You Are Not Welcome Here: Sloterdijk’s Posthumanism and the Rhetoric of Hostile Urban Architecture and Design

Brandon William Aungst

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YOU ARE NOT WELCOME HERE: SLOTERDIJK’S POSTHUMANISM AND THE
RHETORIC OF HOSTILE URBAN ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Department of Communication and Rhetorical Studies

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the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By
Brandon William Aungst

May 2021
YOU ARE NOT WELCOME HERE: SLOTERDIJK’S POSTHUMANISM AND THE RHETORIC OF HOSTILE URBAN ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN

By

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ABSTRACT

YOU ARE NOT WELCOME HERE: SLOTERDIJK’S POSTHUMANISM AND THE RHETORIC OF HOSTILE URBAN ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN

By

William Aungst

May 2021

Dissertation supervised by Dr. Erik Garrett

This dissertation brings together three scholarship areas: rhetorical theory and analysis, hostile urban architecture and design, and Sloterdijk’s version of posthumanism. I synthesize these complementary areas to address the following questions: How does architecture and design contribute to the rhetorical meaning-making of being human and facilitate the communication of that meaning to others? How do different types of architecture and design produce the material contexts for conceptualizing what humanness means and contribute to the development of fore-structures for interpreting and communicating that humanness (e.g., hostile architecture and barbed wire)? How can we conceptualize various types of architecture and design, or materials in general, as the fore-structures that allow us to domesticate and dehumanize, or create and communicate humanness?
What makes a human for Sloterdijk? Domestication. What domesticates a human for Sloterdijk? Technology. Architecture and design are technologies. They are rhetorical materials that separate audiences based on how one can physically interact with them and make meaning from the interaction. One can read architecture and design based on fore-structures provided by a culture, but not all audiences will read architecture and design in the same way. I argue that the various meanings imbued in these materials are purposive and a result of these constructed spaces as material fore-structures. In this dissertation, I look to the forgotten spaces, the banal design of our everyday lives, the overlooked materials, and the taken-for-granted elements of our built environments to better understand their importance as rhetorical artifacts that contribute to the ongoing process of hominization and domestication. In our environments, architecture and design play an essential role in who we are and what we can know about being human.

My argument goes as follows: Architecture and design are rhetorical and contribute to the constitution of being human. Posthumanism is a network of related theoretical concepts that argue for the continued contingency of the concept of human. Sloterdijk is a posthumanist that contends we have always been posthuman, or that we are always in the process of domesticating ourselves as human. For Sloterdijk, space, structures, and design help to bring us back to our originary dyadic-ontological state and separates the animal from the human. Hyde and Smith’s ontological rhetoric, and material rhetoric, help us to understand how we are born into structures—both linguistic and physical—imbued with meaning. Rhetorical theory helps us explain how we interpret and use the meaning that we are given from our interactions with architecture and design to understand and make claims about what is and is not human. My rhetorical analysis of
hostile urban architecture and design grounds these ideas in specific examples from our lived experience. We are born into meaning that comes from our lived spaces. We use that meaning to interpret the world of architecture and design that we are embedded in, and that meaning is part of what we use to separate the human from the non-human, or to humanize and dehumanize.
First and foremost, I would like to acknowledge my parents. Without you, I would not have been able to complete this project. Thank you. Ashley, thank you for more than I can say. Next, I would like to acknowledge my dissertation committee. To Dr. Erik Garrett, thank you for your support with this project over the years. To Dr. Ronald Arnett, thank you for all of your guidance, support, encouragement, and motivation during my time in this department. To Dr. Pat Arneson, thank you for so many lessons learned in conversation, in the classroom, and as a mentor. I would also like to acknowledge Rita McCaffrey for more assistance than I could possibly list here. She was a source of support and encouragement on any occasions and for many reasons. Finally, I would like to acknowledge the many persons in my life, both inside and outside of higher education, that have inspired me keep asking questions and exploring new ideas. My path has been my own, but thousands of years of inspiration have helped clear the way. Thank you.
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Chapter 1. Introduction: Communication, Humanness, and Constructed Space

Introduction: Two Sides of the Fence

Barbed wire, or concertina “razor” wire, creates a violent and hostile line of demarcation in a landscape. On one side, there are those who are protected. On the other side, there are those who are protected against. On November 3, 2018, while attending a rally in Montana, then-President Trump told an audience, “We have our military on the border. And I noticed all that beautiful barbed wire going up today, barbed wire used properly can be a beautiful sight” (Rogin, 2018, para. 6). Addressing border protection measures taken to protect against an alleged caravan of immigrants that had been widely discussed in the media, Trump continued: “These are bad people — as I say bad hombres. There are some bad hombres in that group. So they came out with a list of 300 really bad ones, really bad ones. They’re in there” (Rogin, 2018, para. 8).

Just a few years earlier, in Naco, Arizona, a young woman fell 14 feet onto a pile of coiled razor wire—or concertina wire—and seriously injured herself while trying to climb the border fence from Mexico. Jesus “Jesse” Morales, the Naco fire chief, stated, “It’s just a matter of time when we have someone do the same thing, and we’ll be the ones getting called out” (Ellis, 2019, para. 28). Here, the fire chief’s focus is on the optics of blame, paying little attention to human harm. In a similar disregard for the hurt woman’s humanity, County Sheriff Mark Dannels addressed local residents and stated, “You shouldn’t be on the fence, or climbing on the fence” (Ellis, 2019, para. 31).

These “bloody methods of control” are not unique to the U.S.–Mexico Border. In 2016, a Pakistani refugee attempted to cross the border from Serbia to Hungary and fell from the border fence covered in razor wire.
You could barely see that it was a finger. “The wound was large, with several deep cuts into the flesh. He had tried to climb the fence and was up there when he was caught by police in the middle of the night,” says András Léderer, advocacy officer for the Hungarian Helsinki Committee, a Budapest-based NGO. “He lost his balance. The wound was so horrific because as he fell, he tried to grab the razor wire – and also, he said, touched the second layer of the fence, which is electrified.” (Edwards, 2020, para. 2)

Barbed wire is used to separate and secure more than international borders. The border between the free and the incarcerated is also lined with the “devil’s rope.” The following two examples are also from the “beautiful” side of the fence. In April 2017, two inmates at a Virginia jail attempted to escape by climbing over—and through—concertina wire security fencing (Schladebeck, 2017). The two inmates “were left injured and bloodied after their attempts to scale two razor wire fences at the Henrico County jail this week proved unsuccessful” (Schladebeck, 2017, para. 2). In her coverage of the failed escape, New York Daily News reporter Jessica Schladebeck (2017) referred to the inmates as “amateurs” and opened her article by stating, “A pair of Virginia inmates didn’t mend any fences in their failed prison escape” (para.1). Like the fire chief and county sheriff from above, Schladebeck’s pun fails to recognize the humanity of the two prisoners.

Nearly a year later, in August of 2018, on an online forum titled “Prison Architect,” dedicated to discussions of online gaming for prison architecture, prison security, and general prison-related information for gamers, a user posed the question, “Why the hell does barbed wire cost so much?” The question received multiple replies. The following are excerpts from the online discussion, using the exact language and spelling of the original posts:
• I think that it is to balance its power, it virtually blocks all the attempts at climbing the walls, which is the new escape route. So it is not related to the actual cost of barb wire... I mean look around for prices, most stuff are inaccurate in the game, do you know how much prison furniture actually costs? I read somewhere that a real prison bench costs $500 in real life! So in short, it is a balance issue, for my latest prison I had to spend over 250K on barb wires, but if you consider blocking all new escapes, it is worth it :)
• Yeah, but can’t they chose to go over it anyways? All it does is injure them if they do chose to try it, as well as deter others from trying. I have no idea how much damage it does, but it doesn’t fully block the escape route.
• It doesn’t stop them. A fully healthy prisoner can just muscle through the damage easily.
• If im gonna spend that much money on a barbed wire fence, id like it to stop them fully. If it were maybe 50$ Id be a little more understanding.
• Make 2 or three walls that are barbed and it doesn’t matter how healthy a prisoner is since they WILL DIE from climbing over them … EDIT: Also it doesn’t need to stop them from climbing since you can route them to climb where you want them to.
• You could intentionally leave one section as a one wall to hop over to freedom type of deal to make it enticing to prisoners..... of course nothing stops you from having this wall be part of the Kennel full of guard dogs which is adjacent to the security and staff room where all of your other guards with tazers and shotguns reside as well...

The fictionalized prisoner, narrativized in online gaming, captures the brutality of a popular imagination regarding the humanity of the incarcerated. Here you not only see a disregard for the humanity of prisoners, but also the comments surrounding the use of concertina wire intensifies in its brutality. In comparison to the descriptor “beautiful,” concertina wire is now discussed as a way to harm, maim, and kill. If a prisoner can “muscle through” the barbed wire, there are shotguns waiting on the other side. While fictional, the fantasy of harming the dehumanized other finds a place in a larger system of meaning regarding razor wire as an object of symbolic and physical violence.

On the other side of the fence, we have the voices of those imprisoned, protected against, and dehumanized. Instead of finding beauty, an optics issue, humor, or a delight in the suffering of others, coiled razors of concertina wire are a reminder for prisoners
and immigrants of how the other side of the fence sees them. Although their voices are not often heard, prisoners have found some outlets to communicate and express their thoughts. In 2017, Charles G. Brooks Sr., an inmate, published his poem “Subjugation” in the *Michigan Review of Prisoner Creative Writing*. The following excerpt points to the dehumanizing impact of barbed wire and is quoted using the original spelling and structure.

Penal institutions, ne, correctional facilities, that don’t correct;  
They prevent the resurrection of sLavery, though slavery still lives,  
Calculating my steps, running my race, lest I lose A foot on a mine  
Or aN overseer’s razor wire, forced to call myself anything but “Charles,”  
A number instead oF a man.  
Started from the bottom, and I’m still here, like mOst of us,  
Useless, unless there’s some menial task to be performed (Brooks, 2017, p. 7)

In the confines of prison, identity and a sense of meaning are stripped away. In another excerpt, Sophia Cristo, an inmate at San Quentin State Prison in California, published an essay titled “I Will Be a Lawyer One Day.”

Many people believe it’s a cruel world; i happen to agree. not only is it different, it’s more cruel behind four slabs of brick and an endless outline of barbed wire. It’s like walking into your worst nightmare, but you can’t wake up. I was trapped in my nightmare for eight years, when something stirred me awake. (Cristo, 2019, para. 1)

Cristo’s statement makes explicit the two sides of the fence: the dream and the nightmare. In both of these prisoner writings, barbed wire plays a vital role in capturing views from the other side of the fence, the side of the captured, the imprisoned, the dehumanized.

From the U.S.–Mexico border in Arizona, to the Serbian-Hungarian border, to prison cells and concertina wire fences surrounding U.S. prisons and jails, the separation of space by the hostile and jagged barbs of concertina wire creates two sides: those
protected and those protected against. This violent physical demarcation creates a line that communicates boundaries, ways of being, and the very understanding of what it means to be human and who has the ability to cross from one side of that divide to the other. Concertina wire used in prison and border security fencing is a visible reminder of the power that our physical environments have on our understanding of being human. However varied in form and style, we are always embedded in our physical environments. I will now provide an introduction to this project as it extends beyond border and prison security fencing as an example of the ways that our constructed space humanizes, dehumanizes, and fits within a larger system of meaning of the concept of humanness.

**Overview of Project**

From the house, to the car, to the bus, to the parking garage, to the office, to the store, and then back home again, most of our time is spent in buildings or structures of some kind. In fact, people generally spend 90% of their time indoors (United States Environmental Protection Agency, n.d.). The time spent outdoors is often in buildings that cut sharp angles into the environment and separate the sky into geometric patterns. At ground level, sidewalks direct us to follow controlled paths, benches provide a sense of respite from the walk, and a multitude of signs indicate what is and what is not an acceptable use of space. Shapes, colors, and textures of buildings and street-level designs direct us through a maze of interaction with others and to an awareness of ourselves.

Each building serves a purpose: dwelling, production, consumption, entertainment, health care, criminal justice, etc. Each piece of street-level architecture, design, and furniture serves a purpose: rest, movement, waiting area, etc. Each purpose is
normalized by the existence of the buildings and the minor design elements of the space.
We move in structures and spaces self-aware, directed toward fulfilling the purpose
represented by the meaning of the space around us, with some design elements erupting
into our consciousness, while others hide, unseen and unfelt.

We are born into structures and architecture, and design begins to separate us
from, and connect us to, others. Architecture and the materially constructed world
communicate, at a basic level, interiority and exteriority. According to Darryl
Hattenhauer (1984),

Architecture not only communicates, but also communicates rhetorically. Churches and shopping malls, doors and stairs—these architectural items not only
tell us their meaning and function, but also influence our behavior. Architecture is
rhetorical because it induces us to do what others would have us do. (p. 71)

Those “others” that Hattenhauer (1984) speaks of—designers, architects, and public
decision-makers—are adding to the conversation of what makes us human through the
medium of architecture and design. While the materiality of our designed world can be
attributed to those whose hands played a vital role in its creation, the reading of
architecture and design as a rhetorical artifact is pivotal for its functioning. Our reading
of architecture and design is made possible through fore-structures, or the means by
which we interpret our reality, as articulated by the philosopher Martin Heidegger
(Heidegger and Krell, 1993) and brought into rhetorical studies by Michael Hyde and
Craig Smith (1979). Our interpretive abilities are co-constituted, rhetorically, by living
within architecture and design. We interpret being human through the world in which we
are situated, including architecture and design.
Architecture and design can be considered a physical and linguistic fore-structure that enables us to communicate humanness to ourselves and others. Simultaneously, architecture is communication that provides the fore-structure for interpreting humanness. We use architecture and design to communicate who we are to ourselves, and then we communicate that meaning to others. The fore-structure helps us understand who we are and moves us from the ontic to the ontological.

Focusing on this movement from the ontic to the ontological, German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk’s (1998, 1999b, 2004, 2011, 2014b, 2016) posthumanism begins with an onto-anthropology that interrogates spatiality instead of language. Onto-anthropology analyzes how we domesticate ourselves and undergo hominization to become human (ontological) through anthropotechnics (the fusion of the human and technology). In this dissertation, I will explore the communicative role of architecture and design, including its connection to our understanding of humanness as artifacts of meaning-making and as a means to facilitate human communication about being human to a wider public audience. Through this analysis, I will develop an argument for the rhetorical and ontological grounding of architecture and design to better understand what it means to be human. I will develop this argument through a theoretical investigation of the scope of contemporary and material rhetoric, Peter Sloterdijk’s conceptualization of posthumanism, and a visual and material rhetorical analysis of hostile urban architecture and design.

This introductory chapter comprises three main sections. First, I present a statement of the problem. Second, I discuss how architecture and urban design have been
covered in communication literature and how this project is situated in that conversation.

Lastly, I provide an outline of subsequent chapters.

**Statement of Problem**

Architecture and design, specifically hostile urban architecture and design, play a role in the constitution and domestication of the human. Hostile urban architecture and design is defined as the strategic use of design in our constructed environments to influence or eliminate certain undesirable behavior (Chellew, 2019). Examples of this type of strategic design are public benches that eliminate the possibility of being used for sleeping, and the use of blue lighting in public restrooms to make injecting intravenous drugs difficult and dangerous. I argue that barbed wire and concertina or “razor” wire are examples of hostile urban architecture and design. These architecture and design objects function as materials that make meaning through allowing and deterring movement and use, and as rhetorical artifacts that function within a larger system of meaning. The material and rhetorical meaning-making capacity of architecture and design is part of a larger process of humanization and dehumanization. After situating my project within the existing work on architecture and design in the field of communication in the first chapter, I begin the project by addressing the myriad conceptualizations of posthumanism. Posthumanism as a theoretical concept was coined by Ihad Hassan (1977) in the seminal work “Prometheus as Performer: Towards a Posthumanist Culture?” Although his work was published in the late 20th century, the concept of the human as a product of its relationship with technology dates back to Plato’s idea of the human as emerging from the wilds of nature through the collective of social groupings (Ferrari, 2007). When Hassan (1977) coined the term, he conceptualized the posthuman as such:
“Humanism may be coming to an end as humanism transforms itself into something one must helplessly call posthumanism” (p. 843). Hassan’s prediction emphasizes the after in posthumanism, while other theorists question whether we were ever human (Colomina & Wigley, 2016; Ferrando, 2016). Regardless of whether the starting point is the end of the human or the questioning of the existence of the human, posthumanism is an umbrella term in contemporary theory that seeks to better understand what it means to be human in the past, present, and future.

As a contemporary theoretical concept, posthumanism theory can be divided into multiple schools of thought, including the posthuman as a rupture from classical humanism, and through new forms of technology, animal studies, post-anthropocentrism, and new materialism. Although each approach to the concept of the human is different, these various branches of posthumanist theory are concerned with the following questions and concerns: what it means to be human, the human/non-human divide, the anthropocentrism that has dominated humanities discourse, and the modification of the human through technology to the point of conceptual annihilation (Ferrando, 2016; Haraway, 1991; Hayles, 1999; Wolfe, 2010). While much scholarship has focused on the future of the human in relation to technology and environment, posthumanism and the event of becoming human has been largely overlooked in communication scholarship (Gates, 2013). Additionally, posthumanism needs to focus not only on the future but also on the present and, most importantly, the past. This return to the past helps us to better understand the formation of the concept of the human and the role that our material world plays in its perpetuation and many iterations over time. New objects and materials enable new humans, but old objects and materials played a similar role over time. In this
dissertation, I will look at how our material and constructed world helps us to communicate being human through the rhetorical artifact of architecture and design.

Peter Sloterdijk builds his theory of space (sphereology) on Heidegger’s claim that being-human is the standing in the clearing of being (Sloterdijk and Fabricius, 2007). For Sloterdijk, the clearing is an actual space. Through his onto-anthropology (the stepping out of the ontic human animal into the clearing of being human), I answer the following questions: How does the demarcation of space through architecture and design allow for the human to communicate humanness, both as meaning-making to oneself and to others? How are we ontologically grounded as distinctly human, or dehumanized, through the rhetoric of architecture and design? What role does marking territory through architecture and design play in communicating both the safety of being something other than animals and being human in the clearing or constructed environments?

The driving questions for this dissertation are as follows: How do architecture and design contribute to rhetorical meaning-making of what it means to be human and facilitate the communication of that meaning to others? How do different types of architecture and design produce different contexts for conceptualizing what being human means and develop the fore-structures for knowing what it means to be human (e.g., hostile architecture and barbed wire)? I will end the dissertation by exploring the ongoing implications of architecture and design’s role in the constitution of the human in a case study of hostile urban architecture and designs.

Using contemporary rhetorical theory, specifically Hyde and Smith’s conceptualization of rhetoric as a means to create meaning and make known meaning to oneself and others, material rhetoric, and Sloterdijk’s sphereologicial theory on
hominization, domestication, and humanism, I will look at architecture and design in public and semi-public spaces, to explore the ways that domestication and communication through architecture functions rhetorically and has played a role in shaping us as human. Through analyzing hostile urban architecture and design, I argue that domestication and communication through architecture and urban design are pivotal in the conceptualization and continuation of being human.

Modification of the human through architecture perpetuates the always contingent concept of the human. Walls continue to define us as self-domesticated animals. Most posthumanist theories privilege the blurring of the line between the human and the non-human. This dissertation seeks to analyze how architecture and design reinforce the concept of being human by allowing us to understand some as being human—while dehumanizing others—and communicate that self-awareness.

This dissertation will bring together three scholarship areas: rhetorical theory and analysis, hostile urban architecture and design, and Sloterdijk’s version of posthumanism. Although communication scholars have addressed architecture (Blair et al., 1991; Broadbent, 1980, 1996; Hattenhauer, 1984; Jackson, 2006; Thomas, 2003) and some posthumanism theorists have addressed architecture (Wolfe, 2010), connecting these two areas of inquiry through the work of Sloterdijk will explore new areas of communication scholarship.

Sloterdijk’s work is now coming to prominence as English translations are appearing. Although communication scholars have not used his work extensively, some examples include Chang and Butchart’s (2012) edited book titled *Philosophy of Communication*, which includes an essay by Sloterdijk; Halsall’s (2005) work on
cynicism and communication; Lash’s (2012) work on figuration and space; and ten Bos and Kaulingfreks’s (2012) work on spherology and community. By connecting rhetoric, architecture, and posthumanism/humanism through the theories of Peter Sloterdijk, this dissertation will synthesize these complimentary areas that seek to answer the following question: How can we conceptualize various types of architecture as the fore-structures that allow us to domesticate and hominize, or create and communicate, humanness?

Questions surrounding the concept of the human have become more salient over the past few decades, and the future of the human appears less certain than before to some. The future can be contextualized through an understanding of the human as a construct. As the concern over what it means to be human becomes a greater topic of discussion within the humanities, an analysis of the present can help us to better understand the possibilities for the future of the human. I hope that this project will reveal that the impact of architecture and design is greater than previously understood, and that architecture and design help to shape our role as humans within the natural world and the world of our own making. If architecture and our constructed environment can be viewed as rhetorical, and rhetoric can be viewed as the way that people make meaning, express meaning, and interpret the world, this project can help place greater emphasis on the ontological impact of our constructed environments.

The rhetorician Thomas Farrell (1991) stated,

The rhetorical characteristics of ongoing cultural practices are likely to go on unnoticed. This does not mean that they are absent or unimportant, but only that our practices themselves are taken for granted in a way that withholds our sense of their partnership. (p. 193)
In this dissertation, I look to the forgotten spaces, the banal design of our everyday lives, the overlooked and the taken-for-granted elements of our built environments to better understand their importance as rhetorical artifacts that contribute to the larger project of the ongoing process of hominization. In our environments, architecture and design play an essential role in who we are and what we can know about being human.

Throughout history, there have been many attempts to separate the human from the animal. For Sloterdijk, the process has been one of spheres that we live in—bubbles, globes, or foams—to return to a dyadic ontology, or an ontology of always being with others or other things. His spherology is a theory of space and how that has been used to create, or domesticate, the human. Hostile urban architecture and design, both implicit and explicit, is a contemporary form of this domesticating technology. Hostile urban design and architecture communicate an attempt to separate the human from the animal, and the human from the dehumanized. It relies on the dehumanizing principle that to be human is to step out of the wild of nature into dwellings. To sleep outside is to be animal. Walls and spaces that the agentive human controls are what separate one from animals. We are born into design and constructed space that communicate who is human and who is not—our fore-structures are the physical structures and what they mean to use. We use these to understand ourselves as human or less than human. We then communicate that knowledge to others through our interpretation of the world around us and our place in it.

What makes a human for Sloterdijk? Domestication. What domesticates a human for Sloterdijk? Technology. Architecture and design are technologies similar to pickaxes, language, and mobile communication devices. It is a rhetorical material that separates audiences based on how you can physically interact with it and make meaning from the
interaction or deterred interaction. You are able to read the architecture and design based on fore-structures provided to you. Not all audiences will read architecture and design in the same way, and I argue that this is purposive and a result of these constructed spaces as material and cognitive fore-structures.

My overall argument is as follows. Architecture and design are rhetorical and contribute to the constitution of being human. Posthumanism is a network of related theoretical concepts that argue for the continued contingency of the concept of human. Sloterdijk is a posthumanist who contends that “we have always been posthuman,” or that we are always in the process of domesticating ourselves as human. For Sloterdijk, space, structures, and design help to bring us back to our originary dyadic-ontological state and separate the animal from the human. Contemporary rhetorical theory, especially Hyde and Smith’s ontological rhetoric and material rhetoric, helps us understand how we are born into structures—both linguistic and physical—imbued with meaning. Rhetorical theory helps us explain how we interpret and use the meaning that we are given from our interactions with architecture and design to understand and make claims about what is and is not human. The rhetorical analysis of hostile urban architecture and design grounds these ideas in specific examples from our lived experience. We are born into meaning that comes from our lived spaces. We use that meaning to interpret the world of architecture and design that we are embedded in, and that meaning is part of what we use to separate the human from the non-human, or to humanize and dehumanize. Focusing on rhetoric, urban communication studies, and semiotics, I will now provide an overview of how architecture and urban design are discussed in communication research.
Communication and Architecture/Urban Design

Following the expansion of rhetoric’s areas of inquiry in the late 1970s (discussed in Chapter 4), some scholars in communication studies took an interest in architecture as a communication artifact (Farrell, 1991; Hattenhauer, 1984; Kanengeiter, 1990; Lucaites et al., 1999). Although architecture has not been extensively studied in communication, a few examples and inquiry areas do exist. Nancy Jackson (2006) asks this question: “[H]ow does the built environment shape and constrain who communicates, the content of the communication and the effectiveness of the communication?” (p. 32). Jackson (2006) contends that architecture is an overlooked field of inquiry for communication scholars, and could provide insight into the impact of the physical context and scene of communicative engagement. She argues that most of the research and discussion surrounding communication and architecture has come from architects. Architectural theorists outside of communication have, over time, expressed a great interest in the role of communication in architecture and design. This interest by architectural theorists ranges from the early Roman architectural theory of Vitruvius, Alberti, and Serlio, to more contemporary work by theorists such Geoffrey Broadbent (1980). Interdisciplinary dialogue between these two fields could, as Jackson (2006) argues, provide greater insight into the role of architecture in our communicative lives. While the two fields often take a different approach to communication and architecture (architects focusing on what the building communicates to the public and communication scholars focusing on the human communication afforded by design and architecture), the relationship between the two and their attendant concerns are highly complementary. Nancy Jackson (2006) claims,
Architects are interested in content and process, but their descriptions and concerns have a different focus than those of communication theorists. Even though architects and communication scholars are equally interested in meaning and form, the implications are different in application. A communication scholar is ultimately interested in human interaction, whereas an architect may be more interested in the aesthetic effect of the architecture. (pp. 33–34)

While this conceptualization of communication scholars and their realm of inquiry might fit a specific understanding of what communication studies is relegated to, the field has grown to encompass more than human interaction. Recent work in new materialism and non-anthropocentric communication studies focuses on the communicative interactions of human-object and object-object relations (Bryant et al., 2011). Similarly, architectural theorists have shown a greater interest in more than the aesthetic and perceptual effect of architecture, providing insight and analyses into a wide range of concerns related to design and architecture (Colomina and Wigley, 2016). These concerns vary and include the way that architectural objects and space inform the way that we understand transit, the development of the human through design, and the development of design through the human.

To better understand the importance of furthering the exploration of architecture and design within communication scholarship, I will cover the main approaches used by communication scholars when analyzing architecture: rhetoric, urban communication studies, and the related field of semiotics. I discuss the role of architecture in semiotics to address one of the ways that architecture has been discussed in the literature, although semiotics as an approach is not a part of my overall argument and analysis. My analysis of architecture and design utilizes a rhetorical approach through the lens of posthumanist theory and the work of Sloterdijk. First, I address rhetoric and architecture. Next, I look
at the field of urban communication. Finally, I look at the related field of semiotics, where I provide a brief overview of how semioticians have discussed architecture.

**Rhetoric and Architecture**

Looking at architecture and design as rhetoric seeks to answer this question: What does this constructed object mean, and what does it do? Architecture functions rhetorically; it produces meaning and allows individuals to express meaning. According to Jackson (2006), “Architecture has a public and a private function; architecture calls for judgments and decisions and is situated in the public sphere; architecture constrains and proscribes behaviors. Architecture is rhetorical; it has a communicative function” (p. 37).

Early rhetorical approaches to analyzing architecture isolate and analyze the persuasive aspects of architecture. Hattenhauer’s (1984) essay on rhetoric and architecture argues that buildings go beyond communication and influence our behavior. For Hattenhauer (1984), form and function follow communication. Thus, meaning must be made before an audience can utilize architecture.

Communication and rhetoric are inherent aspects of architecture. Architecture uses signs to communicate its function and meaning. This communication is rhetorical when it induces its perceiver to use or to understand the architecture—from a hot dog stand to a monument. (Hattenhauer, 1984, p. 71)

Here, Hattenhaueur (1984) focuses on the perception and use of the constructed environment for the audience. Different architectural texts are rhetorical when the audience is induced to act, or their attention is directed to a way of perceiving the objects. Using the example of restaurants and churches, Hattenhauer (1984) defines the rhetorical element of architecture: “[T]he structures arranged by humans into communicative forms become rhetorical when their signifieds influence behavior” (p. 74). It is not only the
effect of architecture that is rhetorical, but also the design: “[A]rchitecture is structured for maximum rhetorical effectiveness: to communicate the denotation clearly and the connotation agreeably” (Hattenhauer, 1984, p. 74). Hattenhauer’s work on architecture uses a rhetorical approach through semiotics to understand how a building functions, the meaning it creates, and how the audience’s behavior is affected. My argument in this dissertation is that architecture and design function rhetorically to induce behavior, but the focus is architecture, design, and space as an ontological and ethical category. Architecture and design are not limited to the aesthetic and the sign function; rather, they contribute to our understanding of being human.

Architecture is considered rhetorical in two ways, as either the object itself as a material or as the effect it has as a rhetorical force (Schuster, 2006). These two approaches focus on how the actual material and design of architecture functions rhetorically, or on how certain architecture exists as a force in the world through the meaning that it makes and its persuasive power. Material and visual rhetorical scholars have sometimes used architecture in their analyses. I will discuss material and visual rhetoric in greater detail in Chapters 4 and 5, but material rhetoric, as described by Carol Blair (1999), is that “rhetoric’s materiality constructs communal space, prescribes pathways, and summons attention, acting on the whole person of the audience” (p. 48). Barbara Dickson (1999) describes material rhetoric as “a mode of interpretation that takes as its objects of study the significations of material things and corporal entities—objects that signify not through language but through their spatial organization, mobility, mass, utility, orality, and tactility” (p. 297).
Using these conceptualizations of material rhetoric, architecture and design is often an object of analysis for material rhetoric theorists. Visual rhetoric is defined by Sonja Foss (1994) as follows:

Visual rhetoric, like all communication, is a system of signs. In the simplest sense, a sign communicates when it is connected to another object, as the changing of the leaves in autumn is connected to a change in temperature or a stop sign is connected to the act of stopping a car while driving. To qualify as visual rhetoric, an image must go beyond serving as a sign, however, and be symbolic, with that image only indirectly connected to its referent. (p. 144)

Foss’s conceptualization of visual rhetoric treats the visual object as the object of inquiry, not just a sign that refers to its referent. In Foss’s (1986) visual rhetorical analysis of the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington, DC, she argues that the object of the memorial serves multiple purposes for a variety of audiences, although they are all affected by the object. This embeddedness of the object, analyzed for its visual components, attracts a broad audience, yet each audience will feel differently based on the elements used in its design. Foss, referencing Lewis Mumford, states,

A building provides an example of just how a visual structure influences those who use it or look at it. The building not only “tells” us about the people who designed and chose it, but its features can modify our own reactions, encouraging us to feel, for example, more courtly when we enter a palace, more pious when we enter a church, more studious when we enter a library, or more businesslike when we enter an office. (Mumford, 1968, p. 265, as cited in Foss, 1986, p. 328)

Architecture, as a visual and material object, does more than communicating a message intended by the architect. For Foss, the audience will respond affectively in their embodied relation to the constructed environment. Viewing visual objects, or visual works of art, as rhetoric is complicated by the aesthetic nature of the object:

To study visual works of art only as rhetoric, however, is to ignore important features of the works that distinguish them in significant ways from discursive
rhetoric—their aesthetic qualities and the aesthetic responses they may evoke. I propose that a useful way to conceptualize a viewer’s response to a visual object is that it assumes two forms or occurs in two steps—the aesthetic and the rhetorical . . . [T]he aesthetic precedes the rhetorical response and consists of a direct perceptual encounter with the sensory aspects of the object. The rhetorical response that follows constitutes the processing of the aesthetic experience and thus the attribution of meaning to the object. (Foss, 1986, p. 329)

An object that is experienced by an audience will have a sensory or aesthetic impact, as well as the lasting effects of the sensory experience, ultimately leading to the attribution of meaning. For Foss, first analyzing the visual elements is a necessary step to understanding these objects as rhetorical. Before one can understand the visuals as rhetorical, one must first analyze the aesthetic or visual elements. The elements of the visual, or material, object become part of a larger system of meaning that transcends the immediate aesthetic quality of the object. Visual rhetoric is the use of images to create and participate in larger systems of meaning upon reflection.

Although I will discuss Carol Blair’s theoretical work on material rhetoric and memorials in greater detail in Chapters 4 and 5, I will briefly discuss her work as it relates to architecture, specifically. Blair et al. (1991) analyze the Vietnam War Memorial as a site of epideictic as well as political and deliberative rhetoric. Often, the political nature of the monuments or memorials is the decision to memorialize one thing over another and “‘instruct’ their visitors on what is to be valued in the future as well as in the past” (Blair et al., 1991, p. 263). Instruction, direction, and the drawing of attention is a similar focus of Mary Lay Schuster’s (2006) material rhetorical analysis of a freestanding birth center. Schuster argues that to understand how rhetoric can provide multiple, counterhegemonic, and readings of resistance, the physical space of the birth center and its effect on the body must be understood.
Other scholarship on rhetoric and architecture continues to examine the role of the war monument as a rhetorical artifact (Blair et al., 1991), the communicative and rhetorical aspects of libraries (Thomas, 2003), and the transition from the rhetoric of architectural modernism to postmodernity through the manipulation of architectural imagery (Tell, 2014).

**Urban Communication**

A branch of communication studies that takes a multi-method approach to communication and our built environments is urban communication. According to the Urban Communication Foundation (2020) website, urban communication is conceptualized in the following way:

We start from the premise that cities themselves function as a medium of communication, arguably among the world’s oldest forms of media and communication. Cities are places where messages are created, carried, and exchanged by structures, infrastructures, and people. “Urban communication” is the meshing, for better or worse, of technology and social interaction … “Urban communication” reflects both an emergent and interdisciplinary field. It provides a fresh perspective from which to view the city and its transformation. Economists, geographers, sociologists, urban planners, environmental psychologists, artists, and others, are scrutinizing urban messages, the technologies that create and disseminate them, their interrelationships, and their far-reaching effects on the lived experience within our urban environments. (para. 5)

An affiliate of the National Communication Association, the Urban Communication Foundation was formed in 2005 to examine cities from a communicative standpoint. Using a variety of methods and approaches to analyzing the communicative role of cities, urban communication conceptualizes the city as “a complex environment of interpersonal interaction, a landscape of spaces and places that shape human behavior; and an intricate technological environment” (Urban Communication Foundation, 2020, para. 7). Giorgia
Aiello and Simone Tosoni (2016) conceptualize urban communication as a broad field of communicative inquiry in the following way: “Generally speaking, urban communication scholarship is concerned with the ways in which people in cities connect (or do not connect) with others and with their urban environment via symbolic, technological, and/or material means” (p. 1,254). Urban communication scholars have explored a wide variety of issues related to urban spaces, communication technology, design, rhetoric, and media studies. In a special issue of the *International Journal of Communication*, editors Aiello and Tosoni (2016) provide a three-part system of classification for better understanding and conceptualizing the city in urban communication: the city as context, medium, and content. The “City as Context” is an urban communication approach that views the city as a context for a wide variety of communicative practices and how they help produce urban space (Aiello & Tosoni, 2016). In the field of “urban media studies,” Simone Tosoni and Seija Ridell (2016) view the city as a context and analyze the media practices in contemporary urban environments that are integral to its inhabitants’ daily lives. Other researchers and theorists working in this approach include Coleman et al.’s (2016) work on news media as a means of communicating within and with cities. They use a multi-method approach (e.g., interviews, content analysis) to circumvent the reliance on digital media as the sole contributor to urban communication. The “City as Medium” approach views the built environment of cities as a form of communication media (Aiello & Tosoni, 2016). Dickinson and Aiello’s (2016) work on material rhetoric focuses on the visual, material, symbolic, and movement-focused ways cities or urban environments communicate. In their material rhetorical analysis of urban environments, Dickinson and Aiello (2016) define urban communication as material:
Our first assumption is that urban communication is material. The city is made up of bricks, concrete, steel girders, fences, sidewalks, curbs, roads; it comprises honking horns, whirring wheels on macadam, chirps and tweets of urban birds, rising voices of people spilling out of pubs at closing time; it is constructed of the smells of rotting trash, vomit, frying food, fresh cut grass in an urban park in the middle of summer, or the crispness after a September rain that cools and cleans the city; its heat can rise like waves off the cities’ surfaces; its deep chill can drive the unhomed to subway grates and into layers of boxes. In short, the city is quite distinctly made of ‘matter.’ (p. 1,296).

While not all research in urban communication is rhetorical, the authors provide a descriptive explanation of what one finds in a city and how those communicative things are material. Dickinson and Aiello (2016) provide a revised version of Carol Blair’s material rhetorical analysis method that emphasizes the importance of the movement of bodies through physical space in urban environments. The authors argue for a “methodical movement” through urban spaces to better understand the city as communicative (Dickinson & Aiello, 2016, p. 1,295). Instead of “being-there,” they argue for a “being through there” that emphasizes the importance of embodied movement in the process of analysis. As I discuss in Chapter 5, the type of architecture and urban communication that I analyze in this dissertation does not lend itself to an embodied movement through space.

In the “City as Content” approach, urban communication scholars view the city as content for a multiplicity of communicative acts: “Through a focus on the stories emerging from cities and those about cities (particularly in relation to economic, political, and social issues), scholarship in this area offers vivid accounts, analyses, and applications of urban communication as concrete praxis” (Aiello & Tosoni, 2016, p. 1,258). An example of the “City as Content” approach is the use of the audio documentary to capture the embedded and lived experience of urban inhabitants. Daniel
Makagon and Mary Rachel Gould (2016) use audio recordings of urban storytelling and focus on recording audio as documentary production as a form of urban communication.

Gary Gumpert and Susan Drucker, both directors of the Urban Communication Foundation, address the communicative city from an evaluative perspective (Drucker & Gumpert, 2016), analyzing the use of public surveillance technologies (Gumpert & Drucker, 1998, 2001) and zoning and public interaction (Drucker & Gumpert, 1991). The authors focus on how specific cities are able to manage their communication structure and platforms to better the health and well-being of the city.

In “The Communicative City Redux,” Drucker and Gumpert (2016) discuss how the Urban Communication Foundation assessed the communicative nature of cities when judging for the organization’s Communicative City Award. For Drucker and Gumpert, the health and well-being of a city, from a communicative perspective, focuses on the ability of inhabitants to interact and communicate, the communication infrastructure, and how this relates to the political and civic engagement of its inhabitants. A 2008 special issue of the *International Communication Gazette*, edited by Gumpert and Drucker, focuses on “Communicative Cities.” The authors view the city as a complex of interrelating materials, practices, functions, and affordances. Using the All-American Cities Award as a starting point to assess urban inhabitants’ quality of life, they cite the criteria used in this competition. They claim that the criteria, such as civic engagement, use of resources, diversity and inclusion, and cooperation with neighboring municipalities, are missing one element: “Communication availability, images, infrastructure, policy and regulation all define a city and population as well” (Gumpert & Drucker, 2008, p. 196).
The editors lay out a theoretical and methodological description of the role of communication in cities by answering the following questions: “(1) how does a city communicate and (2) how does it facilitate communication?” (Gumpert & Drucker, 2008, p. 195). They claim that the city of yesterday is disappearing. Yet, the function of a city remains the same: “as a medium of communication in so far as messages are carried through communication in those spaces. These spaces are arguably among the oldest forms of communication and media” (Gumpert & Drucker, 2008, p. 196). While the responses to their questions about what makes a city communicative will vary between different urban communication scholars, Gumpert and Drucker (2008) claim that “all cities are communicative in nature in the sense that as constructs they speak and function as places to exchange ideas” (p. 201). Their emphasis is on the claim that “the quality of life within that urban landscape is a complex pastiche of technical, social and policy factors” (Gumpert & Drucker, 2008, p. 195). As in their 2016 essay previously discussed, Gumpert and Drucker focus on the quality of life in urban environments and link the quality of communicative life to this overall conceptualization of quality. To better understand the role of communication in the health and well-being of a city, the Urban Communication Foundation surveyed 30 participants, including “communication scholars, architects, environmentalists, lawyers, journalists and environmental psychologists,” asking them to list the characteristics of a communicative city. They organized the responses into the following categories: (a) “those activities that broadly constitute sites and opportunities for social interaction,” (b) those factors that constitute the urban infrastructure,” and (c) “those factors that are operationally political or civic in nature” (Gumpert & Drucker, 2008, p. 196). These categories are intimately involved
with the health and well-being of the city, but they are not solely determined by the city as communicative, as other factors play a role: “There are numerous perspectives through which the economic, social and manufacturing pulse of the urban landscape can be viewed, but communication transcends and is the primary operational lens through which to understand, analyze and evaluate the city” (Gumpert & Drucker, 2008, p. 200). For Gumpert and Drucker, and many working in urban communication, communication is the ultimate factor that connects the various components of cities, past and present. Communication is linked to a community, or the collective of individuals living together with common interests. Communities are linked to cities as the site of collective living with common interests. Gumpert and Drucker (2008) link communication with community and cities, connecting them “with the thread of interaction, contact and talk” (p. 200).

Having discussed two of the major approaches to communication, architecture, constructed environments, and design, I now turn to a related field in communication to address architecture and semiotics.

Semiotics and Architecture

Following Hattenhauer’s (1984) rhetorical work on architecture using a semiotic lens, other communication scholars have used semiotics to analyze and theorize architecture and design. While not all semiotic work is explicitly situated within the discipline of communication studies, the two fields share an interest in exploring how natural and socially constructed objects contribute to and constitute our shared understanding of the world through meaning-making. The focus of a semiotic analysis is
to treat architecture as a language. It is not an ontological or a material rhetorical approach to the role of architecture in the constitution of the human.

Semiotics, or the science of signs and signification, dates back to the mid-19th century with Ferdinand Saussure and Charles Peirce. While both theorists developed different approaches to the study of signs, the common assumption is that sign systems are relational and only function through contrast. In this approach, meaning does not exist in the thing itself. Instead, meaning can be found in the relationship between the signs themselves (syntactic), between the sign and the thing that the sign signifies (semantics), and the relationship between the signs and the people who use them (Eco, 1980). For most semioticians, communication is not just one of many systems that function alongside other cultural systems, such as governments and education; communication is the system that allows all systems to interact externally (with other systems) and internally (individual parts of the discrete system).

While Saussure’s work focuses mostly on linguistic signs, other approaches have analyzed non-linguistic sign systems, such as music, art, visual communication, and advertising (Barthes, 1972). The semiotician Umberto Eco provided some of the most influential works on semiotics and architecture. His work outlines the function, meaning, and constraints put on society, treating architecture as a language (Eco, 1980). Focusing on the syntactic—or the structure and rules of architecture—Eco deconstructs architecture’s language to better understand the constraints imposed by different societies. Compared to discursive language’s ambiguity in usage, architecture is restricted by the parameters established within different cultures, with little room for deviation (Eco, 1980).
Eco’s goal in analyzing architecture was to search for the architectural language that constrains society in order to deconstruct those very constraints and rebuild them anew (Jackson, 2006). Eco argues that the meaning can be found within the structure or constraints, like bench placement or the arrangement of bricks. The meaning can be found within two different elements of the architecture as form or codes: the technical/syntactic (the rules of how space is used) and the semantic (the rules of how space is supposed to be used or its function). Taken together, each element of architecture is imbued with meaning based on social conventions. Eco’s (1980) focus on the effect of architecture as a system of rules and conventions on the human is important:

If the codes operative in architecture allow only slight deviations from a standardized message, however appealing, then architecture is, not the field of creative freedom some have imagined it to be, but a system of rules for giving society what it expects in the way of architecture. (p. 40)

In his semiotic analysis of architecture, design is limited, and societies expect that architecture follows these structural rules. Inhabitants of different societies are born into an architectural system of rules that defines each design’s function.

Eco’s (1989) work on the concept of the “open work” of art and the ambiguity of meaning intended by the creator highlights the audience’s role in the co-creation of meaning. The “open work” of art, or design, is intentionally created with a level of ambiguity, where meaning must be co-created by the audience. Certain design elements can be arranged to fit a particular meaning for a multiplicity of audience members and their approach to the overall meaning of the object. Such ambiguity is not without design and directive—the creator establishes parameters that limit the range of possible meanings while keeping some options open. As there is a sense of direction and guidance
afforded by a rhetorical approach to architecture, an audience member can choose from a multiplicity of meanings provided by the open work of art and their horizon of possible meaning. The audience member and the architecture or design act on one another for the co-creation of meaning made possible by the rules structuring and governing their ambiguity of possible meanings. Examples of this can be found in modern experimental composition, postmodern architecture, and abstract modernist art.

While Foss’s primary focus was on function in the analysis of memorials’ materiality, other scholars such as Broadbent (1980, 1996) argue that architecture serves rhetorical purposes that can “carry meaning” beyond function. Broadbent’s (1980) work on semiotics and architecture provides an architectural model similar to Chomsky’s deep structure for language (Jackson, 2006). Broadbent (1980) identifies four elements of deep structure within architecture:

1. The building as container for human activities—spaces, sizes and shapes.
2. The building as modifier of climate—barriers, roof, light, heat, etc.
3. The building as cultural symbol—even when building is “functional.”
4. The building as consumer of resources—materials used, value of building. (p. 137)

Together, the four components of his model provide a structure for viewing architecture as a language. However, Broadbent (1980) later argued that architecture as a language has no direct equivalent to words, as design elements are too culturally ambiguous.

Other theorists working in communication argue that a linguistic model is too limiting when discussing the multisensory and embodied experience of architecture and design (Agrest & Gandelsonas, 1996; Rapoport, 1990). Rapoport (1990) claims that architecture, unlike language, is nonlinear and should be analyzed with the assumption of an underlying framework for interpretation, or schema. For Rapoport (1990), schema
work in a system with other schema, establishing a network of interrelated interpretive frameworks for making meaning out of our surroundings. Rapoport (1990) focuses on how our communicative behavior is affected by architecture and how an audience interprets the meaning of a built environment. The system of schemata uses one schema to make sense of another, and each setting or subsequent environment is defined by the relations of all possible meanings brought by the audience member. For Rapoport (1990), a setting is comprised of three levels of meaning: high, mid-level, and low-level. Here, each level pulls from a multiplicity of meaning afforded to the audience member based on their schemata. We make sense of our environments based on a multiplicity of meaning, working at the level of culture, identity, basic needs, and behavior satisfaction. Thus, each audience member will have a different set of interrelated schemata.

As demonstrated in the discussion on architecture and urban design in the communication literature, communication theorists have given attention to the role of architecture in our communicative lives as material rhetoric, rhetorical artifacts that function as symbols, urban communication in the form of the communicative city that facilitates communication, and semiotics. My project contributes to this literature by introducing the posthumanist work of Peter Sloterdijk and ontological rhetorical theory. By connecting these theoretical positions, I argue that not only does architecture and design communicate and facilitate communication, but also that it functions as constitutive to the conceptualization of being human, the separation from the human and the animal, as a material fore-structure embedded in a larger system of meaning that provides the possibility for certain interpretations of our constructed environments. Other communication scholars have focused on the role of space, architecture, and design in the
context of communication, but I will introduce the work of posthumanism, the dyadic ontology and spatial theory of Peter Sloterdijk, to analyze how space and design are ontological and solicit or deter engagement, ultimately inviting or deterring humans. Next, I will provide an outline of the rest of the dissertation.

Outline of Chapters

Chapter 2 Overview

In Chapter 2, I provide an overview of some of the main themes in posthuman studies. I focus on the distinction between entering into the posthuman era as a disintegration of the classical human subject through technology, and the idea that we have always been posthuman. The second approach is conceptualized as a process that can be understood through analyzing how we have always constituted ourselves as human. These two approaches differ in their orientation to the concept of human, with the former being future-oriented and the latter being an approach that recognizes the human as a contingency throughout history. I begin with the idea of posthumanism as the discrete original human extended corporeally through posteriori technological and information-based augmentation, or technological and future-oriented posthumanism. In this section, I look at the work of posthuman scholars N. Katherine Hayles (1999) and Donna Haraway (1991). Next, I look at Cary Wolfe’s (2010) posthumanism, focusing on his theories of animality and the conceptualization of the human. Then, I discuss the work of two architectural theorists working at the intersection of posthumanism and architecture and design studies, Beatriz Colomina and Mark Wigley (2016), to introduce the idea of a posthumanist position where we have always been posthuman, or where the contingency of the human is a necessary part of the human. Next, I discuss several
theorists and scholars working beyond posthumanism in the realm of post-anthropocentrism and new materialism. Although the theorist in the latter part of the chapter is not explicitly working in posthumanism, their theoretical contributions provide an intellectual framework for this dissertation and continue the idea that the contingent nature of the human is not new.

Furthermore, I discuss the theoretical positions of Bruno Latour and actor-network theory (Latour, 2005; Michael, 2017), speculative realism (Bryant et al., 2011; Meillassoux, 2008), and object-oriented ontology (Harman, 2010a, 2011). This section provides a way to understand post-anthropocentrism as a disruption to the idea of the human as ever existing. Next, I discuss David Gunkel’s (2012) work on machine ethics and the ethical status of objects before turning to Judith Butler’s (2001, 2005, 2015) work on the social ethics of recognition. Lastly, I discuss posthumanism in communication literature. The work discussed in this chapter will establish the general outline of a posthuman and post-anthropocentric position that is complementary to the posthumanist work of Sloterdijk (1998, 1999b, 2004, 2011, 2014b, 2016).

The posthumanisms and related theories in this chapter approach the human as a historical rupture that should be overcome or abandoned, a long-standing myth perpetuated by dominant cultural and social forces, or a question that should always be posed. While varied in their approaches and conceptualization of the human, a common thread is questioning what makes a human. I argue that a posthumanism in the context of communication studies should focus on the conceptualization of the human, an appreciation for post-anthropocentrism that is not anti-humanist, and special attention to
the effects that these conceptualizations of the human have on our understanding of what it means to be human and who is included/excluded from this category.

I argue that what is missing in the posthumanist literature and theory is work on the role of architecture and design as a technology that contributes to the constitution of the human throughout history. Posthumanist theory is an important theoretical approach to better understanding the contested nature of what it means to be human. Still, there needs to be more focus on architecture and design and how it communicates humanness. Architecture and design are rhetorical and contribute to the constitution of being human. I will argue that posthumanism is a network of related theoretical concepts that argue for the continued contingency of the concept of the human. This chapter provides the necessary context to understand the different ways that posthumanism conceptualizes the human, including Peter Sloterdijk. Sloterdijk is a posthumanist who contends that “we have always been posthuman,” or that we are always in the process of domesticating ourselves as human. For him, space, structures, and design help bring us back to our originary dyadic-ontological state and separate the animal from the human.

Chapter 3 Overview

Having addressed the major themes of posthumanism and the related fields of post-anthropocentrism and the subject status of humans and their environments in Chapter 2, I turn my attention to the work of the German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk and his theories on humanism and posthumanism in Chapter 3. Due to the limited amount of attention paid to his work in communication studies, I begin with a brief intellectual biography. I focus on his Spherology trilogy (i.e., Bubbles, Globes, and Foams) (Sloterdijk, 1998, 1999b, 2004, 2011, 2014b, 2016) and his infamous essay on
domestication and auto-domestication, “Rules for the Human Zoo” (Sloterdijk, 2009a), to explain his work on humanism and posthumanism. Although Sloterdijk’s range of insight into various topics is broad, I focus on explaining his work on the always contingent nature of the human. Finally, I discuss his relevance to contemporary communication studies and the current conversation about what constitutes a human.

In this chapter, I demonstrate that Sloterdijk combines multiple aspects of posthumanism and postanthropocentrism, beginning with a dyadic ontology, and then moves to explicate our continual searching for this relationship with other things in the world, non-human, non-animal, and literal dwellings (constructed spaces). Those things, human and non-human, are what we use to communicate our humanness. Specifically, I address the following questions: How can Sloterdijk’s work on humanism be understood as a kind of posthuman theory? What separates his ideas from those of posthuman theorists? How can Sloterdijk’s concepts of domestication, auto-domestication, and the separating of the human from the animal be understood as communication? I will argue that his work’s communicative aspect can be understood by looking at the small, overlooked spaces he explores in the Spherology trilogy and “Rules for the Human Zoo.” These small spaces—the area connecting the fetus and the placenta, or the walls of the modern apartment complex—are largely overlooked in communication theory. Such spaces are the intermediaries and mediums that allow the human being to become, to move from the ontic to the ontological, and from the danger of the outside to the immunized shelter of the interior of spheres. I argue that these spaces are not universally translatable with the same meaning to all inhabitants at any given historical moment. We are born into our spatial environments and learn to create meaning and communicate that
meaning based on the rhetorical artifacts that we have access to and the meaning that is imbibed with each artifact. The history of humanity is an attempt to reconnect with the originary mode of dyadic ontology. New technologies provide new forms of hominization, domestication, and auto-domestication, but the process of becoming human, stepping into the immunizing safety of the clearing, is a process of inhabiting, creating meaning from, and communicating with our lived spaces.

Architecture and design are rhetorical and contribute to the constitution of being human. Posthumanism is a network of related theoretical concepts that argue for the continued contingency of the concept of human. In this chapter, I address the following part of my larger argument. Sloterdijk is a posthumanist who contends that “we have always been posthuman,” or that we are always in the process of domesticating ourselves as human. For Sloterdijk, space, structures, and design help bring us back to our originary dyadic-ontological state and separate the animal from the human. This chapter on Sloterdijk provides the necessary background for my argument that contemporary rhetorical theory, especially Hyde and Smith’s ontological rhetoric, helps us understand how we are born into structures, both linguistic and physical, that are imbued with meaning.

Chapter 4 Overview

Following a discussion of Sloterdijk’s posthumanism in Chapter 3, I turn my attention to contemporary rhetorical theory in Chapter 4. Specifically, I look at the post-World War II shift from classical rhetoric and the discussion of the social construction of knowledge, the expansion of rhetoric to nontraditional discourse (social movements, feminist rhetoric), epistemic rhetoric, philosophy and rhetoric, postmodern rhetoric, and
material rhetoric. After providing an overview of contemporary rhetorical theory, as a shift in the scope of rhetoric, I focus on the ontological rhetoric of Hyde and Smith (1979), and the material rhetoric of Carol Blair (1999) and Barbara Dickson (1999). I focus on these aspects of contemporary rhetorical theory to provide the groundwork for how posthumanism, Sloterdijk, and architecture are situated within a contemporary rhetorical landscape.

In this chapter on contemporary rhetoric, I describe the work of several influential rhetorical theorists, movements, and positions in the debate over the role and scope of rhetoric and its subsequent effects. Each theorist has proven highly influential, both within and outside of the academy and the discourse surrounding rhetoric’s future. Contemporary rhetorical theory has allowed for previously overlooked cultural artifacts, such as architecture, to be considered rhetorical. I argue that when rhetoric is viewed as meaning-making, the fore-structures (both physical and linguistic structures) and rhetorical artifacts (including our constructed physical environment) become the very things we use to understand and communicate our being in the world. This chapter connects the work of Sloterdijk, who emphasizes being as a being-there in the physical world, to the role the physical world plays in the rhetorical constitution of understanding being human and the separation of the human from animality. Here, I discuss how meaning and our ontological grounding can be connected to our constructed spaces through rhetorical theory. I argue that, although primarily focused on language, Hyde and Smith open the door for a stronger connection of rhetoric, and fore-structures for meaning-making, to new materialism, material rhetoric, and the onto-anthropology of
Sloterdijk. By shifting toward the material and non-linguistic, the relationship between rhetoric and ontology moves beyond language to our built environments.

Chapter 5 Overview

In Chapter 5, I build on the previous chapters to conduct a visual and material rhetorical analysis of hostile urban design and architecture. This analysis supports my argument that architecture and design are rhetorical and contribute to the constitution of being human. As discussed in Chapter 2, posthumanism is a network of related theoretical concepts that argue for the continued contingency of the concept of human. I argue that Sloterdijk is a posthumanist who contends that “we have always been posthuman,” or that we are always in the process of domesticating ourselves as human. For Sloterdijk, space, structures, and design help bring us back to our originary dyadic-ontological state and separate the animal from the human. In Chapter 5, I argue that contemporary rhetorical theory, especially Hyde and Smith’s ontological rhetoric, helps us understand how we are born into structures, both linguistic and physical, imbued with meaning. Contemporary rhetorical theory, posthumanism, and Sloterdijk’s theory of domestication and dyadic ontology help us explain how we interpret and use the meaning we are given from our interactions with architecture and design to understand and make claims about what is and is not human. Here, I provide a material and visual rhetorical analysis of hostile urban architecture and design to ground these ideas in specific examples from our lived experience. Hostile urban architecture and design is defined as follows:

Defensive urban design, also known as hostile, unpleasant, or exclusionary architecture is an intentional design strategy that uses elements of the built environment to guide or restrict behaviour in urban space as a form of crime prevention, protection of property, or order maintenance. (Chellew, 2019, p. 19)
I argue that these specific examples of architecture and design are designed to separate the human from the non-human, or the human from the animal. I begin by discussing the method that I use to analyze hostile urban design and architecture. I describe the visual rhetorical method of Sonja Foss (1986, 1992, 1994) and the material rhetoric analysis method of Carol Blair (1999). Next, I identify my reasons for using a combined approach of rhetorical analysis. Then, I discuss the background of hostile urban architecture, providing visual examples and current literature on the subject. I then offer an analysis of implicit and explicit hostile urban design and architecture. I define implicit hostile urban design and architecture as materials and design practices that are intended to go unnoticed by their unintended audiences. They are designed to communicate meaning to the intended audience by reducing the affordances offered by the object. I analyze three artifacts, including the Camden bench, anti-homeless spikes, and anti-drug use blue lighting. Next, I place the implicit visual and material rhetorical analysis in the context of anti-homeless policies. Then, I define explicit hostile urban design and architecture as materials and design that are readily accessible and visible to all people, but with a different meaning for each audience based on their rhetorical fore-structures. Explicit hostile urban architecture and design is read as hostile by all audiences, but what this type of environmental object means to each audience depends on who you are as a person.

Lastly, I analyze barbed wire and concertina wire—also known as razor wire—as examples of explicit hostile architecture and design. Next, I place the explicit hostile architecture and design rhetorical analysis in the context of discourse surrounding the use of razor wire as security fencing from incarcerated individuals and former President
Trump. For both the visual and material rhetorical analysis of implicit and explicit hostile urban design and architecture, I begin with Foss’s three-step analysis and then use Blair’s conceptual questions.

**Chapter 6 Overview**

Following the rhetorical analysis of various forms of hostile urban design and barbed wire in Chapter 5, I conclude this dissertation by connecting the previous chapters on posthumanism, the theories of Sloterdijk, and communication studies to the role of hostile urban design and barbed wire in creating the human and facilitating communication about being human. Ultimately, I argue that we are born into meaning that comes from our lived spaces. We use that meaning to interpret the world of architecture and design that we are embedded in, and that meaning is part of what we use to separate the human from the non-human.

**Conclusion**

Hyde and Smith (1979) argue for a relationship between rhetoric and hermeneutics that is ontological. For Hyde and Smith (1979), the first function of rhetoric “is to ‘make-known’ meaning both to *oneself and to others. Meaning is derived by a human being in and through the interpretive understanding of reality. Rhetoric is the process of making-known that meaning’” (p. 348, emphasis in original). The authors draw on Heidegger’s claim that language is always already present and argue that our interpretation of the world is always constituted by the language that we are born into (ontological). Rhetoric is ontological in the sense that the fore-structures (ontological) that allow for the interpretation of reality (meaning-making) are necessary preconditions of the human and are derived from the sharing of meaning (rhetoric).
The relationship between rhetoric and interpretation provides the “structure of the concrete and hence is that which, when it is disclosed, provides the concrete with its conceptual clarification” (Hyde & Smith, 1979, p. 348). Rhetoric constitutes the linguistic possibilities of the subject, providing the fore-structure used in interpretation. Put another way, that which can be interpreted, and how it is interpreted, is a product of rhetoric. To interpret phenomena, the “fore-structure” constituted by rhetoric must exist for the interpretation to occur. Rhetorically constituted fore-structures allow for knowledge claims to be made to ourselves before communicating that meaning to others. Interpreting architecture as rhetorical moves meaning from meaning-making as a way of interpreting the world to communicate that meaning to others, as architecture is a shared artifact.

Using Hyde and Smith’s conceptualization of rhetoric, I look at architecture as a rhetorical artifact that shifts the role of architecture and design from a mere communicative object to an ontological fore-structure that allows humans to make meaning. For the human animal (ontic) to separate itself from the danger of nature and move into the clearing of the ontological, the structure or literal dwelling functions as the primordial act of communicating humanness. We are born into meaning and architecture. Architecture communicates being human and provides fore-structures through the various types of design in our environments. As a rhetorical artifact, architecture provides the fore-structure to interpret oneself and the world as human and non-human, the humanized and the dehumanized, covering the variations and gradations between each of these contested categories.
While rhetorical, urban communication, and semiotic work on architecture has opened the door, posthumanism, ontological rhetoric, and Sloterdijk’s posthumanism offers a new way to view the role of architecture in meaning-making and the formation of the human. How are certain humans able to make meaning from architecture and design that communicates the type of human interpreting? What humans are allowed here? And, following that question, what type of human is embodied in this interpretation?

I will return to the communicative role of architecture in the following chapters, but for now, it can be stated that communication and architecture have a relationship that can be understood in terms of medium, as well as a relationship more akin to the rhetorical theory of Hyde and Smith. Architecture, along with language, provides the fore-structure for interpreting, with the implication that only certain humans can understand the message.
Chapter 2. Posthumanisms

Introduction

The concept of the human as being-within nature and as a unique being standing outside of nature has long been a topic within the humanities. From Plato’s (Ferrari, 2007) conception of the human as emerging from the wilderness through the collective to the recent discussions surrounding the merging of humans and machines (Wolfe, 2010), the concept of the human has been discussed in conjunction with the environment, animality, and the role of nature and technology. The concept of posthumanism has been applied to a wide range of theoretical positions in a variety of disciplines, including performance studies (Gingrich-Philbrook & Simmons, 2015; MacDonald, 2014), art (Borst, 2012), critical theory (Braidotti, 2019; Braidotti & Fuller, 2019), and communication and media studies (Clary-Lemon, 2015; Gates, 2013; Gross, 2020; Mara & Hawk, 2009). While no one definition or approach to posthumanism can adequately capture the myriad approaches, a common unifying thread is the problematizing of the human’s role in social and environmental relationships. Whether through breaking down boundaries of the separation of animals and humans, humans and environment, or humans and machines, posthumanists seek to reject traditional classical humanism (Gane, 2006).

In the same way that there is no single and encompassing definition of posthumanism, the history of classical humanism is equally varied and complex. Humanism is a complex constellation of historical events and intellectual commitments spanning centuries. At the core of this broad category is a focus on the study of the
human and the centrality of the human entity in all intellectual pursuits. The humanist approach, by definition, is necessarily anthropocentric. Anthropocentrism is a direct consequence of the Enlightenment approach to the Cartesian dualist subject; the human could, through reason and rationality, better understand their role in the larger environment. This form of engagement with the world was unique to humans and thus justified a privileged position for the human subject. The human subject—understood as the central mediator between environmental phenomena—was called into question by the three towering theorists in the 19th century: Marx, Freud, and Darwin.

While Marx, Freud, and Darwin are credited with ushering in a new approach to much of the way that we conceptualize contemporary culture, each of these revolutionary thinkers specifically and effectively called into question the centrality of the Cartesian human subject in the larger phenomena of science, society, and the psyche (Randall, 1961). By questioning the human’s centrality in social and environmental relations, each of these thinkers provided an entry-point for a post-anthropocentric position, later taken up by many posthumanists and other 20th-century theorists. Marx’s conceptualization of human nature emphasized the social relations that constitute embodied humans. For Marx, the human was a product of a larger system of social, political, and economic forces, not a unique being standing outside of these relations (Balibar, 2014). Freud’s contribution to the questioning of the classical humanist understanding of the human and the shift to a post-anthropocentric perspective can be found in his argument that humans are motivated and driven by animalistic urges and sexual and aggressive instincts. Our urges place us in the realm of the animal, a part of nature, and our subconscious that is connected to these urges is a product of our environments. As animals, humans are
constituted by external forces that shape our psyche (Storr, 2001). Darwin’s publication of *On the Origin of Species* revolutionized the existing conceptualization of the human as standing outside of nature. Darwin’s theory of evolution intertwined the human with the realm of nature and the animal (Kirkman, 2007).

Although Marx, Freud, and Darwin planted the seeds of post-anthropocentrism, the centrality of the human in classical humanism continued through the beginning and middle of the 20th century in the form of positivism and modernism in the sciences, art, and politics. Positivism in science continued the privileging of the human subject as separate from its environment, a detached observer with special access to universal truths. In art, politics, and social theory, the modernist project continued this anthropocentric trajectory by reemphasizing the privileged position of the detached and autonomous human agent. The modernist ethos of efficiency and rationality, exemplified in science through positivism, in the arts through Le Corbusier’s architecture, and in social theory through the work of the Frankfurt School, emphasized the uniqueness and universality of the human subject. The anthropocentric universal human subject, exemplified in Leonardo Da Vinci’s *Vitruvian Man* (Sackey, 2019), raises the issue of what defines the universal human subject through the criteria employed and used at different historical moments.

A universal human subject, standing outside of nature yet fully immersed within it, rational and efficient, the great mediator between thought and action, has a long history of being exclusionary, narrowly defined, and politically motivated (Butler, 2015). The universal human subject has evolved into a subject that is less about DNA than racist, classist, and colonialist demarcations and justifications (Braidotti, 2013). From the
exclusionary practices of defining citizens in ancient Greece, to the 3/5 Compromise in the United States that dehumanized Black and Indigenous slaves, what counts as a human has evolved over time and in varying locations. This history of categorization does not imply a history of posthumanism, rather a history of creating the human in an attempt to exclude the Other. The universal human subject remained constant; it was the criteria for becoming human that remained a contingency. A watershed moment in the political, cultural, and artistic landscape of the mid-20th century complicated the exclusionary practices of defining the human (Braidotti, 2013; Wolfe, 2010).

Although different from theoretical posthumanisms, postmodernism, like Marx, Freud, and Darwin, ushered in a new era of post-anthropocentrism where the Western humanist’s relationship to the environment was called into question. Postmodernity, like posthumanism, is not easily defined or categorized. It works as a larger umbrella term for a set of theoretical positions and practices that dominated late 20th-century literary, philosophical, and communication theory.

Again, similar to posthumanism, certain themes and approaches run throughout most of the prominent works of postmodernist theoretical writings. A questioning of the modernist project (e.g., efficiency, rationality, universality) is a key feature in political, artistic, and socio-cultural postmodernist literature (Bulter, 2015). The guiding narratives that gave structure to the Enlightenment and modernist project began to question the centrality of the human in human-world or human-environment relations. These ideas, which justified anthropocentrism in previous years, were challenged, and new conceptualizations of the human began to materialize. Among these presuppositions that were questioned was the belief in universality in aesthetics, politics, and, most
importantly for this dissertation, the universality of the human. Da Vinci’s *Vitruvian Man* no longer exemplified the universal human; the emergence of the civil rights movement, the women’s liberation movement, the gay rights movement, and other identity politics categories sought to expand the definition of what counts as a human. Again, human as a category is not the focus in the postmodern interregnum; instead, what counts as a human is questioned (Hassan, 1977). Postmodernity as a historical moment laid the groundwork for a posthumanist move that asked, What is a human? Who has been included and excluded from this category? And what traditions have contributed to that distinction? Postmodernity’s rupture deemphasized the privileged human subject as standing outside of its environment and placed it squarely in the social relations that constitute being. Anthropocentrism was questioned as a consequence of shifting understandings of identity formation and social interaction.

Two of the most notable works that established postmodernism as an intellectual and academic site of contestation are Francois Lyotard’s (1984) *Postmodern Condition* and Fredric Jameson’s (1991) *Postmodernism*. Each theorist explored a different direction: Lyotard focused on the decline of the grand or master narrative, and Jameson interrogated the frenetic energy of late capitalism to understand art and culture in the postmodern era (Poster, 2002). Yet, these two works did not arise in a vacuum; rather, they articulated an intellectual milieu that was a defining component of poststructuralism, most notably with the works of Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida. These theorists question the universality of the human condition, ushering in the theoretical paradigm of a post-anthropocentric conceptualization of human-environment relations.
The anthropocentrism of classical humanism is a critical issue in various posthumanisms and their related fields. It will provide a connecting point for the threads of posthumanism that I discuss in this chapter. Whereas classical humanism posits the human as a static ahistorical entity, some posthumanisms call into question the human’s meaning, history, and future in an always shifting landscape of technological advancement that blurs the line between the human and the non-human. I will focus on two approaches to posthumanism that pose two different conceptualizations: The human is a contingency that either has a history of fluidity, where the ways that we have always been posthuman are the key element of analysis (Braidotti, 2013; Butler, 2001, 2015; Ferrando, 2016; Foucault, 1971, 1995; Sloterdijk, 1998, 1999b, 2004, 2009a, 2009b, 2011, 2014b, 2016), or that recent technological developments have ushered in a new era of conceptualization focusing on the disintegration of the classical human subject (Cavanagh, 2008; Cielemęcka & Daigle, 2019; Haraway, 1991; Hayles, 1999; Wolfe, 2010, 2014).

In this chapter, I discuss theorists focusing on the conceptualization of the posthuman as a break and disintegration of the unified subject of classical humanities through new technologies and informatics. Then, I review those theorists and positions that address the long-standing issues of what it means to be human and to treat the human as a contingency. This second category focuses on those working outside of posthumanism, yet share many of the same concerns. Many of the theorists in the second category discuss post-anthropocentrism and new materialism as a way to understand and complicate the idea of the human in the context of other objects, human and non-human. These two approaches differ in their orientation to the concept of human; the former
focuses on new technology contributing to the human’s disintegration. The latter recognizes the human as a contingency throughout history. Yet, the distinction between entering into the posthuman era as a response to new technology and a disintegration of the unified human, and the idea that we have always been posthuman through a relationship with our environments and other beings, human and non-human, shares some of the common tenets of posthumanism. I will address the following major tenets of posthumanism and its related fields: technology as a means to complicate the understanding of the human; the relationship and blurred distinction between humans and animals; post-anthropocentrism as an approach that deprivileges the role of the human in human-world relations; the ontological status of objects in a larger network of being; the impact of other beings, including things, on the constitution of the human; and the ethical status of non-human objects. These tenets are found in posthumanist theory and related fields, but not all theories emphasize each tenet. Finally, I discuss posthumanism and its related fields in communication literature.

Architecture and design are rhetorical and contribute to the constitution of being human. I argue that posthumanism is a network of related theoretical concepts that argue for the continued contingency of the concept of human. This chapter provides the necessary context to understand the different ways that posthumanism conceptualizes the human, including Peter Sloterdijk. Sloterdijk is a posthumanist who contends that “we have always been posthuman,” or that we are always in the process of domesticating ourselves as human. For Sloterdijk, space, structures, and design help bring us back to our originary dyadic-ontological state and separate the animal from the human. I will now
discuss posthumanism as focused on technology and the disintegration of the classical humanist conception of the human.

**Posthumanism: New Technology and the Disintegration of the Human**

Posthumanism became a distinct intellectual and academic category in the mid-20th century. An early account of posthumanism by the literary theorist Ihab Hassan (1977) helped establish the trajectory of post-human studies as future-oriented and responding to the idea of a unified human that is disintegrating: “Humanism may be coming to an end as humanism transforms itself into something one must helplessly call posthumanism” (p. 843). Hassan (1977) stressed the importance of transforming the human and the role of artificial intelligence: “Will artificial intelligence supersede the human brain, rectify it, or simply extend our powers?” (p. 843). His conceptualization of the human is a condition that is contingent upon new mutations of the entity. This process is not enigmatic; instead, it is a natural process. As previously stated, there is no single posthumanism. Rather, the umbrella term covers an array of approaches, definitions, and conceptualizations.

Addressing the posthumanism tenet of technology and the constitution of the human, one of the main branches of posthumanism focuses on the dissolution of the static human through technological engagement, information systems, and augmentation of the human body. These foci imply a forward-looking approach to the human’s conceptualization, one that moves from the human as a universal concept to the breaking up of those distinct categories. This approach does not imply that the human has only recently become posthuman. Instead, the following theorists in this posthuman technology tradition focus on the disintegration of the classical humanist subject. The
human of humanism has died, leaving open the possibility for a rebirth of the concept. Foucault is often credited with one of the first posthuman declarations that specifically addressed the idea of an end to the universality of the human and the postmodern exploration of the posthuman. The post in the posthuman signifies the coming after, situating the human as a historical concept while leaving open the possibility for augmentation that is only possible once the category of the human is interrogated. In *The Order of Things*, Foucault (1971) claims,

> One thing in any case is certain: man is neither the oldest nor the most constant problem that has been posed for human knowledge. . . . In fact, among all the mutations that have affected the knowledge of things and their order, the knowledge of identities, differences, characters, equivalences, words – in short, in the midst of all the episodes of that profound history of the Same – only one, that which began a century and a half ago and is now perhaps drawing to a close, has made it possible for the figure of man to appear. . . . As the archaeology of our thought easily shows, man is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end. . . . If those arrangements were to disappear as they appeared, if some event of which we can at the moment do no more than sense the possibility – without knowing either what its form will be or what it promises – were to cause them to crumble, as the ground of Classical thought did, at the end of the eighteenth century, then one can certainly wager that man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea. (p. 386)

Like Hassan, Foucault establishes the trajectory of the human, and the posthuman, as a rupture and a historical moment where epistemologically shifting ground allows for the reconceptualization of the entity of the human in a new intellectual environment.

Although charged with being anti-humanist, according to Deleuze (1995), “Foucault questions the extent to which man, as a conceptual category, can be understood as an opening – a line of flight – and to what extent as an obstacle or obstruction, ‘a way of imprisoning life’” (p. 91). This is not anti-humanism, but rather a clear conceptualization of the human as historical, not the end of evolution, but a stop on the way.
For Foucault, what was created before was not possible in another context. And what is possible now was inconceivable before. Once the epistemological groundwork has been altered, the ontology of the human is open to debate, transformation, and reconceptualization. Following Foucault, these techno-information extensions of the corporeal and conceptual human have been intimately connected with machines, information technologies, and human augmentation. Although what could be considered the earliest forms of this approach to posthumanism could include many other thinkers and theorists, I will now briefly sketch two of the highly influential theorists in posthumanism theory. Each has articulated humans’ conception based on shifting boundaries of embodiment, new technology, and informatics: N. Katherine Hayles (1999, 2005) and Donna Haraway (1991). Hayles (1997, 1999, 2002) argues that

the posthuman view configures human being so that it can be seamlessly articulated with intelligent machines. In the posthuman, there are no essential differences or absolute demarcations between bodily existence and computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, robot teleology and human goals. (1997, p. 23)

Hayles explicitly emphasizes the “post” in posthuman—the after of the classical conceptualization of the human is extended embodiment. In How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics, Hayles (1999) asks what it means to be human in the current historical moment, where rapid technological changes subsequently call into question previous conceptualizations of the human. Unlike other posthumanists who operationalize technology to include a wider definition, Hayles focuses on computers, virtual reality, artificial intelligence, and informatics. For her, embodiment and information play a critical role in what constitutes
a human. The role of information, not the universal human notion of consciousness, destabilizes the human of classical humanism. Hayles argues that the liberal Enlightenment view of the human privileges consciousness over the body, while the posthuman view privileges information over the body. For Hayles, (dis)embodiment is important for both the humanist and the posthumanist. Such a view of the posthuman is not anti-human or postbiological; Hayles instead focuses on the relationship between information, technology, and the embodied human. It is this embodiment that is crucial to her argument. The human can be reconceptualized if we consider our changing understanding of what it means to be embodied as an actor in the network of society, where the embodied human reflects the destabilization brought about by technological changes. The mind-body dualism of Enlightenment humanism is reconfigured as the materiality of the embodied human, information, and the environment merge. Hayles (1999), an English professor with a background in biology, uses examples from science fiction in a hyperbolic way to uncomfortably push the concept of disembodied consciousness to the extremes.

Hayles cites the violence of the disembodied brain in Hans Moravec’s (1988) *Mind Children: The Future of Robot and Human Intelligence* as a reminder that the future of uploaded consciousness, separate from the human body, is already present. Her example of disembodied consciousness reminds us that the posthuman is not separate or an after-human state. Rather, it is the merging of information technologies and the embodied human. The posthuman is biological, yet more than a mere embodiment. The posthuman is the extension of consciousness and the merging of technology and human (Amoore, 2019). Hayles traces the roots of the Enlightenment human’s disintegration to
the Macy Cybernetics Conferences from 1946 to 1953. Interdisciplinary and wide-ranging in scope, these conferences conceptualized the human as a machine that processes information. Taking this conceptualization as a starting point, the conference attendees sought to model artificial intelligence on human information processing. They created a goal of symbolically representing the work of human cognition. The objectives of this enterprise were pragmatic in nature. They sought to more efficiently produce machines that were modeled after ways that humans process information—thus signaling the fusion of the human and machine.

Although not explicit in their intentions, Hayles argues that these goals significantly impacted culture far outside of the conference rooms. The meshing of human information processing and machine technology significantly problematized the concept of the Enlightenment human, the universal yet individual and discrete entity that engaged with society, not as a part of the network. Classical humanism posited the human as universal and standing above nature, where posthumanism began the process of flattening the ontology and incorporating the entity known as the human, still embodied, into the larger network of information processing. For Hayles (1999), the posthuman is an era of distributed ontologies, networks of information that allow for a “reflexive epistemology” (p. 288). It is a partnership between humans and machines that replaces the need for domination and control. While Hayles provides an extensive overview of the posthuman’s new era, her account does not ultimately dispel the myth of the role of technology as the savior to our social and environmental problems.
Donna Haraway and the Cyborg

Donna Haraway also addresses human partnership with technology and information. Her text *A Cyborg Manifesto* is a foundational work on posthumanism (1991). Cyborg feminism complicates the notion of essential qualities of the category “female.” As a metaphor, the cyborg rejects categorical boundaries and can be understood as merging the human and the non-human. This merging complicates the category of the human as it relates to nature and machines (Haraway, 1991). Haraway’s work is complementary to the work of Hayles, as both theorists seek to complicate and explore the boundaries between the human, animal, and machine.

Haraway identifies three categories or boundaries in *A Cyborg Manifesto*: human and animal, animal-human and machine, and physical and non-physical. Evolution, blurring, and boundary-crossing are the key concepts to understanding her work on the posthuman in a historical moment of accelerated technological change. The classical humanist understanding of the human is rife with dualisms—self/other, culture/nature, male/female, civilized/primitive, right/wrong, truth/illusion, total/partial—that provide dichotomies of domination. These dualisms necessitate an essentialism that Haraway believes the cyborg metaphor can help to complicate and ultimately eradicate (1991).

Perfect communication, a direct consequence of essentialist ontological hierarchies through the classical humanist dualism, is the language of domination. The cyborg metaphor seeks to disrupt this communication style and offers political opportunities and communities that are not founded on identity but affinity. Haraway’s metaphorical cyborg, like Hayles’s posthuman, exists to exemplify the condition of the contemporary human being, one who is open to modification and expansion through
technology and what she refers to as “informatics,” or the “technologies of information [and communication] as well as the biological, social, linguistic and cultural changes that initiate, accompany and complicate their development” (Hayles, 1999, p. 29). Informatics is information embedded, utilized, and analyzed within its social boundaries. Haraway views the cyborg and informatics, through science fiction, as a cultural artifact, as more than just the extension of the human through prosthesis, but a rejection of the classical humanist version of man.

Although Haraway’s cyborg maintains the human, with the improvement of the human through the use of technology, this is not an accentuation of the classical humanist subject. Something considered a human will ultimately remain—albeit in a politically and culturally constituted reconfiguration— and moves beyond the classical humanist subject. Similar to Hayles, Haraway’s view of technology is not one of fear, idolization, or fetishization. Instead, she views technology, informatics, and the human as the boundary that must be explored and problematized for the best utilization of the embodied human that can ultimately eradicate dichotomies of power produced by the classical humanist understanding of man. Here, the posthuman can be a political tool, a process, and an action to better disintegrate the already present blurring of the contingent boundaries.

**Carey Wolfe and Animality**

Hayles and Haraway provided much of the early work on technology, information, and the concept of the human that ultimately established one of the main threads in posthumanist theory. Recent work on posthumanism has expanded Haraway’s and Hayles’s approaches to the posthuman and has taken into account the human-environment and human-animal relationship (Adams & Thompson, 2020; Berland, 2019;
Cielemęcka & Daigle, 2019; Devellennes & Dillet, 2018; Goriunova, 2019). The work of posthuman theorist Cary Wolfe moves in this direction. He addresses one of the central tenets of posthumanist theory—the non-human other’s treatment, including the animal. In *What Is Posthumanism?* Cary Wolfe (2010) focuses on the human-animal relationship in posthumanism, raising the issue of subjectivity as not specific to the human, abandoning notions of personhood, and reintegrating the split between environment and system, human, and animal. Wolfe (2014, 2010) approaches posthumanism from a more historical perspective and focuses on the post-anthropocentric turn. While the title of his book is deceptively simple, the ground that he covers is anything but narrow. Divided into 10 chapters, Wolfe covers such ground as contemporary art, architecture, animal studies, systems theory, and film, among other topics. He argues for moving beyond the central placement of the human in these fields of study. Wolfe (2010) aims to fully comprehend what amounts to a new reality: that the human occupies a new place in the universe, a universe now populated by what I am prepared to call nonhuman subjects. And this is why, to me, posthumanism means not the triumphal surpassing or unmasking of something but an increase in the vigilance, responsibility, and humility that accompany living in a world so newly, and differently, inhabited. (p. 47)

In order to achieve this goal, Wolfe uses a systems theory approach that seeks to undermine the role of the human in cultural understandings and studies. Wolfe grounds much of his work in the second-order systems theory of Niklas Luhmann (Wolfe cites Norbert Weiner as an example of first-order systems theory). Wolfe argues that second-order systems theory is primarily concerned with emergence and self-organization, two terms that find a comfortable home with his definition of posthumanism. Wolfe (2010) defines posthumanism as follows: “[P]osthumanism in my sense isn’t posthuman at all—
in the sense of being ‘after’ our embodiment has been transcended—but is only posthumanist, in the sense that it opposes the fantasies of disembodiment and autonomy, inherited from humanism itself” (p. xv). Wolfe’s disagreement with what he refers to as Hayles’s version of the posthuman as “triumphant disembodiment” is evident in the above quote; he sees other forms of posthumanism as idolizing technology or as rejecting the category of the human (2010, p. XV). It is a deprivileging of the role of the unique human subject inherited from classical humanism. Like Hayles and Haraway, Wolfe argues that this deprivileging of the human as a unique subject can be traced to the systems theories of cybernetics and the Macy Cybernetic Conferences from 1946 to 1953. While this questioning of the integrated human subject can be traced to cybernetic theory, the integrated human has long been a myth.

Wolfe is first and foremost an animal-studies scholar or animalist, and his essays on the human-animal relation help to establish his unique approach to being posthuman. He seeks to connect the concept of the posthuman to the question of animality, or Derrida’s “question of the animal,” in order to revisit the question of who and what can be considered a subject of ethical address, a topic that I will explore in greater detail later. The centrality of the human in human-animal relations reifies the anthropocentrism of humanism, as well as other posthumanisms that fail to address this issue. Wolfe’s issue of ethics, borrowing from Derrida, is always to be asked yet never fully answered. It is unending and foreclosable. Relationality is a key concept in understanding the emphasis on anthropocentrism in other posthumanisms and animal studies:

It’s also, and more profoundly, that a second form of finitude obtains in our prosthetic subjection to any semiotic system whatsoever that makes possible “our” concepts, “our” recognition and articulation of our “nonhuman relations” in the first place. Whatever those relations are, they involve a scene of address . . .
that no party owns, controls, or masters, because that scene of address and the form of relation that makes it possible were on the scene, as it were, before either party in the transaction. This gets even more complicated, of course, when the beings in relation inhabit wholly or largely different phenomenological worlds; the iterative form of language in the broadest sense . . . has to form a recursive loop that can braid together different life worlds in a third space reducible to neither—the very space of relation. What this means for our extrahuman relations with nonhuman animals, for example, is that the animality in question in that relation isn’t just a matter of our relation to that animality (either of the nonhuman other or to the animality of ourselves) but is also, and more complexly, a matter of the animality of the form of relation itself. (Wolfe, 2014, p. 556)

This form of address and relationality radically subverts the very notion of the human-animal hierarchy by placing the third space of relationality as a site of mystery, a being unknown that is irreducible to either party. Appreciating the relationality of humans and non-human animals as a distinct space allows for a greater understanding of the role of human-non-human object relations, which is discussed later in this chapter alongside the work of Bruno Latour and Graham Harman.

Having discussed some of the foremost theorists working explicitly in the field of posthumanist studies, I now turn to the theories of post-anthropocentrism, design as constituting the human, and the subject status of non-human objects. The following sections explore theorists who emphasize the ontology of the non-human object in its relationship with humans and beyond. Their work highlights significant tenets of posthumanism: post-anthropocentrism as an approach that deprivileges the role of the human in human-world relations; the ontological status of objects in a larger network of being; the impact of other beings, including things, on the constitution of the human; and the ethical status of non-human objects.
Beyond Posthuman Studies: Post-Anthropocentrism and the Ethical Status of the Non-Human Animal/Object

The posthuman theorists discussed so far have provided the groundwork for posthuman studies that explicitly focus on the concept of what is possible after the classical humanist conception of the human. I will now discuss the work of several theorists and philosophers that are working in the realm of post-anthropocentric studies, as well as those whose theories have contributed to this concept, focusing on the status of the non-human object and its role in the larger environment, as well as the role of the human in relation to these objects. One of the main themes and tenets of posthumanism, post-anthropocentrism, provides a way to recognize the centrality of the human in the humanist tradition. By decentering the human, post-anthropocentrism places the human in a larger system of social and environmental factors that each contribute to our collective and individual existence. The following theorists and theories—Colomina and Wigley, actor-network theory (ANT), speculative realism, object-oriented philosophy, David Gunkel, and Judith Butler—all work with the idea that humans are embedded within a network of actors. Some of these positions and theorists call for a flattened ontology that treats all things as equal. Others emphasize the role that the social plays in constituting the human. These positions and theorists question the classical humanist tradition and recognize the importance of all objects and relations in what it means to be human.

Colomina and Wigley: Are We Human?

While Wolfe briefly addresses architecture in his work on the posthuman, other theorists outside of posthuman studies have theorized the relationships between the
conceptualization of the human, design, and architecture at greater length. In Beatriz Colomina and Mark Wigley’s (2016) book *Are We Human?* the two architectural theorists explore that very question. Although straightforward, the question they pose is anything but simple to answer. Departing from the assumption that the ability to question one’s identity as human is the marker of the human species, the authors instead state that “if the human is a question mark, design is the way that question is engaged” (Colomina & Wigley, 2016, p. 5).

Again, this question is not clearly answered but problematized. They do this by arguing that design is what makes us human. And humans design in an attempt to further mold the plasticity of the human subject. To be human is to design oneself and others, from cell phones to hand-axes, from fashion to prosthetics. Furthermore, Colomina and Wigley (2016) state, “The history of design is therefore a history of evolving conceptions of the human. To talk about design is to talk about the state of our species” (p. 9). This history is not modern; it dates back thousands of years. The power to produce objects, demarcate space, and apply techniques of control through design allows for a contingency of our species in different states of recognition.

Colomina and Wigley take a historical approach that focuses less on any technological ruptures in the 20th century, while admitting that certain technological changes have ushered in a rapid expansion of how the design of technology affects the plasticity of the human subject. In conjunction with the ability to design, this plasticity is unique to humans and contributes to what it means to be a human. The human brain is not just the creator of new tools. Rather, it is co-created by the tools and design in the processing of creation. Humans are malleable artifacts that are constantly rearranged and
created through engagement with the environment. Here we find similarities to the posthuman theorists previously discussed: the role of the human in the larger environmental context, the import of non-human objects in the conceptualization of the human, and, following Wolfe, the question of ethics in the discussion of human-environment relations. Quoting architects Alison and Peter Smith, Colomina and Wigley (2016) argue that “good design is an ethic rather than an aesthetic” (p. 89). This argument contends that the subject status of non-human objects is more than something that is affected; rather, it can affect, and those relations raises the question of the ethical status of the non-human objects.

Having addressed the theories of Beatriz Colomina and Mark Wigley, I will now turn to the theories of post-anthropocentrism and the subject status of non-human objects. The following sections explore theorists that emphasize the ontology of the non-human object in its relationship with humans and beyond. Their work highlights some of the major tenets of posthumanism: post-anthropocentrism as an approach that deprivileges the role of the human in human-world relations; the ontological status of objects in a larger network of being; the impact of other beings, including things, on the constitution of the human; and the ethical status of non-human objects.

**Actor-Network Theory and Flat Ontologies**

One of the most influential theories in the larger discussion of ontology and how humans interact with their environment is ANT. Although not explicitly working in posthumanist theory, ANT addresses some of the major tenets of posthumanist thought. ANT is a post-anthropocentric approach that deprivileges the role of the human in
human-world relations, the ontological status of objects in a larger network of being, and the impact of other beings, including things, on the constitution of the human.

First developed by science and technology studies theorists Bruno Latour, Michel Callon, John Law, and Madeliene Akrich, ANT seeks to explain how humans interact with larger systems of materials and symbols to create social situations (Latour, 2005; Michael, 2017). ANT is a strongly anti-reductionist ontology, or an ontology of things that cannot be reduced to anything less than relational. This relationality necessarily deemphasizes the status of the human existing outside of nature, the environment, and social systems. Latour’s concept of object, or actor, is not limited to physical objects (both discrete technologies and technology as a concept are actors, as well as processes and ideas). For actor-network theorists, all objects, or actors, are real if they can affect and be affected. Latour’s anti-reductionist ontology necessitates the equality, but not equal strength, of all objects. Human and non-human actors might produce different levels of impact on a social system, but each has equal ontological import. We are who we are because of our entanglement with things, and those things are in turn affected by us, producing a dynamic and fluctuating network of relations. Strongly anti-essentialist, the implications are that humans are not the central mediators in social networks. All actors in this theory are the same in that they affect and can be affected (Harman, 2014).

ANT is a theoretical framework that treats both human and non-human “actors” as agentive in the relationship between humans and non-human materials in society. The human and non-human relationships ultimately provide the infrastructure for society. ANT seeks to describe infrastructure as relational between human/non-human and material/non-material (semiotic) actors. The relationship between actors constitutes the
ontology of an actor: Therefore, each new relationship produces a new actor. Thus, social relations exist only in a network, and there is no social force that exists prior to relations.

Here we can connect this approach to the theory of Colomina and Wigley. Relationality in a network is not transmission, but instead it is a translation. New ontologies form in the ever-shifting social systems, meaning that no two actors are ever the same at different times. When ideas and materials interact, the whole of social networks is produced. It is in this whole that the constant and perpetual performance of becoming is present. Actors are performing relations to other actors that produce the whole that subsequently affects each actor. Each actor is the sum of its relations to other actors and the social system. Actors are created by and sustain the network. As a method, ANT seeks to describe rather than explain social relations. The flattening of humans’ ontological status and non-human objects has significant meaning for our understanding of our environments, even if we do not have access to all of the relational ties. The Internet in relation to a human actor is not the same Internet in relation to the National Security Agency or the mobile media device used for access. The equality between humans, affective hallucinations, mobile phones, and the Internet necessitates that each affects the other.

Importantly, interactions must take place to effect change and produce affect, thus highlighting the importance of contingency for both actor-network theorists and the constructivist approach to technology. Two key terms in ANT provide greater nuance to the post-anthropocentric argument and the idea that both materials and symbols affect the ontology of each actor. The first, intermediaries, are entities with relatively little impact on the system under analysis (this does not imply a lack of impact) and function to
transport the greater impact of another actor. Mediators are the more significant objects of study that serve to create a difference in the social system or object under analysis. Some objects function as intermediaries and mediators in different contexts, thus exemplifying the flattened ontology of ANT (Harman, 2014). ANT work has been highly influential for social theorists and philosophers who seek to question and undermine the centrality of the human in communicative and relational interactions. This group, the speculative realists, offers a continuation of the ever-broadening concept of posthumanism and post-anthropocentrism. Like ANT, speculative realism and object-oriented philosophy are not explicitly posthumanist theories, but they do share some of the major tenets of posthumanism: Post-anthropocentrism as an approach that deprivileges the role of the human in human-world relations and the ontological status of objects in a larger network of being.

**Speculative Realism**

One of the critical developments in post-anthropocentric theory comes from the loosely connected philosophical movement speculative realism. Speculative realists deemphasized the very qualities of what makes a human distinct, intact, and universal. While not arguing against the concept of the human, these disparate approaches of the speculative realists can be placed in the field of posthumanism as they question the barrier between being inside and outside the human and non-human. In 2007, a workshop held at the University of London’s Goldsmiths College brought together several philosophers and theorists under the newly coined moniker of “Speculative Realism” (Harman, 2011).
Although working from a variety of distinct philosophical approaches and schools, the organizers of the workshop—Graham Harman, Quentin Meillassoux, Ray Brassier, and Iain Hamilton Grant—all shared a similar contempt for the philosophical position of “correlationism” (Harman, 2010b). Correlationism, a term coined by Ray Brassier, is “the view that philosophy cannot speak of human or world in isolation, but only of a primal correlation or rapport between the two” (Harman, 2011a, p. 171). This unifying rallying point for a discussion on continental philosophy’s future and direction sparked debate within the self-identifying group of speculative realists, further splintering the loose collective (Harman, 2011a). Anti-correlationism, a direct attack on Kantian metaphysics, provides a critique of the anthropocentric view of relational philosophy that posits the human-world relationship as the only relationship possible. Or, as Graham Harman states, speculative realism attempts to follow Husserl’s charge to return to a discussion of the “things-in-themselves,” although how to approach the “things-in-themselves” parted from Husserl’s human-perception focus.

For some, including Harman and his position of object-oriented philosophy, the “things-in-themselves” remain inaccessible in their entirety to humans. For others, such as Meillassoux and his position of speculative materialism, there is a direct insight into the object through mathematics. Although often in disagreement, both factions ask what can be known about reality and the human’s role in that reality. Either way, the critique of anthropocentrism and a focus on everyday or mid-sized objects are crucial aspects of speculative realism.

In an essay on applied object-studies in media theory, Marcel O’Gorman (2012) provides an outsider’s account of the recent proliferation of a return to materials and
objects in the humanities and social sciences, or “thing studies.” O’Gorman notes the everydayness of the objects discussed in this new field; from clods of clay to calico curtains, they are ordinary objects. An account of everyday objects does not exhaust the reach of speculative realism. But, to take the meaning of the experienced world seriously, as Edmund Husserl initiated in the project of phenomenology over a century ago, provides a crucial entry-point for distinguishing the branches of speculative realism from the dominance of philosophical idealism. According to speculative realists, following Immanuel Kant’s publication of the *Critique of Pure Reason* in 1781, philosophy has been confined to correlationism (Bryant et al., 2011). This confinement places humans at the center of all relations and necessitates the inability to perceive an ontology beyond human thought. The speculative realists take issue with one or more problems concerning correlationism, and the possibility of adapting their theoretical positions to the study of posthumanism is becoming more and more critical.

Speculative realists are part of a long tradition of debating realism and idealism—a debate that is as old as philosophy itself (Moser, 1994). Bryant et al. (2011) argue that “the new turn towards realism and materialism within continental philosophy comes in the wake of a long period of something resembling ethereal idealism” (p. 3). Ethereal idealism, or “correlationism,” is an anti-realist stance that functions as a philosophy of access. Correlationism, based on Kant’s transcendental idealism, is a philosophy of access where human understanding is limited to the correlation between thinking and being, and the two can never be accessed separately. Such a position allows for self-referential understandings of “being,” for humans to exist as beings in the world, and to have phenomenological experience of the world. Yet, correlationism denies the ability to
discuss anything independent of thought and language. While not an explicit idealism that denies the existence of a mind-independent world, correlationism functions as an ethereal idealism, or a subtler version of explicit idealism that denies access to the mind-independent world.

For much of continental philosophy after Kant, objects of the world conform to our minds through the necessary artifice of a priori categories that structure knowledge. Such a position limits human knowledge to only that which appears to us, structured by the Kantian intuitions. Lee Braver (2007) argues that the Kantian anti-realist position permeates all continental philosophy from Hegel through Heidegger to Derrida. Bryant et al. (2011) expand the extent of this permeation of anti-realism and anti-materiality by citing the preoccupation of post-structuralist continental philosophy with subjectivity, culture, and language. Their critique also encompasses the loss of a genuine political engagement due to the “cultural turn” of academic Marxism. Materiality and the everyday object significantly lost attention in contemporary philosophy (Bryant et al., 2011).

Speculative realists argue—in response to the anti-realist tradition established by Kant, concretized by Hegel, redirected by Husserlian and Heideggerian phenomenology, and perpetuated by post-structuralists such as Derrida—that a return to materials and metaphysics has taken place in the late 20th century. Bryant et al. (2011) cite French philosophers and cultural theorists Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari as ushering in a new concern with material ontology from an anti-subjective “realm of becoming” that posits “subject and thought being only a final, residual product of these primary ontological movements” (p. 6). By providing a distributed ontology through rhizomatics and
intensities, Deleuze and Guattari create a system of becoming that moves beyond the subject into a plane of becoming.

As evidence of the shift away from a Kantian correlationism and a return to materiality and an ontology beyond human access, Bryant et al. (2011) argue that French social theorist Bruno Latour offers another approach. Latour (2005), discussed previously as one of the founders of ANT, is a strongly anti-reductionist ontologist. Like object-oriented philosophy, Latour’s concept of object, or actor, is not limited to physical objects. The equality between affective hallucinations and marbles for both Latour and speculative realism provides a strong anti-correlationist approach to ontology. Although Deleuze, Guattari, and Latour are not self-identified speculative realists, the anti-correlationist thread of their respective philosophies provides evidence that the trajectory established by Kant has been highly influential but not irreversible.

Graham Harman provides an account of Kant’s main contributions to philosophy that form the basis of the object-oriented ontology position. First, since the things-in-themselves can be thought but never known, human knowledge is ultimately finite. Second, the human-world relation (mediated by space, time, and the Kantian categories) is philosophically privileged over every other relation. Thus, philosophy is primarily about human access to the world, or at least must take this access as its starting point (Harman, 2011b). Harman’s position is similar to the posthuman tenets of a post-anthropocentrism as an approach that deprivileges the role of the human in human-world relations and the ontological status of objects in a larger network of being.

For Harman, these two contributions from Kant have been used to criticize realism and have reduced philosophy to a philosophy of access. A philosophy of access
holds the position that “if we try to think of a world outside human thought, then we are thinking it, and hence it is no longer outside thought. Any attempt to escape this circle is doomed to contradiction” (Harman, 2011b, p. 60). This position places the human at the center of all relations (Kant’s second contribution) and limits human knowledge (Kant’s first contribution). Harman, as an object-oriented philosopher, accepts the first Kantian contribution and rejects the second. In the realm of posthumanist thought, the two are linked. If humans are not the central mediator of all things in the world, there must be knowledge outside of the human grasp.

**Object-Oriented Philosophy**

Object-oriented philosophy, first coined by Harman in his 1999 doctoral dissertation, agrees with the Kantian position that things-in-themselves in their entirety are beyond human understanding (Harman, 2010b). Objects of the world, both real and non-real, cannot be exhausted by practical use or theoretical exploration. The object-oriented philosophy position disagrees with the anthropocentric Kantian privileging of human-world relations and argues that human access to the world should not be the starting point for philosophy. Object-oriented philosophy retains the mystery of objects that is more closely aligned with a critique of anthropocentrism found in some posthumanist theories, such as Wolfe, Haraway, and Hayles.

Object-oriented philosophy and object-oriented ontology are closely linked forms of ontology that place objects at the center of the discussion of being and existence. Object-oriented philosophy is specific to the work of Graham Harman. Two criteria constitute the basis of his position:

1. Individual entities of various different scales (not just tiny quarks and electrons) are the ultimate stuff of the cosmos.
2. These entities are never exhausted by any of their relations or even by their sum of all possible relations. Objects withdraw from relation. (Harman, 2010a, paras. 15-16)

Stated simply, Harman argues that objects of all sizes and kinds should be taken as objects. They should not be reduced to the “tiny quarks and electrons” that constitute their most reduced physicality. Objects are also more than their relations to other objects. Objects cannot be exhausted by reductionism to the smallest parts or to the largest relational structures. These criteria are examined in further detail, but for now, they serve to distinguish object-oriented philosophy from object-oriented ontology. Object-oriented ontology is a thread of speculative realism that both takes issue with correlationism and places objects at the center of ontological inquiry. Object-oriented philosophy moves beyond a focus on objects, and examines object-object relationships beyond human mediation.

Harman’s philosophical background is in phenomenology, specifically the work of Martin Heidegger and Edmund Husserl. The culmination of his work on ontology, The Quadruple Object, was published in 2011. In this text, Harman (2011b) defines his ontology of objects, drawing on Heidegger, Husserl, and Latour. Using The Quadruple Object, I will provide a brief description of object-oriented philosophy.

Before addressing the key philosophical influence on Harman’s theory, addressing the philosophical status of objects provides a justification as to why taking objects seriously requires attention. Objects are important for understanding the role that speculative realism and object-oriented ontology plays in a posthumanism that accounts for the impact of our physical environment on our being in the world. According to Harman, pre-Socratic philosophy started as an anti-object-oriented enterprise. Although
constantly confronted with apparently discrete things of the world, the pre-Socratics sought to discover an underlying reality that united the illusion of difference that reduced things to constitutive elements. In *The Quadruple Object*, Harman (2011b) cites the pre-Socratic philosophers and their proposed underlying materials, Thales (water), Anaximenes (air), Empedocles (earth, air, fire, water), and Democritus (atoms), as initiating the philosophical attempt to reduce perceptual units into underlying root elements. In tandem with reducing objects to constitutive elements, another cast of pre-Socratics sought to explain the world as a true singularity perceived as different. Harman (2011b) references the pre-Socratic philosophers Pythagoras Anaxagoras, Parmenides, and Anaximander as examples of early monists or philosophers of the *apeiron*. This monism goes by different names (e.g., being, apeiron), but always posits that the world is of one thing. This one thing was either in the past and broken into pieces, or is currently a singularity that is deceived by our perception or will be in the future, as the notion of opposites is destroyed. For Harman (2011b), this monist view carries on in the work of Emmanuel Levinas (the *il y a* “broken to pieces by human consciousness”) and Jean Luc Nancy (the “whatever” that precedes all specificity). The history of the anti-object trajectory of philosophy illustrates one of two important aspects of object-oriented philosophy—Harman’s theory of undermining. Undermining is the view that objects “are too specific to deserve the name of ultimate reality, and dream up some deeper indeterminate basis for from which specific things arise” (Harman, 2011b, p. 10). Undermining is a form of reductionism that views objects as too shallow to be reality and undeserving of philosophical attention.
While undermining deprivileges discrete things as being reducible to even smaller constitutive parts, overmining treats objects as necessary only when manifested in the mind or as part of a network that affects other objects. The overmining view takes the position that discrete objects are “nothing more than palpable qualities, effects on other things, or images in the mind” (Harman, 2011b, p. 12). An overmining philosophy, such as ANT, posits that an object is nothing more than how it appears to the observer. This constellation of immediately perceived qualities tells one that there are only instances, not deeper substances. In this view, objects are real only if they are affected by and affect other things (Harman, 2011b). Harman takes issue with the overmining approach because it denies any possibility of change. If each and every object was exhausted by the current, and only, state of givenness, objects could not enter into new relations as the same object. Therefore, overmining provides no way of linking the various perceived bundles of qualities to the same thing. Each perception of an object is different, and the relational quality of a thing would be linked to one perception only. Overmining would eliminate the possibility of claiming that different perceptions of an object are perceptions of the same object.

The philosophies of undermining and overmining provide historical evidence for the deprivileging of everyday objects. Harman cites Edmund Husserl for bringing long-overdue attention to the mid-sized objects that humans encounter in everyday experience. Although Husserl could not overcome the charge of idealism, one can find engagement with “black-birds, centaurs, and mailboxes” in his work (Harman, 2011b, p. 117). Similarly, one can find descriptions of objects such as hammers and scenes of railway stations in Heidegger’s work. Both Heidegger and Husserl maintain an idealism, although
they both engage with the often-denigrated world around them. Harman’s path toward a realist account of objects begins with the rejection of correlationism and the use of Heidegger’s tool-analysis.

Harman (2011b) cites Heidegger’s tool-analysis as one of the most critical moments in 20th-century philosophy and compares it to Plato’s myth of the cave. Harman believes that the most common interpretation of Heidegger’s tool-analysis (that of a privileging of practice over theory) is incorrect. Harman argues that Heidegger believed that withdrawal into the unnoticed realm is the most common form of objects. When equipment fails, it becomes present and partially emerges from the unnoticed realm. To illustrate this point, Harman (2011b) uses the example of the earthquake: We are rarely aware of the ground beneath our feet, and it is only when an earthquake “breaks” the ground that new aspects of the object are noticed. The same shift from unnoticed existence to conscious presence can be found in hammers, body organs, and computers, regardless of whether or not they fail as objects. Simply directing one’s attention to the pancreas allows for a shift from the unnoticed realm to the noticed. Although I am now aware of the hammer and the pancreas through either a failure or a shift in attention, I have not exhausted the full thing-in-itself. From governments to panda bears, aspects of the object will never be grasped by theorizing or practical engagement. Harman’s reading of Heidegger maintains the mystery of the object, a mystery that is partially explained through both theory and practical engagement.

Object-oriented philosophy maintains that objects should be taken seriously as reality and that human-world relations are merely a part of the world. In The Quadruple Object, Harman (2011a) proposes an ontology of objects through a fourfold structure.
The fourfold structure consists of two types of objects: real and sensual. In addition to the two types of objects, Harman proposes two types of qualities: real and sensual. Put together, the fourfold structure illustrates Harman’s ontology of objects that surpasses the human-world relation of correlationism while maintaining the finitude of human knowledge.

The purpose of the fourfold structure of objects is to explain how objects that are withdrawn are able to make contact with one another without exhausting their ontological status. For Harman (2011b), the object is a “dark crystal, veiled in a private vacuum: irreducible to its own pieces, and equally irreducible to its outward relations with other things” (p. 47). To keep his ontology consistent with Heidegger’s withdrawn being, Harman insists that an aspect of an object always withdraws into the “dark crystal.” For Harman, and unlike Heidegger, there are many objects, more than one “equipment.” The object that can never be fully exhausted by any engagement is either physical or non-physical, exists on its own accord, and withdraws. The withdrawn aspect of the object is in no way more important than any other sensuous or experienced aspect. An object withdrawing from human perception is not unique. Yet, what distinguishes Harman’s fourfold structure is his insistence on the relationship between non-human objects with other non-human objects. This position places him in the posthuman camp through a decentering of the human in environmental relations.

Harman explicates the fourfold structure through a description of its constitutive parts and qualities: First, the real object is autonomous from whatever encounters it.

If I close my eyes to sleep or die, the sensual tree is vaporized, beings are destroyed along with me. Second, though sensual objects always inhabit experience and are not hidden behind their qualities, real objects must always hide. But despite these differences, there are important similarities between the
two kinds of objects. Both are autonomous units. Both are irreducible to any bundle of traits since they are able to withstand numerous changes in the qualities that belong to them. And most importantly, both real and sensual objects are polarized with two different kinds of qualities. (Harman, 2011b, p. 48)

The types of objects and qualities create a fourfold tension of how objects exist and interact. The first type of object is a real object. The real object must always hide or withdraw. A real object maintains and is autonomous regardless of its encounters; it hides behind qualities and withdraws from them. A real tree continues to be a real tree long after one forgets about it, falls asleep, or dies. A sensuous object, by contrast, exists only in an encounter with another object, and it is always present. The sensuous object has accidental qualities (the green, round shape of a pear at a certain time of day caught in a certain light from the window), though it does not hide behind them. Sensuous qualities are those found in the experience of an object. Real qualities are only known through an intellectual investigation of the object and can be said to represent the *eidos* of the object.

The four parts of the fourfold structure allow for four pairings: real objects/real qualities; real objects/sensuous qualities; sensuous objects/real qualities; and sensuous objects/sensuous qualities (Harman, 2011b).

Real objects with real qualities allow the objects to exist as separate entities, known only through intellectual investigation. We know that a pear is a pear through intellectual investigation, and what could be a mere bundle of qualities can now exist as a discrete thing. This combination allows for a pear to maintain its unique status as a pear. However, real objects with real qualities do not express themselves experientially until the real object comes forth from a withdrawn state through a sensuous quality. The combination of real qualities and of a real object is withdrawn from sensuous experience,
and the real object only emerges in experience through sensuous qualities (e.g., the shifting ground during an earthquake). The real object affecting the sensuous experientially informs us of the expressed aspects of the real and withdrawn object.

A sensuous object with real qualities can be partially known because there is always something about what we experience of an object that allows it to maintain its status as that object. We experience the object, and it maintains its status as that object. It is possible to have some sense experience of a sensuous object, but it cannot be fully expressed through its real withdrawn qualities. A sensuous object is always in a shifting relationship to sensuous or accidental qualities. Sensuous objects are what we encounter, and we experience them through their sensuous qualities. Again, we experience the pear as a sensuous object with sensuous qualities, although the pear can also be a real object with sensuous qualities that we experience. As a real object, the pear is the withdrawn pear; the pear is an object that maintains its unique ontological status as a pear. The real qualities of a pear are the qualities that, regardless of the shade of green or time of day that we experience the pear, allow the pear to maintain as the same pear.

The four combinations of objects and qualities interact with one another to create the experiences that we have of the world. Object-quality combinations allow for change within experience through the withdrawing aspect of objects. For Harman, if everything were immediately perceptible, nothing would change, or nothing could maintain any status as the same object when the sensuous qualities shift. Real objects exist regardless of our thinking of them and enter into relations with other non-human objects that may have access to different aspects of the same real object. The import of Harman’s understanding of objects is the various ways that objects can interact through withdrawal
and sensuous experience. Interaction through expression and withdrawal of the shifting qualities and intellectual investigation entails an indirect interaction. Objects cannot exhaust the entirety of other objects through engagement or theorizing. Interaction is only possible through a kind of “vicarious causation” afforded by qualities. This interaction takes place both with humans and non-humans:

[B]y definition, there is no direct access to real objects. Real objects are incommensurable with our knowledge, untranslatable into any relational access of any sort, cognitive or otherwise. Objects can only be known indirectly. And this is not just the fate of humans — it’s the fate of everything. Fire burns cotton stupidly. (Harman, 2011b, p. 7)

This means that cotton interacts with fire indirectly. Cotton does not interact with the color of fire, and fire does not interact with the softness of cotton. Furthermore, cotton interacts with only certain aspects of fire, aspects of the real object that humans cannot access. Moreover, humans interact with aspects of fire inaccessible to cotton. Humans and objects interact with other objects through qualities, not direct access. Object-object relations decenter the human in environmental relations.

In defense of his object-oriented philosophy as a form of realism, Harman states,

First, I think that objects cannot be reduced to anything else, and must be addressed by philosophy on their own terms. Second, the tensions between objects and their qualities and other objects can be used to account for anything else that exists; it is truly a global subject matter. Third, I hold that the object-oriented model holds great promise for many domains of knowledge, but especially for the various disciplines in the humanities. (Harman, 2011b, p. 138)

Having opened the door to realism that treats material objects, such as windows and paintbrushes, and sensual objects, such as unicorns and square circles, equally, Harman believes the new approach to ontology has applicability in other academic fields. This non-anthropocentric approach to ontology and materialism is especially relevant in the
context of posthumanism and rhetoric. Objects are partially known and partially mysterious actors in the world or relations that include humans. Harman’s object-oriented ontology and philosophy is a materialist and post-anthropocentric conceptualization of the environment that humans inhabit—not anti-humanist, but a post-anthropocentric conceptualization of environmental relations and ontology. Having discussed the post-anthropocentric work of speculative realists, I will now discuss the new materialist and machine ethics work of David Gunkel as an example of the questioning of the subject status of non-human objects connected to the posthuman project. Gunkel’s work emphasizes some of the major tenets of posthumanism: post-anthropocentrism as an approach that deprivileges the role of the human in human-world relations and addresses the ethical status of non-human objects.

**Machine Ethics and the Ethical Status of Objects**

David Gunkel’s (2012) *The Machine Question: Critical Perspectives on AI, Robots, and Ethics* works at the intersection of posthumanism, post-anthropocentrism, technology ethics, and communication ethics. Gunkel (2012) begins by asking whether non-human objects should be considered moral agents. He suggests that “the machine institutes a kind of fundamental and irresolvable questioning” (p. 211). Gunkel has less interest in answering many of the questions he poses than in providing an opportunity to interrogate the moral philosophy emphasis on moral-agency. He asks three questions that guide his theoretical investigation of machine ethics: “Namely, what kind of moral claim might such mechanisms have? What are the philosophical grounds for such a claim? And what would it mean to articulate and practice an ethics of this subject?” (Gunkel, 2012, p. 2).
Gunkel’s work focuses on whether autonomous machines are morally culpable and deserving of ethical protection. He begins with this question because he argues that the history of moral philosophy is agent-driven and focuses on the development of the moral nature of the decision-maker and moves to the moral nature of the actions performed by the agent. Gunkel argues that embedded within moral philosophy is the assumption of who is an agent, and “what” is excluded in that process. The “who” of agency and protection is always up for debate, though for Gunkel, technology has often been left out because we have decided that is the case. For Gunkel, technology and machines have been considered a means to an end. If moral philosophy continues this anthropocentric process of inclusion/exclusion, it subsequently produces moral justification for designating the always excluded non-human or non-animal other, where machines, or the idea of machines, always “exceeds difference. . . . It is otherwise than the Other and still other than every other Other” (Gunkel, 2012, p. 207). More than anything else, the idea of the machine provides an entry-point for questioning the role of personhood and subjecthood in ethics. But the concept of personhood makes this difficult and begs the following question: Is consciousness the marker? Often, consciousness is attributed to other minds, but that leaves us to ask this: What ethical conditions can be detected in minds that we cannot access?

Such a limitation perpetuates the need for humans to ask and answer the question of who is us and who is Other. Gunkel believes that the information ethics of theorists, such as Floridi (1999, 2002), make a move to consider the moral patiency of everything that has being (ontocentric). But Gunkel finds this too assimilationist and reductionist; it reduces everything that is Other to the same thing. Referred to as a flat ontology similar
to ANT, this leveling of ontological status makes ethics very difficult for Gunkel. Ontology that encompasses more than the human is not anti-humanist. Gunkel’s ontology beyond the human is an expansion of ontological status, not a flattening of the hierarchy of ontological status. Gunkel’s position reflects the idea that ontology is not limited to humans, one of the main tenets of posthumanist thought.

Gunkel argues that the question of the *who* of the moral agent is possibly not the right term, or that it cannot be answered. It is messy and perhaps not the correct place to start. Gunkel argues that moral agency is not found in others: It is created. Here he introduces the concept of moral patiency. Moral patiency is not concerned with the moral character of the agent or the agent’s actions, but that which is affected by the actions. Gunkel finds these origins in animal ethics where animals are not agents but patients, addressing the following question: Can they suffer? The question of suffering complicates the concept of moral patiency. How do we know what suffering is? Since we are talking about other minds, how can we know that they are suffering? To further complicate matters, Gunkel asks this question: What is an animal? Gunkel’s posthumanist blurring of the animal-human distinction and the animal-human-machine distinction addresses these distinctions through the idea of what animals, machines, and humans can do, and what can be done to them.

Again, Gunkel asks more questions than he provides answers. One insight that is relevant to his post-anthropocentrism and posthumanism is the following question: How did you become who you are and, in turn, how do machines become what they are? This question becomes even more relevant when we follow Gunkel’s argument that says ethics
are created, and that patiency/agency is assigned. We choose to include and exclude what is a moral agent and patient. It is not natural; it is constructed. The binaries are artificial.

Ultimately, Gunkel asks if machines, or the idea of the machine as a metaphor for radical alterity that cannot be easily classified, are deserving of moral consideration, both as patients and as agents. When we ask this question with the binary already established, we are forced to differentiate between the two. Gunkel’s approach to post-anthropocentrism and posthumanism offers a significant contribution for serious consideration of the role of non-human objects in the construction of what it means to be human through asking us to evaluate why we consider some things to be deserving of moral protection and to be morally responsible. I will now discuss the social ethics of recognition in Judith Butler’s work to address one of the significant tenets of posthumanism: the impact of other beings, including things, on the constitution of the human.

**Judith Butler and the Social Ethics of Recognition**

Having covered Gunkel’s work on machine ethics and the question of the Other as agentive and attaining subjecthood, I now turn to another, Judith Butler, who works outside of the realm of posthumanism and post-anthropocentrism to further contextualize posthumanism as a position that addresses the impact of the human, however conceptualized, on its environment and on other beings, human and non-human. Regardless of how we become human or how the human is defined, the connectedness of different beings has profound impacts for the ontology of things. Although not working as a self-identified posthumanist scholar, Butler’s work on the social constitution of the
subject through recognition reflects the posthumanist thread concerning how the human is constituted through interaction with its environment.

Judith Butler’s (2001, 2005, 2015) work on the social ethics of recognition provides an account of what is at stake in our conceptualization of the human and its role in the larger social network. Butler’s work provides an important theoretical connection to the consequences of how humans view the world around them, both as agents and patients, formed and forming, acting and acted upon. Butler does not argue for a post-anthropocentric or anti-humanist worldview. Rather, her social ethics provide greater insight into the human’s formation as a being with others.

Butler’s (2005) *Giving an Account of Oneself* responds to the criticism that the current “postulation of a subject who is not self-grounding, that is, whose conditions of emergence can never fully be accounted for, undermine[s] the possibility of responsibility and, in particular, of giving an account of oneself” (p. 21). The subject that is transparent and constituted a priori provides far fewer problematics concerning ethical responsibility toward the Other. Given the notion of a static subject, responsibility is easy to articulate, and the ethical relationship between self and Other is responsiveness with, not responsiveness to. Responsiveness with implies the importation of a unique private self. But, for the subject who is not self-grounded, where do we assign responsibility? Butler contends that it is the always-already given discourse where the self is constituted that provides the demand for ethical responsibility. “Being” as a response to discourse demands that we are always in conversation with the Other, and the very conditions of the always-already necessitate the Other in actualizing the limited knowledge of the self. The knowledge of the self that is possible comes in the form of a limited ability to give an
account of oneself: My own narrative is not my own, yet is given to me in the confines of language and the relationship to the Other: “[T]he very terms by which we give an account, by which we make ourselves intelligible to ourselves and to others, are not of our making” (Butler, 2005, p. 21). It is the necessitated connection to the narratives that presuppose a subject and the constant engagement with those narratives in the social sphere that ethical responsibility attains. Butler is working in the post-subjective state while simultaneously arguing that such a state necessitates the possibility for social ethics. The epistemic relationship of the self that is known to the limits of the social self only available to others establishes an ontology of being-with and being-for. The epistemic revealing and concealing of Others and the shared use of language form the opaque self, which, in turn, provides the context for the perpetuation of the continuation of the radical alterity of the future becoming of the private self, in the process of giving an account of oneself.

Butler’s argument analyzes two interrelated points, each one reliant on past accounts of the socially constituted self. The first point is that one is required to give an account of oneself to justify “being” and must rely upon the already existing language and the attendant narratives to do so. One does not enter into the world as a subject already with control of the language and narratives used to express one publicly. Second, such an account is always speaking to the Other, and the account always demands recognition from the Other in the form of address. Given the linguistically constituted nature of Butler’s subject, discourse is a requirement for being; I cannot provide my own narrative without the interpenetration of the Other and the already existent language used to communicate with the Other. Exposure to Others forms the basis for ethics: either
through the institutions that define the subject or the interaction with Other subjects and the process of recognition. The human subject is a response to and is constituted by other things, human and non-human.

In response to the problematization of ethics and the opaque self, Butler relies on the work of Adriana Cavarero (2000). Cavarero argues that to be a self, certain dispossession in the direction of the Other is required. To be a self is to be in dispossession toward the Other that demands an accounting of the self, using the language and directedness of speech that the social sphere entails. The Other is what allows “me” to be “me” and to give an account of myself directed at the “you.” Without the “you” that demands an account, there would be no “me” to account for. The opacity of the self obtains from the always-already context of the language and institutions that the self is engendered within, yet has no control over. The self identifies through the recitation of the narrative that must be acknowledged by the Other for the very constitution of the self. For ethics to emerge from the context of not fully knowing oneself, recognition of the limitations for the ability of self-knowledge must occur. Once the understandings of the limitations of self-knowledge are recognized, the very structures that exist before the self can and should be recognized for their complicity in forming the basis of ethics. The language and institutions that form the self whom I vaguely know are the same cultural artifacts that the Other recognizes me as a subject through. In a post-anthropocentric context, Butler’s social ethics demands recognition of the non-human animal and the non-human object as a necessary means to constitute the self.
Posthumanism and Communication Studies

Now that I have provided an overview of some of the posthumanisms relevant to this project, I will briefly discuss posthumanism as it has been addressed in communication literature. Kelly Gates (2013) calls for an increased focus on the posthuman in communication departments. Gates argues that instead of questioning whether or not we are posthuman, in the way that Hayles and other posthumanist theorists have addressed the concept, we should strive to better understand our current obsession with the technological modification of the human. She describes this preoccupation with communication technologies as society’s “obsession, in digital culture, with transitioning human experience into something more integrated with technical systems, something more cyborg-like, and ostensibly capable of transcending banal, embodied, earthly, and less mediated forms of life” (Gates, 2013, p. 243).

While Gates does not explicitly define what is meant by posthuman, the author argues that we are already posthuman. Thus, communication scholars should look toward the future in their research in this area. While Gates’s position that we have already become posthuman raises concern—have we ever not been posthuman, or human, and is the interregnum over, and if so, what follows?—her argument places key communication studies concerns in the framework of some conceptualizations of the posthuman. Gates’s (2013) view of the posthuman is decidedly future-oriented, one that seeks significant interrogation of the implications of discrete technologies that are “designed to literally integrate bodies more seamlessly with devices and more thoroughly into network infrastructures” (p. 243).
Gates uses the examples of consumer Google glasses and military technology to argue that we are already posthuman because of the integration of technology in our everyday lived experience, but fails to look at the concept of the human as a historical rupture or as a conceptual necessity. Ultimately, her argument serves to introduce the concept of the posthuman to a certain kind of communication theory—one that can be expanded by broadening the definition of the posthuman.

Before Gates’s call for greater attention to posthumanism in communication studies, other scholars produced work on posthumanism, materialism, and object-studies that worked at the boundaries of communication. Nicholas Gane (2006) provides an overview of posthumanism in literary theory, science, studies, political philosophy, art, and film studies, focusing on Donna Haraway’s work. In 2002, the journal Technology, Culture, and Society published a special issue on materiality and sociality (Pels et al., 2002). In the introduction, Pels et al. (2002) provide an entry-point to a relationship between materialism, posthumanism, and the field of communication. They argue that objects are back in strength in contemporary social and communication theory. Whether in the shape of commodities, machines, communication technologies, foodstuffs, artworks, urban spaces, or risk phenomena in a thoroughly socialized nature, a new world of materialities and objectivities has emerged with an urgency that has turned them into new sites of perplexity and controversy (Pels et al., 2002).

Using the transforming concepts of autonomy, agency, and material objects within a contemporary context, Pels et al. (2002) discuss the potentials and problematics of ontological symmetry between humans and non-humans. The ontology of non-human material objects becomes complicated as the distinction between what counts a person
and what counts as a thing is blurred. The erosion of the distinction between the real and the constructed in hyperreality presents a challenge for a traditional anthropocentric ontology. If humanness is a contested reality, the human role in human-world relations provides equally confounding issues. This problematization of the constitution of the human and the treatment of the object as more-than-can-be-accessed by the human-world relationship has ethical implications for the treatment of non-human-non-human interaction, or the way that non-human objects engage with one another. Emergent communication technologies produce moral issues concerning machine ontology. The notion that a product of human invention can both agentively hide elements of its being and affect change on other non-human objects demands a new approach to conceptualizing the world through a philosophy of access.

The media archeologist Jussi Parikka (2012, 2013) calls for an ontology of the weird materiality of technology that works at the intersection of communication, technology, and postanthropocentrism. Weird materiality is the status of media as irreducible to materials that pollute or the aspects of meaning beyond the material. Parikka’s work on materialism and media theory uses speculative realists’ work to focus on the “materialities of material,” or the relationship between the material machine and media culture. He writes:

Hence, I propose a multiplicity of materialisms, and the task of new materialism is to address how to think materialisms in a multiplicity in such a methodological way that enables a grounded analysis of contemporary culture. Such methodologies and vocabularies need to be able to talk not only of objects, but also as much about non-solids and the processual—the weird materiality inherent in the mode of abstraction of technical media—so we can understand what might be the specificity of this brand of materialism that we encounter (but do not always perceive) in contemporary media culture. (Parikka, 2012, p. 97)
Media has the ability to affect and be affected, operates at the level of materiality, and requires the engagement of another object to exist. As an object that cannot be fully known by humans, media can withdraw when engagement ceases. James J. Brown Jr. (2014) extends this argument in the realm of rhetoric and extrahumanism. Brown argues that the rhetorical education has long been robotic and can continue to stand alongside our contemporary engagement with writing and machines. That which is produced is the result of machinic practice and becomes the discourse used in the engagement of rhetoric with the robot or machine. Brown’s work on rhetoric and extrahumanism is one example of how posthumanism and materialism can also be found in contemporary rhetorical studies.

Rebecca A. Alt and Rosa A. Eberly’s (2019) “Between Campus and Planet: Toward a Posthumanist Paideia” (2019) calls for rhetorical education to be used in the service of human welfare and democratic life in response to humanities advocates asking for public support of a liberal arts education. The authors argue for a posthumanist paideia, or a rhetorical education that uses the best of the humanist rhetorical tradition within the framework of other rhetorical theories aimed at advancing feminist, antiracist, and posthuman perspectives on civic engagement and public welfare. This project is a response to real problems on college campuses and seeks a greater appreciation for the role of posthumanist theory that gives students the proper tools to engage in ethical communication practices. Using the posthumanist theorist Rosi Braidotti’s concept of the posthuman “nomadic subject,” or a materialist, embodied, and embedded human, the authors argue for moving beyond the autonomous human subject to provide greater engagement with the more interconnected experience of students on college campuses.
(Alt & Eberly, 2019, p. 99). Like many posthuman theorists, Alt and Eberly (2019) are not arguing to abandon the human, but to abandon the traditional understanding of the human. The embeddedness of this reconceptualization of the human is in an environment of others, traditionally left outside of the fold of what constitutes a human. Their posthuman rhetoric is one that is social, an assemblage of embodied subjects that inhabit ever-shifting public spaces.

Several special issues of communication journals have brought attention to the posthuman in rhetoric over the past two decades. In 2000, John Muckelbauer and Debra Hawhee edited an issue of *JAC* focusing on posthumanism in rhetoric, specifically the extra-human. *Technical Communication Quarterly* had a special issue focused on the intersection of posthumanism rhetorics and technical communication (Mara & Hawk, 2009). Other new materialist, post-anthropocentric, and posthumanist writings on rhetoric, media studies, performance studies, and communication theory have been used to interrogate the concept of the human in the context of communication studies (Brooks, 2009; Dobrin, 2015; Fay, 2008; Foley, 2014; Gingrich-Filbrook & Simmons, 2015; St. Pierre, 2015; Zemlicka, 2013). While these authors are disparate in their approaches to communication and rhetorical studies, the emergence of an interest in the posthuman and postanthropocentrism is evident.

**Conclusion**

The posthuman and the related concepts of post-anthropocentrism, materialism, object-studies, and machine ethics cover an enormous body of literature spanning philosophy, animal studies, science and technology studies, performance studies, cultural studies, and communication. As evident from the literature and positions on the
posthuman discussed in this chapter, there is no singular definition of the posthuman. Although these theorists are disparate in their conceptualization of the posthuman, if they even use the term, they all work with one or more of the major tenets of posthumanism: post-anthropocentrism as an approach that deprivileges the role of the human in human-world relations; the ontological status of objects in a larger network of being; the impact of other beings, including things, on the constitution of the human; and the ethical status of non-human objects. Whether approaching the human as a historical rupture that should be overcome or abandoned, a long-standing myth perpetuated by dominant cultural and social forces, or a question that should always be posed, these theorists hold one common thread: questioning our conceptualizations of the human. I argue that a posthumanism in the context of communication studies should focus on the conceptualization of the human, have an appreciation for post-anthropocentrism that is not anti-humanist, and pay special attention to the effects that these conceptualizations of the human have on our understanding of what it means to be human and who is included/excluded from this category. Having covered many of the themes of posthumanism in this chapter, I argue that a focus on architecture and design as a technology that has always contributed to the conceptualization of the human is missing. If posthuman studies are made relevant by questioning how the concept of human is constructed, we need to pay more attention to our physical surroundings as they communicate what it means to be human or less than human.

We have always been posthuman. While the posthumanist theories that are forward-looking in their treatment of emergent technology seek to conceptualize the human as a creation that can be overcome, I argue that the human has always been a
product of its embeddedness with other things that help to create unique types of humans. The type of posthumanist approach that I argue for does not seek to destroy the human or the entire project of the humanities. Instead, the goal is to understand the consequences of conceptualizing humans in a certain way that limits the role of embeddedness in a world of Others—humans, animals, and non-animal objects—and to explore the power of non-humans in our conceptualization of who we are and how we communicate that understanding, both to ourselves and to our communities. I will now turn to German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk and situate his work in a posthuman context.
Chapter 3. Sloterdijk and Communication Studies

Introduction

Having addressed the major themes of posthumanism, I now turn my attention to the German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk and his theories on humanism and posthumanism. Working with his *Spheres* trilogy (Sloterdijk, 1998, 1999b, 2004, 2011, 2014b, 2016) and his essays on domestication and auto-domestication, specifically the “Rules for the Human Zoo” (Sloterdijk, 1999a, 2009a), I explain his work on humanism and posthumanism. Finally, I discuss Sloterdijk’s work in contemporary communication studies and the current conversation about what constitutes a human. I argue that Sloterdijk combines multiple aspects of posthumanism and postanthropocentrism, beginning with a dyadic ontology, and then moves to explicate our continual searching for this relationship with other things in the world, non-human, non-animal, and literal dwellings (constructed spaces). Those things are what we use to communicate our humanness. Specifically, I address the following questions: How can Sloterdijk’s work on humanism be understood as a kind of posthuman theory? What separates his theories from posthuman theorists, such as Hayles and Wolfe? How can Sloterdijk’s concepts of domestication and auto-domestication be understood as communication? The communicative aspect of Sloterdijk’s work can be understood by looking at the small, overlooked spaces he explores in the *Spheres* trilogy (1998, 1999b, 2004, 2011, 2014b, 2016) and the “Rules for the Human Zoo” (2009a). These small spaces, the space connecting the fetus and the placenta, the walls of the modern apartment complex, and, as I will argue later, barbed wire and anti-homeless architecture, are largely overlooked in communication theory. Such spaces are the intermediaries and mediums that allow the
human being to become, to move from the ontic to the ontological, from the danger of the outside to the partially immunized shelter of the interior of spheres. I contend that these spaces are not universally translatable with the same meaning to all inhabitants at any given historical moment. We are born into our spatial environments and learn to create meaning and communicate that meaning based on the rhetorical artifacts that we have access to. The history of humanity is an attempt to reconnect with the originary mode of dyadic ontology. New technologies provide new forms of hominization, domestication, and auto-domestication, but the process of becoming human, stepping into the immunizing safety of the clearing, is a process of inhabiting, creating meaning from, and communicating with our lived spaces.

Architecture and design are rhetorical and contribute to the constitution of being human. Posthumanism is a network of related theoretical concepts that argue for the continued contingency of the concept of the human. Sloterdijk is a posthumanist who contends that we have always been posthuman, or that we are always in the process of domesticating ourselves as human. For Sloterdijk, space, structures, and design help to bring us back to our originary dyadic-ontological state and separate the animal from the human. This chapter on Sloterdijk provides the necessary background for the argument that contemporary rhetorical theory, especially Hyde and Smith’s ontological rhetoric, helps us understand how we are born into structures, both linguistic and physical, that have been imbued with meaning. Now I will provide a brief background of Sloterdijk.

**Intellectual Biography**

Peter Sloterdijk is one of the most popular contemporary German theorists, although his work was rarely discussed outside of his home country until recently. Born
in 1947, Sloterdijk studied at the Academic Studies of Philosophy and German philology in Munich and received his doctorate in philosophy and modern autobiographic literature in Hamburg in 1975. After working as a freelance writer and the director of the Institute for Cultural Philosophy at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna from 1989 to 2008, he became a professor of philosophy and media theory at the Karlsruhe University of Arts and Design, where he has been the rector since 2001.

Sloterdijk became a public intellectual by hosting a broadcast program, along with Rudiger Safranski, from 2002 to 2012 called Das Philosische Quartett on ZDF (German public television). Sloterdijk’s The Critique of Cynical Reason, published in German in 1983 (published in English in 1988), became the best-selling German philosophy book in the post-war era (MIT Press, 2021). From 1978 to 1980, Sloterdijk lived at the ashram of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh (later known as Osho) in Pune, India. This two-year period would prove to be highly influential to his subsequent philosophical work (Sloterdijk et al., 2011).

Sloterdijk has published numerous philosophical works on topics ranging from Nietzsche to media theory, and from modernism to war. His magnum opus, The Spheres trilogy, is a three-part “grand narrative” on his conception of humanism. Sloterdijk has been described as a dangerous thinker in the tradition of Nietzsche, a title that he supports and believes is an important part of a philosopher’s work (Peacock, 2000). The moniker of “dangerous thinker” is most often attributed to his controversial essay “Rules for the Human Zoo” (Sloterdijk, 2009a). This essay, first published in 1999, will be discussed in greater detail later, but it focuses on domesticating the human-animal through a variety of
technologies. While Sloterdijk’s publications have covered a vast intellectual terrain, I focus my attention on his *Spheres* trilogy and “Rules for the Human Zoo.”

**Spherology**

Sloterdijk’s overarching argument in the *Spheres* trilogy is that the human is ontologically dyadic: The human spends its life striving to reintegrate itself with the Other that gives it meaning, and accomplishes this task through the use of technologies. But where did the human that is dis-integrated through the technosphere come from? What allows for the human animal (ontic) to become human (ontological) and to escape the realm of nature?

Sloterdijk theorizes a different approach to posthumanism and humanism. Much of Sloterdijk’s work on humanism, domestication, and anthropotechnics is in response to Martin Heidegger, one of his greatest influences. Heidegger’s view of humanism is that, in a post-war world, humans have been conceptualized as an animal with reason. For Heidegger, this does significant damage to the full import of *Dasein*, his term for a human’s mode of being that recognizes its very being (Sloterdijk, 2009a). Specifically, “Dasein is ontically distinguished by the fact that, in its very Being, that Being is an issue for it” (Heidegger, 1962, p. 4). This is not being a person, or being a human, but rather a fundamental condition that acknowledges its very being in the world. For Heidegger, the animal with rationality tacked on is not enough. Heidegger’s problematization of humanism will be addressed in greater detail in the context of Sloterdijk’s (2009a) “Rules for the Human Zoo,” a response to Heidegger’s “Letter on Humanism” (Heidegger & Krell, 1993). For now, it is important to note the related issue of Heidegger’s “clearing,” or the metaphorical space where something can show itself,
either beings (not Being) or ideas. This clearing is not a physical space, something that Sloterdijk will reconceptualize in his response to Heidegger.

Sloterdijk’s magnum opus, the three-volume *Spherology* series, first published in German in 1998, 1999, and 2004 synthesizes his views of anthropotechnics, the ontology of the two (dyadic ontology), and the domestication and auto-domestication of the human in bubbles, globes, and foam. Bubbles, globes, and foam refer to the individual enclosures, larger social enclosures, and the means of connecting such structures, respectively (Sloterdijk & Fabricius, 2007). Anthropotechnics refers to the fusion of the human with technology to create the domesticated human, tamed from barbarism (Morin, 2009). For Sloterdijk, anthropotechnics is not a modification of the human, as we see in Haraway’s cyborg posthumanism. Instead, it is a necessary and unavoidable reality of existing with other things. An ontology of two is the viewpoint that ontology is a minimal plurality within the smallest microsphere (small interior spaces where humans exist). Domestication is the taming of the human into a certain type of human, specific to cultural, spatial, and temporal contexts. Auto-domestication is the self-performed act of domesticating the human from the wild or taming the animal. For Sloterdijk, the fetus-placenta relationship is the beginning of the ontology of two. This relationship is a state that we wish to return to through the construction of larger spheres; it functions as a place to protect us from danger, an attempt at immunity from the being without-ness of our post-natal state (Sloterdijk et al., 2011). Sloterdijk’s post-metaphysical approach rejects binaries such as subject-object and nature-culture. Through the concept of spherology, Sloterdijk seeks to reincorporate those binaries that have been artificially drawn. Although a coupling, the dyadic ontology is not a binary. Each part of the dyad is not
artificial and serves to constitute the other part, not through difference, but assimilation. A binary, such as subject-object, uses each dyadic component to distinguish one part from the other. Sloterdijk’s dyadic ontology uses each component to create a unity of being, as a singular yet dyadic unit of being, referring to the originary dyadic coupling of the fetus-placenta relationship. The dyad is the original state or unit of all being, where each part is its own being.

Sloterdijk asks three questions in the Spheres trilogy that are in conversation with Heidegger: “[W]hat is the true meaning of ‘being-in-the-world’?; how did humans come to the ‘clearing’ in such a way that the world could become world?; and how did onto-anthropology become the creation of the human through domestication and auto-domestication?” (Mendieta, 2012, p. 69). Through an interrogation of overlooked spaces, Sloterdijk argues that co-existence in a space can offer new understandings of what it means to be human. His theory begins with the microspheres (womb, fetus-placenta, bubbles) that introduce the human mammal to the world, and continues to include macrospheres and mesospheres (intersubjective, large-scale bubbles, totatlizing spheres of containment) (Sloterdijk, 1998, 1999b, 2004, 2011, 2014b, 2016). The Spheres trilogy is a response to Heidegger’s Being and Time and interrogates what Sloterdijk considers to be the seeds of a new approach to Being and Space. Sloterdijk emphasizes the “in” of Heidegger’s being-in-the-world and argues that spatiality is key to understanding what it means to be a being, and a social being. This spatiality is always a co-existence, or the desire to return to a co-existence in a literal way. The emphasis on spheres is a return to the pre-Socratic philosophers and their discussion of the spheres, specifically Parmenides. For Sloterdijk, the sphere is the “there” in the-being-there: “[W]hen men are ‘there,’ then
first and foremost in spaces opened up to them because they have given them form, substance, extension and relative duration by inhabiting them” (Sloterdijk, cited in Schinkel & Noordegraaf-Eelens, 2011, p. 12). It is these “atmospheric-symbolic places,” created by humans and spaces that they are born into, that allow for shared perception and experience of the world. At the same time, these spheres serve to protect and immunize from the outside, or the threats of the Other. Sloterdijk moves from the micro-spheres of the most intimate spaces—in the uterus—to the macrospheres of the globe (Bubbles, 1998, 2011; Globes, 2014b/2009b), finally investigating the meso-spheres of the highly networked, yet individual assemblages referred to as foam (Foams, 2004, 2016). Spheres range in size and function but always serve to ontologically ground humans who share them and recognize the separate yet connectedness of social life. As I discuss in greater detail later, this separate but shared quality of spheres is exemplified by the apartment complex—individual units with shared walls—that connect each microsphere in the act of immunization.

The key difference in Sloterdijk’s project, when compared to Heidegger, is his emphasis on literal dwellings, real spaces, and physical co-existence starting in the womb. It is because of this co-existence that precedes existence that Otherness is the basis of identity. Here, Sloterdijk’s position diverts from Heidegger in that being-there becomes, necessarily, a being-together. I argue that it is the interrogation of overlooked spaces that will provide a greater understanding of our very constitution as humans and how we communicate that humanness.
Bubbles

The first monograph in the Spheres trilogy, Bubbles, was published in German in 1998 and translated into English in 2011. Bubbles lays the groundwork for spherology and the conception of the spheres. The focus in the first installment is micro-spheres. More specifically, and borrowing from Hannah Arendt, the focus is on natality as the origins of human dyadic ontology. For Sloterdijk, in order to be in the world, we first have to be born (Elden & Mendieta, 2009). But before we are born, we are not alone. In the womb, the human has an “original company” in the form of the in-utero relationship of fetus and placenta. This natal relationship is the original form of co-existence, the being-together-in-spheres that provides an immunological barrier between being and the world while simultaneously constituting the dyadic ontology. The primaveral unit is always a coupling and social, and ultimately negates the concept of ontology as an individual state. But, before this negation occurs, the original bubble (womb) is composed of various “nobjects,” or pre-objects that have yet to become full objects because they have not had the opportunity to be an other to anything yet (Sloterdijk, 2011, p. 294). As the originary site of the dyadic ontology that has yet to become an object separated from the original coupling, the womb is without walls. Sloterdijk (2011) claims that three pre-oral stages occur before the primary oral stage, creating the intrauterine conditions for recognizing difference from the original bubble after birth.

The first is the fetal co-habitation stage, where uterine objects such as the umbilical cord, placenta, abdominal wall, and amniotic fluid provide a sense of the first boundaries for the fetus. The second stage is the psycho-acoustic stage. Here, the fetus is prepared for the post-partum soundscape of the world through the transmission of sound
waves via no objects, such as amniotic fluid. The fetus can selectively mute certain sounds, thus preparing it for distinguishing between wanted and unwanted sounds after birth. The third stage is the respiratory stage. Here, the amniotic fluid gives way to the air, and thus through breathing, the fetus begins to participate in the world. It should be noted that Sloterdijk places great importance on the role of air in his larger body of work, including the monograph *Terror From the Air* (Sloterdijk et al., 2009). Originary dyads become complicated by a third that always gives way to a new distancing between the two original dyadic units of mother and child. As the child begins to develop and become more and more of a cultural object, it loses its primeval dyadic “we” and always searches out new objects to form a coupling with. Each instance of being born again with new couplings happens within increasingly larger spheres. But there is always something in between the dyad—a third, a mediator that becomes increasingly complex as the child gets older. There will always be an object that mediates between the two parts of a dyad:

1. fetus – 2 (placental blood/mother’s blood) – 3 mother;
2. newborn – 2 (own voice/mother’s voice/mother’s milk) – 3 mother;
3. child – 2 (language/father/mother’s partner) – 3 mother (Sloterdijk, 2011, p. 319)

The mediator's complexity is the expansion of the coupling into a larger social system, a culture, an increasing sphere. We strive for in each instance of increasing complexity to return to the primeval state of the womb. A heightened state of anxiety, melancholia, and individualism results from negating certain cultural traditions in postmodernity. If there is nothing to replace the originary dyad that forms the basis for an emergent being, the stress of this lack will ensure a life of longing at the moment of birth (Sloterdijk, 2011, p. 387). This being-together extends beyond the intrauterine coupling to early communities.
of worship and intimacy. The tribe creates an immunological barrier against the outside, which is separate from the “bubble” of identity formation. In this tribe, the goal is to blur the lines between the identities of each actor, creating systems of spheres that ceases to have nodes. With each successive distancing from the intimacy of the tribe, the greater the distance from the originary dyad, and subsequent feelings of isolation and separation ensue. Much of the success of a subject’s becoming in each successive coupling is the strength of the other part of the dyad’s ability to protect and give freedom properly:

The degree of [the membrane’s] opening decides over dehydration or flooding. If the companion’s membrane is not sufficiently porous to let through increasing volumes of world, it can develop into a prison of the subject ... If however the companion is lost prematurely through a traumatic incident or remains indifferent or absent for a long time, the subject will suffer from an openness shock, tumbling ‘out’ into the bad ecstasy of the fear of destruction; it becomes acquainted with an exospheric outside in which it cannot bear itself. (Sloterdijk, 2011, pp. 439–440)

The complexity can be overwhelming if the subject—or, in the case of the fetus, the nobject—is not adequately prepared for the expansion of its world. Each becoming, in new and increasingly complex dyadic relations, anticipates the building of larger bubbles. With this expansion, we will now turn to the second book in the Spheres trilogy, Globes (Sloterdijk, 1999b, 2014b).

Globes

In Globes, Sloterdijk turns his attention from the microsphere to the macrosphere. Here, the intimacy of the early spaces of the dyad becomes expanded to the level of worlds. In these spheres, we find cities, states, religions, and empires. Globes is an account of globalization and the effect on the subject in (constant) formation. Sloterdijk analyzes theology, empires, and urbanization and separates three forms of globalization: metaphysical globalization (the conceptualization of the universal uber-object, the perfect
primal form of that which contains everything yet is not contained), terrestrial
globalization (the exploring, conquering, and traversing of the terrestrial globe), and the
global age (or globalization understood in a contemporary sense, cybernetics, or the
contemporary period of foams). For Sloterdijk, globalization is geographic, as well as
philosophical, virtual, and in the realm of the cosmos.

The macrospheres are thanatological places, or places where the subject enters
into death through increased exposure to that which might bring harm. The intimacy of
the originary dyadic unit has been lost: The wall (the literal wall of the birth canal) has
been transgressed, and the subject is now in a state of coping with the opposition that
results when taking a position in the world. Death becomes increasingly important with
each successive attempt to be reborn or return to the originary dyad because each attempt
opens one up to the Other. This position-taking project to return to the intimacy of the
originary dyad makes the world more graspable, more readily available, and increasingly
understood as an actual globe. When the globe came to represent the boundary of the
world, the globe became a place to store knowledge, and the human being became
responsible for the creation of storing knowledge. The creation of the spheres of
knowledge separates knowledge from society, from the tribe, and from the collective we.
Understanding the world as globe meant a form of containment that had real, physical,
graspable boundaries. For Sloterdijk, the moment of “cosmological enlightenment”
ushers in the long-standing project of globalization, and the intimacy of the micro-sphere
is expanded to the limits of the cosmos. Those limits serve as a boundary, a protective
barrier, a shell for the macrosphere.
This first form of globalization seeks to immunize the interior through the integration of the exterior. Metaphysical globalization was an attempt to contain the world as it was known, to make safe through the consumption of the totality of the world through the one all-powerful God or cosmos. God or the cosmos as totality has the ability to grant full immunity to all those contained and exists at the center. This centering of the perfection of the immunizing force maintains a spatial component; placement of each inhabitant with the all-powerful at the center ensures a unity that expands upward, focusing on maintaining order. A theological or cosmological boundary was constructed to maintain the immunity and safety of those expanding outward from the intimacy of the originary sphere of prenatal existence. It is important to note that humans are still severed from any individuality; by placing God at the center, God’s totality subsumes all within the sphere. For Sloterdijk (2014b), such a conceptualization of a total sphere, one with no boundaries, is destined to fail. If the center is everywhere and there is no a circumference, there are no means to create a sphere of intimacy. No protection or any form of immunity is provided.

Consequently, and with the discoveries of Copernicus, the shift to terrestrial globalization occurred. All terrestrial globalization is a “utero-technical” project (Sloterdijk, cited in Schinkel & Noordegraaf-Eelens, 2011, p. 14). This “utero-technical” project is the subject’s becoming a mature adult, seeking greater expansion into the larger spherical container of the actual globe. Civilizations now sought to expand outward to the edges of the physical globe instead of vertically to the cosmos. Terrestrial expansion wrought territorial conquest and replaced the search for God. The desire to provide immunity in the form of the perfect God was replaced by the bringing inside of the
outside in the form of conquering territory. As each microsphere was subsumed under larger terrestrial gains, macrospheres developed based on territory and immunity/protection from the geographic outside/exterior. The always expanding nature of empires was to maximize terrestrial gain, with the goal of expanding the sphere to its absolute limit.

By creating a sphere that encompassed everything, the security of the internal, or the good (pure), would be protected from the external, the evil (impure). Physical walls become the markers of boundaries that demarcate the pure from the impure, and the attendant xenophobia becomes the cultural manifestation of terrestrial expansion. As with the inevitable destruction of metaphysical globalization, the terrestrial sphere is doomed due to the threats from the inside; the larger the sphere, the greater the internal threat.

Sloterdijk also identifies the way that architecture functioned in terrestrial globalization. The city, exemplified by Uruk, Babylon, Rome, Jerusalem, Nineveh, Wyld’s Great Globe, and the Russian Kinopanorama, is the architecture that functions as the sphere within the larger sphere of the empire. This early form of urbanization demonstrates that the power of the immunizing sphere, both in the form of a God and the tangible, grasped empire (Sloterdijk, 1999b, 2014b).

The third form of globalization is the global age. Here, Sloterdijk sets up the transition to the third installment of the *Spheres* trilogy, *Foams*. In the global age, the project of terrestrial globalization and the conquest of the world as picture (Bild) carries into the pre-modern and modern global age. For Sloterdijk (2014b), borrowing from Heidegger’s Welt-Bild, the world as picture is the conceptualization of the globe in its entirety from the standpoint of human beings. This conceptualization is a humanistic
understanding of being and an objective view of the world. The rendering of the world as a literal globe, or in the terrains of a map of conquest, was intensified in the global age through the human’s placement in specific locales within its totality. As people began to travel more and more, the world as picture was no longer a setting before, but a series of interconnected spaces that were experienced through the transmission of the body. The globe is now a space to be in, not a picture to be looked at. In this final form of globalization, society is comprised of foams. Foams are plastic and fluid constellations of bubbles that are intimate and separate spheres of immunity, yet interact with one another and share walls.

In this age, Sloterdijk uses cybernetics as an exemplar of the world as sphere that has been expanded beyond comprehension: The interior and the exterior have collapsed, and the boundaries have become unrecognizable. There is no center in a cybernetic globe, only a series of interconnected spheres with no outer shell to protect and immunize. Or, each node is self-conceptualized as the center, and the rise of individualism engenders isolation. The points or paths protrude everywhere in every direction, creating a sense of dis-placement and dis-orientation to the lost center of the terrestrial globe. Through each node or sphere passes the entirety of every other point in the sphere. As a result, Sloterdijk emphasizes two related concerns: first, the import of the loss of a sense of the interior from the exterior, and second, the need to differentiate between that which appears as a neutral being located at the center of the globe and the multiplicity of beings that constantly interpenetrate and form themselves through augmentation. Our interior worlds are made from a process of interpenetration and immunity. Having introduced the
idea of foam(s) in *Globes*, I will now turn to the third installment of the *Spheres* trilogy, *Foams* (Sloterdijk, 2004, 2016).

**Foams**

“Tell me what you are immersed in, and I will tell you what you are” (Sloterdijk, 2004/2016, p. 17). This quote, from Sloterdijk’s *Foams*, captures the overarching concept of foams: In our current historical moment, there is a loss of center, and with that loss of center comes a multiplicity of ways of being. Foams are globes, fractured, exploded, fluid, and swarming, where centers are created everywhere. As discussed in the previous installment, the world as picture as a whole cannot be set forth to view in this global age. These plastic foams confuse the normal understanding of substances and their ability to interpenetrate one another. Although fragile, the foam gains strength through its ability to penetrate harder substances and reconfigure itself as new centers. Foams are fragile with one another in a matrix of being with each other, penetrating the interiority of one another, yet simultaneously creating temporary immunity from one another. In the global age of foams, we are isolated, yet always connected to each other. Our foams are not spheres and are not round, confusing the notion of a lost ability to locate a center.

Sloterdijk argues that this state of the world is brought about by the constant flow of information, capital, and people. Such a movement, he argues, creates a sense of placelessness, where we are constantly trying to produce a center in an always shifting and fluid world. Using the virtual as an example, he argues that we cannot conceive of a boundary in a world that cannot be conceptualized as a sphere; it is shapeless and thus renders us incapable of establishing communal centers. Without the ability to produce
boundaries, we struggle to identify interiority from exteriority, a position that perpetually
returns us to the post-natal state.

Sloterdijk, using the example of the apartment complex, argues that we create
bubbles to have a sense of centeredness—an intimate space of being that is always
connected to the neighboring apartment, the space that we are interdependent upon
through our shared walls. If we return to the interiority and exteriority of the immunizing
terrestrial globe, we can see that there is no longer an exterior that is not connected to our
interiority in the age of foams. Our worldview is limited by the presence of other bubbles
in the foam, thus reducing our ability to see the whole of the part of the totality of the
world. Within the foam bubbles, each human (bubble) resists the urge to integrate with
the larger foam for fear of destroying the very boundary that immunizes it from other
shifting bubbles in the foam. Therefore, we live in a state of co-isolation. Sloterdijk turns
to a description of the structure of the foam and employs the use of architectural and
constructed environment metaphors and examples.

In the global age of foams, humans use their lived spaces, spaces they are born
into, to create climates. These climates are not chosen, but rather a product of where we
find ourselves. Our environments produce an atmosphere controlled and specialized for
the goal established by the very construction of the space itself. Here, air becomes
problematic and subject to technological advancements. Different climates and
atmospheres are found in shopping malls, in the use of atmospheric weapons of war (gas
warfare), and up to the Earth itself. In this sense, foams perpetually create new foams that
seek to provide the landscape of a totality of microclimates. Spheres are established
through a common and communal presence of humans. When we cohabit and inhabit
spaces, climates are produced through a being-together and through the ways that two subjects interact to recreate dyads. In these spheres, or “cultural hothouses,” foams develop and renew themselves.

**Foams: Islands.** Using a more concrete example to demonstrate what these climates are and how they are situated in the global age, Sloterdijk turns to the metaphor of the “island.” This explication of the island metaphor demonstrates what our created indoor spaces can look like situated within the larger, infinite exterior. Sloterdijk (2016) distinguishes among three islands: absolute islands, atmospheric islands, and anthropogenic islands.

Absolute islands are capsules, enclosed and partially insulated, and can only be full when the surrounding environment (or sea) is replaced. Capsules travel through the surrounding environment freely and can be viewed as creating an environment in a dwelling that will allow them to survive. The absolute island is completely dependent on technology (air supply systems) to protect it from its own environment, and therefore perfectly demonstrates the concept of foams as connected isolation. The walls of the absolute island are impenetrable, yet absolutely necessary for survival.

Atmospheric islands are recreations of natural spaces, islands that exist on the surface of land and water, not in the air, and do not travel through space. Unlike the absolute island, the atmospheric island is semi-permeable in that it separates the interior from the exterior, the environment that it encroaches upon, in a limited way. These artificial islands function as imitations of natural greenhouses that provide the environment for human life. They are climate regulated, an awe-inspiring representation of the very natural environment that they mimic. Sloterdijk (2004, 2016) cites the 1851
Crystal Palace in London and Biosphere 2 in Arizona as examples of the atmospheric
hothouse. As semi-permeable spheres, they allow for the intimacy of the capsule while
simultaneously displaying a public consciousness of the consumer good through their
artificiality. The atmospheric island is the consumer good that is presented as the escape
from the outside, the artificial intimacy of the interior.

Anthropogenic islands are the sites of human becoming—an incubation—that
move the ontic animality of the object to the emerging human. The anthropogenic island
is a cultural hothouse. Humans become insulated from the exterior of non-being through
group inclusion. These hothouses—literal communal dwellings—allow for the
emergence of the human. It is the different types of dwellings that function to incubate
various types of humans. Sloterdijk argues that the originary anthropogenic hothouses, or
dwellings, did not have physical walls; rather, they host metaphorical walls of inclusion
and exclusion, solidarity and difference. Over time, these forms of inclusion/exclusion
became concretized in physical dwellings. From the very beginning, humans have
provided a form of feedback that is made possible by the confines of the cultural
hothouse. Each of the islands corresponds to one of three epochs or ages of globalization:
foams, globes, and bubbles. Sloterdijks’s description moves from the final epoch of
foams to the originary epoch of the bubble—the place where the human first appears.

In the age of the absolute island or the anthropogenic hothouse of our current
historical moment—the age of foams—each cell is a complete unit that is, at the very
least, dyadic. The cell is a human, a sphere within society, and society itself, where each
cell is always in relation (through some form of tension) with other cells. Each cell will
be in a multitude of relationships with other cells, thus creating the human in a sort of
hybrid fashion. For Sloterdijk, each human is a culmination of various relations, multidimensional, and unaware of the myriad relations that constitute its existence. Thinking of the soap bubble image in an amorphous foam, comprised of many soap bubbles, helps to illustrate this concept. Being in the foam is enough to navigate the foam, regardless of what one knows about the bubbles outside of the immediate wall that separates the interior from the exterior.

The concept of the island is fundamental for Sloterdijk’s understanding of contemporary architecture, and the idea that constructed space is a removal from and imitation of nature. Following his discussion and explication of islands, Sloerdijk devotes a significant portion of the remaining 400 pages to an exploration of modern architecture in the context of the global age of foams, or foam architectures. For Sloterdijk, the 20th century ushered in an explicit form of being through dwelling. This form of being through dwelling is one where the integrated house of nature gives way to the fractured and multiplicitous foam architecture of constructed spaces that exist outside of nature. All architectural activity follows the concept of being born and the pre-natal, in bubbles. Birth is a beginning, but not the beginning. It is the beginning of the individual, the separation from the original architecture of the womb and the interior design of the placenta, umbilical cord, and amniotic fluid. All architecture seeks to reconnect the originary dyad; the shells of our dwellings are a reimagining of the womb’s shell. To come into being is to return to the protection of the womb-shell.

I will pause to explicate Sloterdijk’s definition of and use of technology in the process of anthropogenic human becoming. Sloterdijk is a humanist, albeit a hyper-humanist, or a posthumanist in the tradition of “we have always been posthuman”
This approach to humanism implies that the human is always in the making, an always increasing intensification of the project of hominization (Mendieta, 2012). Human animals, by necessity, become ontological through technologies, but we are not ontological to begin with (prenatal nobjects). The human animal becomes ontological through technologies and the recognition of a need to complete the dyadic relationship, and certain technologies are inevitably employed. Sloterdijk’s conception of technology is not limited to machines; rather, it encompasses various autogenetic and anthropogenetic methods, including fasting, prayer, and other embodied mental/physical exercises, as well as architecture and design. The emphasis on embodied mental/physical exercises focuses on how the body is manipulated through a connection to the environment in the process of hominization. These methods, in conjunction with current biotechnologies, create an increasingly diverse and sophisticated means of making new humans (Sloterdijk, 2009a). The capsule of the absolute island in the global age of spherology has increasingly augmented the means of hominization.

For Sloterdijk, an important anthropotechnology that predates current biotechnologies, as they are conceptualized in our current historical moment, such as genetic engineering, is a literal dwelling. Sloterdijk argues that we are human because of domesticating ourselves through dwellings. In response to Heidegger’s claim that “language is the house of being,” Sloterdijk suggests that literal dwellings existed before language and that dwellings are the house of Being (Mendieta, 2012). Given this emphasis on literal dwellings, how can architecture function as the means to communicate the coming into the clearing?
Architecture as Metaphor and the Literal Dwelling

Sloterdijk’s emphasis on architecture is both an ontological and a material position. Returning to the absolute island in the 20th century through individualized housing construction, the dwelling serves to incubate the human following a trajectory from bubble to foam. Sloterdijk claims that we are ecstatic beings, always held out in the open. We are “outside,” and vulnerable to nature. Being “outside”, we are also ontologically vulnerable to others. In order to tolerate the “outside,” we must be stabilized from the inside. The interior must be secure enough to withstand the pressure of the shared walls, while maintaining an awareness of the shared spaces. To be with others, we must secure a level of immunity from losing our awareness of being other than the Other. Where Sloterdijk says Heidegger focuses on language as the house of being, Sloterdijk finds in architecture an analog: actual houses, dwellings, and constructed spaces protect us from the “outside.”

But the history of the Clearing cannot be developed only as a tale of man moving into the houses of language. For as soon as speaking men gather into larger groups and connect themselves not only to linguistic houses but also build physical houses, they enter the arena of domestication. They are now not only sheltered by their language, but also tamed by their accommodations. In the clearing, as its most obvious marks, appear the houses of men (as well as the temples of their gods and the palaces of their masters). Historians of culture have made it clear that with domesticity the relationship between men and animals changed. With the taming of men by their houses the age of pets began as well. Their attachment to houses is not only a question of civilizing, but also a matter of direction and upbringing. (Sloterdijk, 2009a, p. 21)

Here, Sloterdijk connects the act of domestication, self-directed and as a practice of differentiating through the human-pet relationship, to literal dwellings. The house of language is a house with walls and interior design, and includes the concept of the
domesticated pet. Our relationship to non-human animals changed as auto-domestication created an ontological hierarchy and differentiating marker.

In its repetitious form, language provides a barrier to the outside from within, constituted by the fore-structures or already-established perceptual frameworks that we are born into. We can protect ourselves and allow others entry through language. Structures provide similar protection from the “outside.” According to Sloterdijk (2009b),

In human relationships, speaking and building usually create sufficient security that you can now and then permit ecstasy. For this reason, from my viewpoint the architect is someone who philosophizes in and through material. Someone who builds a dwelling or erects a building for an institution makes a statement on the relationship between the ecstatic and the enstatic, or, if you will, between the world as apartment and the world as agora. (para. 73)

The incubating capsule of the modern dwelling is something that, like language, we are born into. But we are in dwellings before we are born into language (the originary bubble of the womb, the transgressing of the wall of the birth canal as the entry to knowing interior from exterior). In “Cell Building, Egospheres, Self-Containers: The Explication of Co-Isolated Existence Via the Apartment” and “Foam City: Macro-Interiors and Urban Assembly Buildings Explicate the Symbiotic Situations of the Masses,” Sloterdijk (2004, 2016) focuses on the single-unit-apartment complex (micro-interior) and the sports stadium (macro-interior) to explicate his position.

The sports stadium reflects a macro-interior in the global age of spherology. Co-isolation is made explicit through the coming together of the individual subjects in a certain density that resonates between completely separate individuals, not a collective unity, or the mass. It is a density of life that makes explicit the need for connection and the withdrawal into co-isolation, presumably after the conclusion of the event taking
place. The macro-spheres of the sports stadium, or large assembly hall, produce a
temporary center and, subsequently, an artificial collective mass that is never fully
realized.

On the other hand, Sloterdijk argues that the single-unit apartment is the
architectural analog to the striving for individualism and freedom from human support. It
is the elemental unit of the egospherical form: “The modern apartment, or that which is
referred to as a studio or one-room apartment - is the material realization of a tendency
toward cell-formation, which can be recognized as the architectural and topological
analogue of the individualism of modern society” (Sloterdijk and Fabricius, 2007, p. 89).
Sloterdijk’s claims that the single-unit apartment is the material incubator of the
becoming-human in a specific historical moment, the 20th century—the hothouse of the
current historical moment. Living in a single-unit apartment is not isolation, rather co-
isolation through the shared wall. Within this dwelling, the inhabitant creates an identity
through the manipulation of design that reflects their wishes for individuation, although
each individual is constructing that which is recognized by the Other as displaying
particular qualities.

In addition to the rendering of a dwelling from the apartment’s cell, the inhabitant
can communicate to the outside world using contemporary communication media. Again,
the process of incubating the individual in the global age is not isolation alone; it is
isolation with the Other that necessarily constitutes its existence. The shared walls of the
apartment are the barriers that allow for co-isolation. This type of architecture allows for
the being-in-the-world of a single individual. With the single-unit apartment, Sloterdijk
(2009b) emphasizes the importance of architectural design:
Early Modern architects were thus right to see themselves as molders of humanity. If one ignores the shot of megalomania, what remains is the fact that the architects of the one-person apartments have enabled the mass version of a historically singular type of human being—at best it was otherwise pre-figured by the Christian hermit monks. (para. 52)

What was once a process of hominization of the adult dyadic subject through communal dwelling in the metaphysical sphere (anthropogenic islands) has become an exercise in mass-producing individuals in co-isolation. Being born into the age of the individual is being born into the age of the mass-produced replica of the very dwellings that connect and immunize us. The apartment complex, or the cellular stacking of individual housing units, was developed at the same time as Husserl’s and Heidegger’s phenomenology: “[B]oth areas dealt with the anchoring of the circumspect individual in a world millieu that had been made radically explicit” (Sloterdijk, 2016, p. 534). Therefore, “existence in a one-person apartment is nothing other than a single case of being-in-the-world, or the re-embedding, after its specific isolation, of the subject in its ‘lifeworld’ at a spatio-temporally concrete address” (Sloterdijk, 2004, 2016, p. 534). The subject is embedded in the world at a real location, a single case of individualization, through the structures that are not of its own making. As stated before, Sloterdijk argues that the subject can decorate that single unit. Still, the dwelling is not of its own making, and the meaning imparted, or communicated, by the mass-produced dwelling renders the subject a product of its specificities and constraints.

Sloterdijk relies on Walter Benjamin’s *Arcades Project* to explore the concept of individuation through interior design as a marker of hominization, while locating it in a particular temporal moment (Benjamin & Tiedemann, 1999). Benjamin argues that in each time period, humans used the technologies, materials, and design concepts most
representative of their current historical moment (Benjamin & Tiedemann, 1999).

Different dwellings and their accompanying material-technologies made available in different spatio-temporal spheres create the fore-structures for the rendering of different subjects.

The choice of these two architectural examples—the apartment building and the sports stadium—are purposefully chosen to distance the examination from the use of the house or home as a microcosm of the world:

We are simply not capable of continuing the old cosmology of ancient Europe that rested on equating the house and home with the world. Classical metaphysics is a phantasm on an implicit motif that was highlighted in only a few places—by Hegel and Heidegger for example—namely that the world must itself be construed as having the character of a house and that people in Western culture should be grasped not only as mortals but also as house residents. Their relation to the world as a whole is that of inhabit-ants in a crowded building called cosmos. So the questions are: Why should modern thought bid goodbye to this equation of world and house? Why do we need a new image in order to designate how modern man lives in social and architectural containers? Why do I propose the concept of foams? . . .

Because since the Enlightenment we have no longer needed a universal house in order to find the world a place worthy of inhabiting. What suffices is a unité d’habitation, a stackable number of inhabitable cells. Through the motif of the inhabited cell I can uphold the spherical imperative that applies to all forms of human life but does not presuppose cosmic totalization. The stacking of cells in an apartment block, for instance, no longer generates the classical world/house entity but an architectural foam, a multi-chambered system made up of relatively stabilized personal worlds. (Sloterdijk, 2009b, para. 5)

Our worlds are our lived-in spaces, our dwellings, and our barriers against collective unity. We are not given a choice to determine our environment in totality. Yet, we communicate through what has been given to us through the particularities of our spatio-temporal embeddedness. To communicate who we are, we must have a sense of meaning about what we are first. To constitute ourselves, we must work with the tools given to us that create a sense of protection and connection, and are readily available in our current
historical moment. Sloterdijk admits that spherology or the spheres theory cannot explain everything, including why some people choose or prefer different designs and dwellings over others. I will address this issue in Chapter 4 when discussing the rhetorical role of meaning-making and communicating meaning. How we are constituted as humans through the meaning that our already existing and born-into spaces afford us is a matter of communication. Individual humans will respond to design differently, based on how we communicate humanness to ourselves through the fore-structures of meaning that we are born into and develop.

The spheres theory, as illustrated in *Bubbles, Globes, and Foams*, is an attempt to emphasize the role of space in hominization, or the becoming-human. Space is an anthropological category. Sloterdijk claims that “humans are an effect of the space they create” (2009b, para. 2). Humans have evolved through the complicated process of insulation, immunization, and “island making” that traces back to the originary dyad:

> Humans are pets that have domesticated themselves in the incubators of early cultures. All the generations before us were aware that you never camp outside in nature. The camps of man’s ancestors, dating back over a million years, already indicated that they were distancing themselves from their surroundings. (Sloterdijk, 2009b, para. 2)

Domestication, or auto-domestication, is the taming of the animal from the wild of the exterior surroundings. It is the stepping into the clearing of being-human through an attempt to return to the event of original becoming. The concept of taming the animal through domestication is prevalent in another of Sloterdijk’s work on posthumanism and humanism, “Rules for the Human Zoo,” which I will now discuss.
“Rules for the Human Zoo”: The Taming of the Human Animal

In response to Heidegger’s 1947 *Letter on Humanism*, Sloterdijk (2009a) works from an onto-anthropological approach to understand how the human animal escaped from the danger of nature and stepped into the clearing of *Dasein*. Heidegger’s work was written in response to Jean Paul Sartre’s claim that Heidegger was a humanist. Heidegger’s position on humanism is sometimes considered a form of posthumanism or post-anthropocentrism through his destruction of metaphysics and critique of anthropocentrism. However, his insistence on the exclusivity of *Dasein* to humans complicates this understanding. Exclusive to humans, *Dasein* displaces the human as central by replacing it with Being, or the human’s self-reflexivity, although some theorists have explored the idea of non-human *Dasein* (Hogue, 2016; Rae, 2013). Sloterdijk’s essay “Rules for the Human Zoo: A Response to the Letter on Humanism” was published in 1999 in the German newspaper *Die Zeit* and was published by Suhrkamp in 2011. In this address, Sloterdijk conceptualizes culture and civilization as a hothouse for anthropogenesis and the taming of the human mammal, responding to Heidegger’s concept of humanism. This essay both responds to Heidegger’s conceptualization of humanism and attempts to connect it to contemporary forms of domestication and auto-domestication through biotechnologies.

The rules in the title of the essay refer to the methods of taming or comportment for being human that are established by some form of authority in the zoo of contemporary human civilization. The zoo metaphor explicitly conceptualizes the human as animal, in a divergence from Heidegger. This difference between the conceptualization of the human by Sloterdijk and Heidegger is discussed below.
Sloterdijk opens the essay by claiming that, in the classical humanist tradition, books are letters to friends. Authors create and send these letters to unknown audiences. Sloterdijk argues that the Romans were the recipients of these letters from the Greeks, although this was unknown to the Greeks. Sloterdijk argues that humanism can be traced to Cicero and the Roman literary genre of writing about friends and love (inspiring topics) to be read by others in a gesture of friendship (and the hopes of inspiration). Sloterdijk connects humanism to communication through reading and writing rather than speaking and listening. He argues, along with Heidegger, that this form of humanism is elitist in the privileging of writing and reading in civilized cultures. Although this form of humanism thrived from the Enlightenment to the Second World War, it ultimately failed. While Roman humanism, or the humanism of the book, survived for millennia, the atrocities and barbarism of the Second World War proved to be too barbaric to overcome through the renewed promotion of a literary elite that will tame the wild animal that is human. Sloterdijk argues that World War II highlighted the fragility of this humanistic tradition; the barbaric man is called back to the atrocities of war, similar to the atrocities as entertainment enacted in the Roman Coliseum. While the sharing of books never disappeared, the tension between a return to the animality of existence and the graduation to the elite status of the tamed human proved too resilient. Cicero’s humanism sought to tame the bestial animal in its liminal state. Some animals were kept to entertain, on standby for the atrocities of the spectacle of the theater, and the battlefields of war. Sloterdijk claims, “But, thereby, it is affirmed that humanity itself consists in choosing to develop one's nature through the media of taming, and to forswear bestialization” (2009b, p. 16). If there is a choice, there are guidelines and rules to be followed. Each end of the
spectrum, the tamed human of the literary elite and the untamed beast of the spectacle, is in a state of tension. These two positions and modes of being for the human make explicit the hominization of the human—the always in production aspect of humanness—that is a product of the media and technology available to its inhabitants.

Sloterdijk continues with his analysis of the “Letter on Humanism” (Heidegger & Krell, 1993) and explains Heidegger’s understanding of humanism in the form of ontology, not biology, a position that Sloterdijk takes issue with. That the human is more than an animal with rationality seems too limiting to Sloterdijk. Sloterdijk argues that Heidegger’s humanism is another form of domestication and places radical constraints on what a human can and cannot do: The “befriending of man through the word of the other” is the “center of ontological consciousness” (Mendieta, 2012, p. 71). For Heidegger, according to Sloterdijk, the word is the primary form of domestication. Alternately, Sloterdijk defines humanism as the attempt to save humans from barbarism through self-taming. However, we can see the disastrous results that such taming can bring (atrocities of war, especially chemical and airborne gas warfare) (Mendieta, 2012; Sloterdijk et al., 2009).

It is not the word, or the word alone. For Sloterdijk, it is the technologies of taming. Sloterdijk (2009a) argues this point:

Why should humanism and its general philosophical self-representation be seen as the solution for humanity, when the catastrophe of the present clearly shows that it is man himself, along with his systems of self-improvement and self-clarification that is the problem? (p. 17)

The problem of the human is the human’s attempt to improve itself, while always swinging between the animal state of existence and the modified entrance into being
human, above the animal state. There is no necessary and ontological difference between
the human and the animal. It is through techniques of hominization that we make
attempts at auto-domestication. For Sloterdijk, unlike Heidegger, the human is fully
immersed in the animal world. Sloterdijk rejects Heidegger’s clearing (in this context)
and the ethics of care by arguing that this position will produce the most docile, passive,
and submissive humans to the grand author of Being. If humans are to be the shepherds
of Being, that default position is one of inactive participation. Here we see the importance
of the rules in the title of the essay: A humanism that is based on the will of rule-makers
will inevitably create a hierarchy of the powerful against the weak: “Humanism cannot
contribute anything to this ascetic ideal [a society of knowers] as long as it remains
fixated on the image of strong men” (Sloterdijk, 2009a, p. 19). Our attempts to make
ourselves human through a variety of actions have problematized, according to
Sloterdijk, our state of bestial chaos in a series of 20th-century global disasters.
Additionally, contemporary media is to blame. The cult of the literary-elite has vanished,
along with the overall act of reading as a way to tame the human animal. Following the
Second World War, the return to a bestial state was attributed to the media-environment
that privileges the spectacle of the atrocity over anything else.

Sloterdijk turns to a critique of the space metaphor used in Heidegger’s clearing,
or the space that needs to be protected in order to keep the human from its bestial state.
The protection of this space by the elite is what Sloterdijk problematizes. For Heidegger,
the space of the clearing to be protected needs a shepherd: the human that is both
protected by the safety of the clearing and the protector of others. For Sloterdijk, this
clearing that Heidegger describes is not a physical space; rather, it is a noetic space, a
dangerous space. In this space, there are the technologies of science that seek to
necessitate a form of decision-making by an authority, a DNA letter writer.

The current biotechnology, as anthropotechnology, functions as the continuation
of the process of domestication, auto-domestication, and hominization, the taming of the
“inner beast” (Sloterdijk, 2009a). These anthropotechnologies, in a long tradition, bring
the human from the ontic to the ontological. Sloterdijk (2014a) states,

If there is man, then that is because a technology has made him evolve out of the
prehuman. It is that which authentically brings about humans. Therefore humans
encounter nothing strange when they expose themselves to further creation and
manipulation, and they do nothing perverse when they change themselves
autotechnologically, given that such interventions and assistance happen on such
a high level of insight into the biological and social nature of man that they
become effective as authentic, intelligent and successful coproductions with
evolutionary potential. (p. 16)

For Sloterdijk, there is nothing unique about contemporary biotechnologies as
anthropotechnologies. Contemporary anthropotechnologies are a continuation of humans
stepping into the clearing of Dasein, to self-tame the barbaric and ontic human animal,
and offer protection from the “outside.” Just like the Roman literary genre of intimate
letters to friends and the cult of the written word, the authors of DNA texts perpetuate a
problematic elitism of humanism in the context of authorship. Like the books of Roman
humanism, there is a canon of genetic perfection, and there are those who make these
decisions about that canon. Sloterdijk raises the question of who should decide the rules
for the contemporary human zoo, assuming that the tradition of letter writing carries into
the present age of genetic engineering. Like the Romans’ literary elite, there will be those
who make decisions on the breeding of the human, but the technologies of breeding the
human will be more widely available. Sloterdijk, in a very contentious move, asks who
will be responsible for such decisions. While Sloterdijk does raise the possibility of a return to Plato’s philosopher-king, the argument for who should be responsible moves more in the direction of how widely available this technology will be made. This availability will require a more complicated set of codes and rules for the breeding process through genetic editing—hence, the rules for the human zoo. Ultimately, to make sense of the new directions of domestication, auto-domestication, and the posthuman, Sloterdijk looks for a history of the present, or a history of domestication and auto-domestication that is still the means for becoming and being human today.

The delivery of Sloterdijk’s “Rules for the Human Zoo” speech and the subsequent publication of the essay became a matter of contention both within and outside of Germany. Sloterdijk’s use of the term “breeding” in the context of creating certain types of humans raised the taboo subject of eugenics in a country with a long and troubled history on the topic. Accused of being a neo-fascist and neo-conservative, critics such as Jurgen Habermas publicly denounced Sloterdijk’s argument and claimed that it had “fascist implications” (Schultz, 2020). Sloterdijk responded to the accusation by claiming that critical theory, the method of the Frankfurt School to which Habermas was associated, is dead: “[T]he days of hyper-moral sons of national-socialist fathers are coming to an end” (Sloterdijk, quoted in Meaney, 2018). The controversy was considered a victory for Habermas and the tradition of critical theory, but Sloterdijk’s reputation as a serious, albeit contentious and dangerous, thinker was cemented and moved beyond Germany (Meaney, 2018).

Sloterdijk is not making a claim to the morality of these new types of anthropotechnics; rather, he is treating them as an inevitability that must be addressed.
The argument that such breeding, or genetic editing, might serve a common good is part of this argument, as well as most discussions of genetic editing in our current historical moment. Such technologies could arguably provide a greater quality of life for a general population if the topic is raised in a realistic manner. The ethics of such technology are not the focus of this dissertation. Instead, the focus is the arguments by Sloterdijk concerning the discussion of the technology as it fits into his conceptualization of posthumanism. Again, Sloterdijk does not treat the human or hominization as a recent event, only the tools that are used in the process. The metaphor of the hothouse or the greenhouse becomes relevant in the discussion of anthropotechnics, genetic editing, and the process of domestication and auto-domestication. The incubation of the human is a process of inculturation based on the material technologies available. Sloterdijk is treating the subject as a certainty, and discussions about what is available to regulate and control the technology are paramount. Such conversations concerning what is available and how it should be regulated are the goal of Sloterdijk’s “Rules for the Human Zoo.”

**Sloterdijk and Communication Studies**

Sloterdijk is now achieving greater recognition outside of Germany, although he is still not as widely read as some of his contemporaries. The *Spheres* trilogy is the leading group of texts found in academic literature, from critical-cultural studies (Cespedes, 2018; Lash, 2012; Sutherland, 2017; ten Bos & Kaulingfreks, 2002), to architecture and urban studies (Ansell-Pearson, 2009; Elden & Mendieta, 2009; Gielis & van Houtum, 2012; Klauser, 2010; Mallinson, 2014; Morin, 2009). The most salient aspects of Sloterdijk’s work found in social science and humanities literature are his theories of globalization in *Foams*, his spatial and dyadic ontology, and his work on
architecture in the concept of the Foam City. Within communication literature, Sloterdijk’s absence is more noticeable, although some scholars working at the intersection of philosophy and communication have used his theories.

Brianke Chang and Garnett Butchart’s (2012) edited volume, *Philosophy of Communication*, contains an essay by Sloterdijk, “Actio in Distans. On the Tele-Rational Formation Ways of the World” (2012). In an effort to introduce Sloterdijk to the field of communication, the authors included his work alongside a wide range of continental philosophers. In this essay, Sloterdijk argues that the history of media is fundamentally an issue of the brain and thought transference. Other communication theorists working in media ecology have tried introducing Sloterdijk to a wider audience of English-speaking communication scholars. Working in media ecology, Robert Halsall (2005) brings Sloterdijk’s media theories to help explain “high” and “mass” culture distinctions. The distinction between various forms of vertical and horizontal communication relates to the hominization process in the context of the taming of the beast (Sloterdijk, 2009a).

Adam Robbert (2018), also working in media ecology, uses Sloterdijk’s argument that philosophy is a practice more than anything else. For Sloterdijk and Robbert, philosophy as a practice is a form of extended cognition in a multiplicity of media ecologies. Robbert draws on animal studies and post-anthropocentric theory to construct his argument.

This short review of communication theorists writing on Sloterdijk exemplifies the lack of attention paid to his communication theory; Sloterdijk’s role in communication studies is underappreciated. My intention is to bring even greater awareness of Sloterdijk to communication studies.
I have argued that Sloterdijk combines multiple aspects of posthumanism and post-anthropocentrism, beginning with a dyadic ontology, and then moves to explicate our continual searching for this relationship with other things in the world, non-human, non-animal, and literal dwellings (constructed spaces). As I will argue in the following chapters, these constructed spaces and designs are used both to make meaning of what it means to be human and to communicate the meaning of being human. Sloterdijk’s concept of domestication and auto-domestication can be understood as communication because we become human through the meaning we make from our surroundings. As I discuss in the following chapter, meaning is something that we are born into and create based on the available means of interpreting the world around us. Our spaces provide, in part, a means of interpreting the world. Once we are born into these spaces, we are born into the meaning that we communicate with. The communicative aspect of Sloterdijk’s work can also be understood by looking at the small, overlooked spaces he explores in the *Spheres* trilogy and “Rules for the Human Zoo.” These small spaces, the space connecting the fetus and the placenta, the walls of the modern apartment complex, barbed wire, and urban design, are largely overlooked in communication theory. Such spaces are the intermediaries and mediums that allow the human being to become, to move from the ontic to the ontological, from the danger of the outside to the immunized shelter of the interior of spheres. I argue that these spaces are not universally translatable with the same meaning to all inhabitants at any given historical moment. We are born into our spatial environments and learn to create meaning and communicate that meaning based on the rhetorical artifacts that we have access to, and the meaning that is imbued with each artifact. For Sloterdijk, the history of humanity is an attempt to reconnect with the
originary mode of a dyadic ontology. New technologies provide new forms of hominization, domestication, and auto-domestication, but the process of becoming human, stepping into the immunizing safety of the clearing, is a process of inhabiting, creating meaning from, and communicating with and through our lived spaces.

**Conclusion**

Sloterdijk is a philosopher of space, communication, and posthumanism. I argue that the spaces covered in Sloterdijk’s theory, as well as the spaces that I will analyze in the following chapters, are not universally translatable with the same meaning to all inhabitants at any given historical moment. We are born into our spatial environments and learn to create meaning and communicate that meaning based on the rhetorical artifacts we have access to and the meaning imbued with each artifact. The artifacts of dwellings—houses, libraries, sports stadiums, and urban design—create the topology of our lived experience. Each human who is becoming, historically incubated in the hothouses of changing spheres, follows a trajectory of the taming of the human animal to the ontological human through inhabiting these spaces. Every element of our contemporary global environment is the product of human creation—the concept of nature included—and functions as a meaning-imbued system of rhetorical artifacts. These rhetorical artifacts inculturate co-isolated individuals to recognize themselves as human, or in the case of dehumanizing design, as the less-than-human. The process of auto-domestication, or the self-enacted becoming human of the human object, is a form of communication with the spatial environment we are born into. I will continue exploring the various meanings that our spatial environments communicate to co-isolated individuals in the following chapter.
Sloterdijk works at the intersection of various humanisms, including posthumanism. While not explicitly identified as a posthumanist theorist, his post-anthropocentrism—through his dyadic ontology—and his argument that our shared spaces shape who we are and domesticate us as humans, place him in the “we have always been posthuman” tradition. Sloterdijk’s work differs from that of other anthropotechnic posthuman scholars, such as Hayles and Haraway, through his use of the dyadic ontology to show we are always, necessarily, co-creating with an Other from before birth. This co-creation with an Other is the originary dyadic unit that we strive to return to. I argue that this theory of hominization, domestication, auto-domestication, and anthropotechnics is a historical and individual process that places him in the posthumanist tradition of post-anthropocentrism and posthumanists that treats the human as having always been posthuman. Sloterdijk considers birth to be the event of the individual, but not the beginning. As discussed earlier, the human, or nobject, exists in a pre-human yet ontological state in the womb. The history of humanity is an attempt to reconnect with the original mode of dyad ontology. New technologies provide new forms of hominization, domestication, and auto-domestication, but the process of becoming human—stepping into the immunizing safety of the clearing—is a process of inhabiting, creating meaning from, and communicating with our lived spaces.
Chapter 4. History of Contemporary Rhetoric: Broadening the Scope, Epistemic Rhetoric, and Philosophy

Introduction

The scope of rhetoric is a defining argument of contemporary rhetoric. What is considered rhetorical, rhetorical theory, or the appropriate subject of rhetorical analyses became a leading discussion in the post-World War II era in the United States (Lucaites et al., 1999). Here, I focus on this aspect of contemporary rhetorical theory to provide the groundwork for how posthumanism, Sloterdijk, and architecture are situated within a contemporary rhetorical landscape. Although the history of rhetoric and rhetorical theory spans millennia, I concentrate on the changes within rhetorical theory in the mid-20th century. I begin with the shift from classical rhetoric to epistemic and contemporary rhetoric. Specifically, I will look at the post-World War II shift from classical rhetoric and the discussion of the social construction of knowledge, the expansion of rhetoric to nontraditional discourse (social movements, feminist rhetoric), epistemic rhetoric, philosophy and rhetoric, postmodern rhetoric, and material rhetoric. Sloterdijk’s dyadic ontology, theory of domestication, and anthropotechnics are not rhetorical theories, yet his work can be situated in the ontological rhetoric of Hyde and Smith (1979) and material rhetoric.

In this chapter on contemporary rhetoric, I describe the work of several influential rhetorical theorists, movements, and positions in the debate over the role and scope of rhetoric and its subsequent effects. Each theorist has proven highly influential both within and outside of the academy and the discourse surrounding rhetoric’s future. Contemporary rhetorical theory has allowed for the consideration of previously
overlooked cultural artifacts, such as architecture, to be considered rhetorical. When rhetoric is viewed as meaning-making, the fore-structures (both physical structures and linguistic) and rhetorical artifacts—including our constructed physical environment—become the very things we use to understand and communicate our very being in the world. As discussed in the previous chapter, Sloterdijk emphasizes being as a being-there in the physical world. In this chapter, I discuss how meaning and our ontological grounding can be connected to our constructed spaces through rhetorical theory.

Architecture and design are rhetorical and contribute to the constitution of being human. As discussed in Chapter 2, posthumanism is a network of related theoretical concepts that argue for the continued contingency of the concept of the human. I have argued that Sloterdijk is a posthumanist who contends that “we have always been posthuman,” or that we are always in the process of domesticating ourselves as human. For Sloterdijk, space, structures, and design help bring us back to our originary dyadic-ontological state and separate the animal from the human. Now I will argue that contemporary rhetorical theory, especially Hyde and Smith’s ontological rhetoric, helps us understand how we are born into structures, both linguistic and physical, that have been imbued with meaning. Rhetorical theory allows us to explain how we interpret and use the meaning that we are given from our interactions with the materiality of architecture and design to understand and make claims about what is and is not human.

**Contemporary Rhetoric: Expansion After World War II**

The aftermath of the Second World War left many academics questioning not only the “why” of the atrocities that ensued globally, but also the “how” of the ability of the nation-states to engender feelings of radical alterity in their constituents (Frank,
Rhetorical theorist David A. Frank places the resurgence of rhetoric in the academy in its historical context: The work of several important theorists and scholars concerning the traumatic events of the Holocaust and the rise of totalitarian powers in relation to rhetoric in the early 20th century was more than a coincidence. This resurgence can be viewed as a reaction to the “how” of the event: Where rhetoric had been overlooked, the answer to the rise and efficacy of propaganda might be found. Frank (2011) contends that while the traumatic events of totalitarianism and the Holocaust proved so sublime as to warrant that some scholars wait several years before articulating their thoughts on the matter, the eventual publication of material concerning the events did reflect a rhetorical turn. The rhetorical turn provides an answer to the question of whether or not the Holocaust transcended understanding (Frank, 2011).

Fast-forward 20 years, and yet another war provoked the question of the role of rhetoric in the academy and rhetoric globally. Concerns over propaganda following the Second World War revived the question of the Aristotelian conception of rhetoric: the art of discovering available means of persuasion in a given case. This definition assumes that the ethical question of “To what end?” is superseded by rhetoric’s necessity to work with already existent truths. Therefore, in the propaganda context, rhetoric can be used for good or bad, depending on the agent and the agent’s relationship to the already existent meaning imbued to language: How do we learn to use language for good, and how do we detect the rhetorical strategies used in the service of evil? In such a question, the notion of the absolute truth is questioned, and we are left wondering if propaganda serves to produce truth or disclose truth. Privileging the latter necessitates a disconcerting answer: that truth, which is disclosed through propaganda, is a truth, no matter how disgusting it
may appear. If rhetoric is also involved in the production of knowledge, as well as its disclosure, the role of rhetoric expands beyond mere style and enters the discussion of epistemology (Lucaites et al., 1999).

Such a conception of language—that it is impartial and that rhetoric discloses truth—came under serious attack in the late 1960s and during the Vietnam era. Lucaites et al. (1999) argue that the years 1967–1976 brought about a radical change in the academy’s conceptualization of rhetoric. Ushered in by Franklin Haiman’s (1967) “The Rhetoric of the Streets: Some Legal and Ethical Considerations,” social theory became a prime focus of certain rhetorical scholars. Haiman draws our attention to the new rhetorical activities that occupied news media, campus environments, and U.S. cities’ streets. Protest movements and the political discourse of the time raised questions of meaning, truth, and ethics.

Lloyd Bitzer’s (1968) “The Rhetorical Situation” provides a more practical and conservative approach to the changing landscape of public discourse, but paid attention to social theory in ways that had been overlooked in rhetorical theory before. Bitzer argues for a larger scope of rhetoric, one that moves beyond the speaker to the rhetorical situation’s larger social context. Douglas Ehninger’s (1968) “On Systems of Rhetoric” supports Bitzer’s expansion of rhetoric to social theory and culture (Lucaites et al., 1999). Ehninger argues for the relationship between rhetoric and culture and for the importance of recognizing a multiplicity of rhetorics within different spatio-temporal contexts. Around this time, in 1970, two conferences were held to respond to the questions of “the problems in contemporary life which require application of rhetorical concepts and methods and to recommend lines of research and educational programs needed to bring
effective rhetoric into relation to current and future needs” (Sloane, 2010, p. 1). The conferences sought to question the role of rhetoric and its utility regarding the context of political and social upheaval. In conversation with the political and social strife of centuries old, this new context was discussed in the walls of the academy, with the new lexicon of postmodernity encroaching upon its territory.

Thomas P. Sloane (2010) refers to the conferences, and to their subsequent collection of writings from the proceedings, as a prospectus that served to state the current orientation of rhetoric to its historical moment and as a guide to the future uses of rhetoric. The future use of rhetoric was already initiated with the publication of Robert Scott’s (1967) “On Viewing Rhetoric as Epistemic.” Scott’s work on the relationship between knowledge and rhetoric proved to be a watershed moment for the relationship between rhetoric and philosophy. I will discuss his work in greater detail after discussing the precursors to the expansion of rhetoric. I now turn to Thomas Kuhn’s work to introduce rhetoric’s expansion in the post-World War II era.

**Thomas Kuhn: The “Paradigm Shift”**

The expansion of rhetoric starting in the late 1960s was a historic culmination of social, political, and academic events (Lucaites et al., 1999). Cited as a precursor of and a foundational theorist for this movement, Thomas Kuhn, specifically his work on the nature of scientific development, helped bridge the disparate theoretical discourses of philosophy, social theory, and rhetoric (Nelson et al., 1987). In *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Kuhn (1962) offers a vision of scientific progress and change that involves persuasion, thus indirectly opening science as an object of rhetorical inquiry.
Kuhn argues that the way scientific knowledge claims work is not exclusively through falsifiability but also through the scientist’s rhetorical strategies. Kuhn suggests that scientists advance knowledge and create paradigmatic changes through accumulating enough evidence and persuading others of its legitimacy. For Kuhn, a scientific community requires boundaries and a set system of received beliefs in order to discover what the world is really like and find objective truths about the natural world. Consequently, certain anomalies that push back against received scientific beliefs are discarded as not matching the way that the objective world really is. Instead of using scientific discovery to guide received wisdom, in the functioning of “normal science,” Kuhn argues that received beliefs shape the scientific community’s understanding of the discovery. In “normal science,” research and discovery is “a strenuous and devoted attempt to force nature into the conceptual boxes supplied by professional education” (Kuhn, 1962, pp. 4–5).

Certain anomalies in the course of “normal science” will ultimately undermine the basic tenets of some received beliefs. The rigid structures that define a paradigm will give way through the process of scientific revolution, although they are often met with great resistance from the defenders of the previous paradigm. The consequence of the function of “normal science” is establishing boundaries that, although often limiting, provide structure for the progress of scientific discovery. A paradigm shift forces the scientific community to set new boundaries and parameters and reevaluate and reinterpret previously established facts. The reevaluation of previously established facts, the resistance of adherents to old paradigms, and the new paradigm’s acceptance all point to the rhetorical nature of scientific discovery and paradigm shift.
For Kuhn, a paradigm shift does not happen overnight and by the mere existence of the anomaly. A paradigm shift is contingent on the persuasive efforts of the adherents to the new paradigm and the cumulative effect of a set of persuasive tools specific to the discipline (e.g., journals, increased amount of testing and exploration, the persuasive elements of speech). Hence, the functioning of normal science is rhetorical: The lack of competing paradigms presents the image of a community that is more successful and capable of progress. The “paradigm shift” distinction applied not only to how science actually operates; it also functioned rhetorically as a “paradigm shift” in the sociology of science and rhetorical theory.

**Effects of the “Paradigm Shift.”**

Kuhn’s exploration of the functioning of scientific communities raised several critical questions regarding the scientist’s role in the discovery or creation of scientific knowledge and rhetoric’s role in the bastion of objectivity. Furthermore, Kuhn’s work opened the door for the study of institutions as rhetorically constituted and postmodern rhetorical theory. Some of the effects of the “paradigm shift” in rhetorical theory are the revival of rhetoric, a push toward interdisciplinarity in the academy, skepticism toward institutions and expert knowledge, and the development of new areas of inquiry, including the rhetoric of architecture. Although not the sole impetus for the revival of rhetorical studies and theory in the academy, Kuhn’s theory of scientific revolutions is undoubtedly among the more influential works (Schiappa, 2014).

Kuhn’s work opened the door for rhetoricians to explore new territory, further elevating rhetoric’s position within the academy. This opening of the door for rhetoric helped contribute to the interdisciplinary turn in 20th-century rhetorical theory.
Furthermore, the questioning of objectivity in the domain of science was the impetus for an increased skepticism of institutions and expert knowledge. Both the turn to interdisciplinarity and the skepticism of institutions are evidenced in the Rhetoric of Inquiry Project. The Rhetoric of Inquiry Project, based out of the University of Iowa in the 1980s and 1990s, sought to expand rhetorical studies’ scope from the domain of political public discourse to other areas of human inquiry, including “science” (Nelson et al., 1987). Following Kuhn, if rhetoric is the overseeing orchestrator of the production of knowledge, all areas of human inquiry are subject to its purview, including economics and mathematics. The Rhetoric of Inquiry Project sought to work from all areas of human inquiry, finally tackling the bastion of objectivity—science—to demonstrate the rhetorical nature of all human activity. In the introduction to *The Rhetoric of the Human Sciences*, Nelson et al. (1987) describe the role that Kuhn’s work has played in the development of a rhetoric of inquiry:

The American concern with politics is evident in Thomas S. Kuhn’s *Structures of Scientific Revolutions*. Its dominant metaphor of revolution is political. The history of modern science reveals patterns of change dramatically different from the picture implied by extant logics of inquiry, and better suited for rhetoric. It therefore challenges philosophy to account for the actual operation of scientific communities—their professional devices of communication and socialization, their political structures, their reliance on aesthetics, their rhetorical dependence on persuasion. (p. 12)

The actual operation of institutions, as constituted by human actors, invites rhetorical analysis. The Rhetoric of Inquiry Project prompted a rhetoric of architecture—a turn to the material—and institutional practices of architects and the public discourse surrounding architecture. Daniel Hattenhauer’s (1984) work, discussed in Chapter 1 of this dissertation, is a direct heir to the work started by the Rhetoric of Inquiry Project. G.
Thomas Goodnight’s (2014) “From Architectonics to Polytechtonics: Rhetoric, Communication, and Information” argues that the use of architecture in rhetoric has appeared over millennia and helps to explore the idea that “engaging the architectural is engaging the rhetorical” (p. 1). Goodnight (2014) makes the connection between architecture as the proper selection and arrangement of materials in a localized tradition, and the arrangement of durable proofs to “recall the memories and inform the sensibilities of an audience brought together for common purpose” (p. 1). Goodnight’s article was published in Poroi, the journal sponsored by the Project on Rhetoric of Inquiry. Poroi came out of the Rhetoric of Inquiry Project; the journal was founded in 1980 at the University of Iowa. The Rhetoric of Inquiry Project’s aim is to “explore how scholarship and professional discourses are conducted through argument, how paradigms of knowledge are sensitive to social-political contexts, and how the presentation of scholarly and professional findings involves the recognition and negotiation of audiences” (Obermann Center for Advanced Studies, n.d., para. 1). The work of this project carries on the tradition established by Kuhn (1962) in The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, further expanding the scope of rhetoric and moving from the practice of classical rhetoric to post-World War II era contemporary rhetoric.

After the publication of The Structure of Scientific Revolutions in 1962 and before the publication of The Rhetoric of the Human Sciences in 1987, Kuhn delivered what was then a work in progress at the Iowa Symposium in 1984 (Schiappa, 2014). Titled “Rhetoric and Liberation,” this essay responded to the use of his work in the field of rhetoric. Kuhn was not entirely comfortable with his role as an “inspiration to those who equate the rhetorical turn with liberation in [Richard] Rorty’s sense … At the same time
it gestures toward an understanding of scientific and mathematical language that is rhetorical through and through” (Schiappa, 2014, p. 2). Rorty’s conceptualization of the “rhetorical turn,” following the “linguistic turn” and the “interpretive turn” found in inquiries within the human sciences, places Kuhn’s work in the attack on objectivity. No longer is rhetoric confined to “Great men” speaking well or the analysis of political speeches. The “rhetorical turn” seeks to analyze all communication, expert language, and intellectual discourse included (Simons, 1990, p. vii).

Again, Kuhn recognized the connection between his work and contemporary rhetoric:

Let me start with agreements. Rorty and I both insist “that there is nothing to be said about either truth or rationality apart from descriptions of the familiar procedures of justification which a given society — ours — uses in one or another area of inquiry.” (Kuhn, 2014, p. 2).

But, Kuhn was not entirely at ease with the critique of transcultural objectivity. Solidarity is the key problematic for Kuhn; he parts from his agreement with Rorty on the individuality of beliefs that create intra-cultural solidarity. As Kuhn (2014) states,

Like solidarity, objectivity extends only over the world of the tribe, but what it extends over is no less firm and real for that. When that reality is threatened, as it sometimes is by exposure to other solidary groups, solidarity is necessarily threatened as well. (p. 9)

We live and function both intra-culturally and inter-culturally by our solidarity, and that solidarity is threatened when objectivity is threatened.

While the effects of Kuhn’s questioning the objectivity of science can be seen as beneficial for rhetorical studies (expansion, revival) and political discourse (the questioning of institutions and objectivity in the service of power), a negative effect can
be seen in the hermeneutics of suspicion evident in much humanities discourse. In Bruno Latour’s (2004) essay “Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern,” he questions the denial of objectivity and facts found in much of the discourse in the humanities. Latour is concerned with the contemporary suspicion of any kind of objective truth. He believes that, as a result, humanities scholars immediately forego thorough critical theory and resort to the assumption that we are necessarily prisoners of language, that there is nothing “natural,” and that all facts are made up. For Latour, this situation is not merely problematic for humanities as an academic field, but has political consequences beyond the academy as well. While students in the humanities are taught to deny objectivity,

dangerous extremists are using the very same argument of social construction to destroy hard-won evidence that could save our lives. Was I wrong to participate in the invention of the field known as science studies? Is it enough to say that we did not really mean what we said? Why does it burn my tongue to say that global warming is a fact whether you like it or not? Why can’t I simply say that the argument is closed for good? (Latour, 2004, p. 227)

Although Kuhn never denied the existence of objective facts, his work, having opened the door for a heightened critique of objectivity, is criticized as having spiraled out of control. This spiraling out of control has serious consequences both within the academy and for the political arena. In our current cultural and political landscape, the problematics associated with the critique of facts and truth that Latour raises have blurred the lines between an understanding of statements of fact and opinion. A recent Pew Research Center study on the ability to assess factual statements from statements of opinion, regardless of whether or not they were facts, shows that more people were likely to perceive a statement as factual if it positively appealed to their political ideology (Mitchell et al., 2018).
This study demonstrates the contested conceptualization of truth and objectivity as it exists outside of the academy, a trend that is only acerbated by the current attack on empirical evidence and fact from the new U.S. right-wing conservatism. The *interregnum* of postmodernity coupled with the advent of social constructionism provided the perfect accommodations for a politically charged and constituted cognitive mapping that subjectively identifies when and how truthful knowledge can be made. Politically constituted schemata are conditioned to arbitrate between that which has the possibility to attain non-subjective truth. The questions of objectivity and truth gained further attention in the field of postmodern rhetoric. I will now briefly discuss the advent of postmodern rhetoric before turning to a discussion of Robert Scott’s epistemic rhetoric.

**Postmodern Rhetoric**

Considered the second rebirth of rhetoric, following the post-World War II expansion of rhetoric in the late 1960s, postmodern rhetoric continued questioning objectivity and the role of rhetoric. Following the calls for expanding rhetoric and the questioning of objectivity, other rhetoricians soon entered the conversation on both sides of the argument, further revitalizing the role of rhetoric in the academy.

Barry Brummett introduced the first use of the term “postmodern rhetoric.” In his 1976 essay “Some Implications of ‘Process’ or ‘Intersubjectivity’: Postmodern Rhetoric,” Brummett argues that all reality is mediated, thus signaling the demise of objective reality. Reality is never discovered through people; instead, people construct reality. If reality and, thus, knowledge are created by people and through their social relations in an intersubjective process, rhetoric plays the role of moderating such constructions. Brummett’s contribution to postmodern rhetoric continued the tradition of questioning
universal truths in an age of the demise of objectivity. Before Brummett’s use of “postmodern rhetoric,” the foundation for this introduction of postmodern theory into rhetorical theory can be found in many post-World War II discussions about the role of rhetoric in the academy and the public sphere. But an academic tension from 1972 introduced the initial signs of a debate over postmodern rhetoric. Two essays, published in the *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, sparked a debate over the neo-Aristotelian nature of Forbes Hill’s (1972) rhetorical analysis of President Nixon’s 1969 address to the American people on the Vietnam War (Lucaites et al., 1999). Hill’s neo-Aristotelian approach, which relied heavily on objectivity and the neutrality of the author, was criticized by Karlyn Kohrs Campbell (1972).

Kohrs Campbell claims that Hill’s assessment of the speech neglected to consider his own subject-position and failed to situate the speech in a moral context, as Neo-Aristotelianism afforded no place for such an assessment. Hill (1972) argues that because Nixon met all of the available means of persuasion, it should be considered a good speech. In this exchange, the role of rhetoric and the legacy of objective analysis is questioned. The division between a modernist (objective) approach to criticism is put in contest with the emerging view of the unavoidability of the subject-position of the author. Or, as Lucaites et al. describe the exchange, it is a battle between criticism (modernist) and theory (postmodern), involving the role of practice in the expanding conceptualization of what rhetoric can and should do. The modernist approach to rhetoric as universal was being questioned, and the answers were often a call to address the embeddedness of rhetoric in specific and local contexts (Lucaites et al., 1999).
Following the Hill and Kohrs Campbell exchange, Kohrs Campbell published groundbreaking work on feminist rhetoric, arguing that classical forms of rhetoric fail to address the specific context of the women’s liberation movement. Here, the emphasis is once again the specificities of the particular identity of the rhetor and audience, questioning the utility of a universal rhetorical approach that is gender normative. Lucaites et al. claim that two works coming at the close of the spirited and influential time for the rebirth of rhetoric in the academy firmly established the new trajectory of rhetorical studies and placed theory at the forefront.

Thomas Farrell’s (1976) and Michael C. McGee’s (1975) work continued to connect the lived experience addressed in contemporary social theory with rhetoric. McGee’s (1975) “In Search of ‘the People’: A Rhetorical Alternative” argues that rhetoric was more than the practice of speaking well or the analysis of speeches for the direct effects. For McGee, rhetoric was “central to the constitution of collective life” (Lucaites et al., 1999, p. 13). It should focus on the ways that discourse works to build community. McGee’s postmodern rhetoric sought to use the individual-collective approach of social theory to better understand how communication shapes our social existence, most importantly as rhetorical audiences.

Thomas Farrell’s (1976) “Knowledge, Consensus, and Rhetorical Theory” offers insight into the problem of fixed meaning through his elucidation of different types of knowledge. I will return to Farrell’s work on epistemic rhetoric in the next section, but his 1976 work contributed to the transition to postmodern rhetoric through his identification of the import of social knowledge for the purposes of truth and rhetoric. He argues that social knowledge differs from technical or specialized knowledge in that it
obtains meaning, but not through correspondence with the external world. Instead, it 
necessitates agreed-upon meaning within a particular context. Farrell (1976) defines 
social knowledge as that which “comprises conceptions of symbolic relationships among 
problems, persons, interests, and actions, which imply (when accepted) certain notions of 
preferable public behavior” (p. 4). Having discussed the transition to contemporary 
rhetoric in the post-World War II era, I will now focus on the relationship between 
rhetoric and philosophy, beginning with Robert Scott’s epistemic turn in 1967.

**Robert Scott: The “Epistemic Turn”**

Robert Scott’s 1967 essay “On Viewing Rhetoric as Epistemic” can be viewed as 
the main catalyst of the epistemic rhetoric debate. In this foundational work, Scott (1967) 
unequivocally argues that rhetoric is epistemic, thus foreshadowing the era of postmodern 
rhetoric and the theoretical connections between continental philosophy and rhetoric. 
Notions of truth concerning rhetoric, argument, and time comprise the bulk of Scott’s 
argument. The sooner that we abandon, or deemphasize, the concept of universal truth, 
the more utility rhetoric will employ. The only acts that we can and should consider as 
true are those taking place in our spatial presence. When we are in the presence of such a 
phenomenon, no argument is needed to validate the experience as truth; therefore, 
rhetoric is no longer necessitated for disclosing the truth in such a situation. Such a claim 
arises from the idea that we rely on our past experience when validating a knowledge 
claim; therefore, argument is superfluous to any act that has truth as a cognitive attendant. 
In lieu of uncovering truth through orality, rhetoric produces time-contingent and 
contextual truth through argument. Each instantiation of competing interests allows for 
the discursive interplay of temporal truths. In an effort to isolate the best time-contingent
and contextual truth, interlocutors should exercise tolerance, will, and a sense of responsibility to make the act most effective.

Arguing that rhetoric is tantamount to the creation of knowledge is an exemplar of the transit to the postmodern mind, discussed in the previous section. Epistemic rhetoric engages three presuppositions of epistemology that it attempts to subvert: the linguistic, the temporal, and the ethical. Now we turn to the first epistemological presupposition—the linguistic—that epistemic rhetoric takes to task: Is language impartial and unambiguous? Can we assign fixed meaning in language that secures the certain truth of a knowledge claim?

The rhetorical scholar Thomas Farrell (1976) offers insight into the problem of fixed meaning through his elucidation of different types of knowledge. Here, I focus on his conception of social knowledge. Following Thomas Kuhn’s work on the consensus-building inherent in the production of scientific knowledge, Farrell identifies the import of social knowledge for the purposes of truth and rhetoric. He argues that social knowledge differs from technical or specialized knowledge in that it obtains meaning not through correspondence with the external world; rather, it necessitates agreed-upon meaning within a particular context. Farrell (1976) defines social knowledge as that which “comprises conceptions of symbolic relationships among problems, persons, interests, and actions, which imply (when accepted) certain notions of preferable public behavior” (p. 4). The salient aspect of his definition of social knowledge is the qualifier “when accepted.” Such a statement implies that the symbolic relationships (language) as functional are contingent upon their acceptance by a particular temporal society. The opportunity for miscommunication occurs when the meaning of the shared symbols
differs. Suffice it to say, as evidenced by the very debate over rhetoric, shared meaning is not guaranteed, and the fixed meaning of symbols is far from guaranteed using this definition.

The second epistemological presupposition that epistemic rhetoric is arguing against is that arguments that count as true will always count as true. Using Stephen Toulmin’s (2003) *The Uses of Argument*, Scott (1967) grounds his initial question of the relationship between epistemology and rhetoric in the notion of certainty. If epistemology aims to answer the question of certainty regarding conclusions, or knowledge claims, we must first understand the complicated term “certainty.” Toulmin’s account of epistemology is logic-based. In order to meet the demands of certainty for a knowledge claim, the only acceptable argument is analytic; the premises of an argument can only be answered by a conclusion that obtains whether the premise is accounted for in the presence of the individual making the claim. Therefore, we can only be certain of a conclusion if we are in the presence of the premises that necessitate it being true; such a case is rare, and relying on and only on such arguments would severely limit an individual in holding any confidence in the world around him. If one is not in the presence of the premise that renders the conclusion true with certainty, Toulmin argues that one is forced to make claims about the present by relying on past experience, and refers to this type of argument as substantial. Scott contends that such a rhetorical situation is not an argument at all if we are to understand an argument as that which produces a new conclusion that was previously unknown or accepted.

In the case of an analytic argument, no new truth is being disclosed that is not immediately apparent, so the situation at hand is not defined as an argument. Argument
or not, Scott contends that what Toulmin refers to as a substantial argument, the most common type of knowledge claim, involves a time shift. If one is to make a substantial argument, that person must be making a time shift to justify their conclusion from a true premise. Without a time shift, the person making the claim is simply reporting on the present situation, not making an argument that is capable of being contested. Such a position poses a problem: If we cannot rely on analytic arguments alone, and we must rely on time-contingent premises to support our conclusions, there must exist some eternal truths that serve as true premises in each and every instance. Such a position would mean that outside of the analytic argument, each instance of a time-contingent premise necessitates either an acceptance of substantial arguments (contextual) or a rejection based on a rejection of the reasoning from the premises or the grounds on which the premises stand. Either way, the problematic makes a case for a critique of rhetoric based on truth. Faith, social norms, and previous experience often serve as truth in colloquial usage, but Scott argues that the term is not appropriate in the discussion of rhetoric, for if a thing is to be true, there is no need to argue for its existence. Ultimately for Scott, there exists a lack of certainty in rhetoric and the world writ large.

Another effect of the epistemic turn in rhetoric is the increased attention on ethics, agency, and contingency. The third presupposition that epistemic rhetoric seeks to subvert is that of the ethical implications of universal truths: If truth equals certainty—and is discovered, not assembled—agentive responsibility is limited in the actualization of the rhetorical situation:

If one can act with certainty of truth, then the effects of that action can be viewed as inevitable, that is, determined by the principle for which the individual is simply the instrument; the individual acting is not responsible for the pain, for example, that his actions may bring to himself or to others. The man who views
himself as the instrument of the state, or of history, or of certain truth of any sort puts himself beyond ethical demands, for he says, in effect, “It is not I who am responsible?” (Scott, 1967, p. 15)

The a priori conception of truth from the agent’s perspective provides an ethical bypass to the effects of action taken in light of the supposed truth. Kantian duty provides the temporally transcendent striving toward the supreme law to act according to the categorical imperative and excuses the agent from responsibility. This duty is an effort to conform to a higher, a priori, reason-guided truth. The supreme law is that which supersedes all other positive laws and where duty is done in accordance with the supreme law, not the particularities of positive law. Positive law is historically contingent: that which strives toward the supreme law can never be misguided, yet can fail to become an actualized instance of expressing the supreme law. Acting in accordance with that which must be done from duty, in accordance with an a priori truth, places the weight of the consequences away from the agent. But if positive law serves to be in accordance with the supreme law, acting in accordance with positive law necessitates an a priori truth that is being disclosed. The “instrument of the state, or of history, or of certain truth of any sort” is she who acts in accordance with that which existed before, and will continue to exist after, she exercises action that discloses truth (Scott, 1967, p. 15). Disclosing truth necessitates communication, and communication allows for miscommunication that can distract from actualizing the proposed action of a truth, but not its status as truth. Acting in accordance with the supreme law as duty to disclose truth alleviates agentive responsibility.

While the lack of responsibility and the creation of a supreme law are comforting, such a position is untenable with a lack of certainty concerning truth. To not know that
one’s actions correspond to an a priori truth places the responsibility squarely on one’s shoulders for the results of the actions taken. Such a position highlights the contingency of acting ethically: As there is nothing outside of societal norms for the basis of an ethical decision, the agent finds herself focusing on the past in an effort to make correct ethical decisions while recognizing that insofar as she can be expected to be responsible, she is indeed responsible for the consequences of her actions. If truth is created in the rhetorical situation, the certainty of acting according to a universal truth or supreme law is necessarily absent, and the responsibility now lies with the agent and her actions. What was in the past a contextually and ethically sound truth might not prove to be so in the current situation. While highly influential, Scott’s work was unwelcomed by some rhetoricians and rhetorical theorists. I will discuss these critiques of the epistemic turn.

**Criticisms of Epistemic and Big Rhetoric**

Before turning to a discussion of the influence of Scott’s work on the relationship between rhetoric and philosophy and the work of Michael Hyde and Robert Craig Smith, I address one of the main critiques of the expansion of contemporary rhetoric, epistemic rhetoric, and globalized or Big Rhetoric, ushered in by Kuhn, Scott, and the Project on the Rhetoric of Inquiry.

While much can be written about the beneficial effects of epistemic rhetoric, some of the effects can be understood in a negative light. Aside from further intensifying the rejection of objectivity as described by Latour, epistemic rhetoric overlooks some of the fundamental aspects of classical rhetoric. For Whitson and Poulakos (1993), the triumph of epistemic rhetoric denigrates an essential part of rhetoric, the appeal to the bodily senses and aesthetics:
Aesthetic rhetoric focuses on the human body as an excitable entity, an entity aroused by language. Inasmuch as the ears can be bribed, the nostrils infiltrated, the skin raised, the tongue stimulated, and the eyes stopped at the surface of things, the task of aesthetic rhetoric is to speak words appealing to the bodily senses. In carrying out this task, it substitutes the sounds, the smells, the textures, the flavors, and the sights of the world with a sensual language surpassing them. By contrast, epistemic rhetoric concentrates on one part of the body, the brain, as an entity capable of thoughts and calculations when prompted by language. Assuming that the brain thinks through certain mechanisms, the task of epistemic rhetoric is to produce a language catering to them. In executing this task, it substitutes the world’s inner logic with a cerebral language said to correspond to it. (p. 141)

The epistemic turn in rhetoric reduces the import of bodily senses in favor of the rational and reasoning organ: the brain and its attendant cognitive functioning. Furthermore, epistemic rhetoric follows epistemological procedures whose authority appears to obtain outside of the audience: unquestionable standards of knowledge. Aesthetic rhetoric, appealing to the bodily senses, measures success by the visible response of the embodied audience. Whitson and Poulakos critique epistemic rhetoric for its lack of transcendence beyond the already established knowable. Epistemic rhetoric appeals to the always-already as it can be measured, leaving out the exploratory power of aesthetic rhetoric. Epistemic rhetoric might persuade, but it lacks beauty.

Although the new era of rhetorical studies ushered in by Scott is highly influential, not everyone in the academy viewed the epistemic turn favorably. Schiappa (2001) addressed these objections as the political critique of Big Rhetoric, defined as the fear of a discipline that is too broad to be effective. This critique covers three areas: definitional (if rhetoric is everywhere, it is nowhere); evaluative (Big Rhetoric contributes to weak scholarship); and political (without a clear disciplinary history and
discrete identity, the discipline of rhetoric is threatened). Big Rhetoric could threaten rhetoric as an institution.

The most influential critique of Big Rhetoric comes from Dilip Gaonkar (1993). Gaonkar opposed the new shift in rhetorical inquiry and the epistemic turn. Gaonkar provides a critique that cuts across issues related to the academy and the role of rhetoric, as well as the utility of viewing rhetoric as epistemic. In his essay “The Idea of Rhetoric in the Rhetoric of Science,” Gaonkar (1993) argues that epistemic rhetoric pushes the field into territory that is unsustainable, both politically (academy) and intellectually (scientists have no need for the language of rhetoric). In *Rhetorical Hermeneutics: Invention and Interpretation in the Age of Science*, a volume of collected essays containing Gaonkar’s critique and the responses of his critics, editors Gross and Keith (1997) comment on the expansion of rhetoric:

In this, Wingspread [and Pheasant Run] recognized that, as of 1971, rhetoric’s globalization was not generally recognized. It is hard to doubt that the globalization of rhetoric is now complete. How quickly it has happened—how easily rhetoric has become a universal hermeneutic! In his essay, Gaonkar teaches us to reflect on the consequences of our disciplinary haste. (p. 5)

The consequences of globalized rhetoric, according to Gaonkar, are that rhetoricians have such disparate and diverse objects of inquiry, and the field has expanded to the point of reducing its ability to do much of any value. The conception of rhetoric has been expanded to the point as to make it virtually disappear. Furthermore, a rhetoric that is everywhere is inevitably nowhere. This expansion does damage before it disappears: the loss of disciplinary identity and any semblance of a coherent theory; meaninglessness as the result of plasticity; the misuse of the term “rhetoric” so that new practitioners cannot
understand its motivations. Gaonkar (1993) poses the question of globalized rhetoric as follows:

Is it possible to translate effectively an Aristotelian vocabulary initially generated in the course of “theorizing” about certain types of practical (praxis) and productive (poiesis) activities delimited to the realm of appearances (that is, “public sphere” as the Greeks understood it) into a vocabulary for interpretive understanding of cultural practices that cover the whole of human affairs, including science? (p. 261).

Gaonkar uses science as the exemplar of an area of rhetorical inquiry that will actualize the above-mentioned downfall of rhetoric as a respected and useful academic discipline. By focusing his attention on the bastion of objectivity, Gaonkar’s critique forces those within the academy and the general public to question the validity of the humanities in the purported era of overreaching.

Gross and Keith (1997) recognize this strategy in the introduction to Rhetorical Hermeneutics: Invention and Interpretation in the Age of Science: “If rhetoric can prove itself of explanatory value in the inner sanctums of physics and chemistry, its claims to wide scope become genuinely cogent” (p. 6). Whether or not this has succeeded is left unanswered. But one can argue that while rhetoric may not have penetrated physics and chemistry enough to satisfy even the most resistant, the explanatory power of rhetoric has proven itself in a vast number of areas.

Effects of “Critique of Globalized Rhetoric.”

While Gaonkar uses highly provocative language to articulate his position on the epistemic and globalized turn of rhetoric in the late 20th century, the effect of his words can be measured in the response they received. Gaonkar’s position of critique caused a controversial stir within rhetorical studies and beyond. As evidenced by the publication of Rhetorical Hermeneutics (Gross & Keith, 1997), containing the original piece by
Gaonkar that criticized globalized rhetoric, and the response of his critics within rhetorical studies, Gaonkar’s essay provoked a discussion about the epistemic turn of rhetoric and the concept of globalized rhetoric in the latter half of the 20th century. Gaonkar forced rhetoricians to ask important questions and give an account of their disciplinary identity. Whether or not his respondents found his argument convincing, Gaonkar’s critique disrupted the status quo of contemporary rhetorical studies.

Another effect of the “critique of globalized rhetoric” extends beyond the in-house controversy of rhetoric’s scope. Gaonkar’s claim that globalized rhetoric transcends its proper boundaries can be seen in the attacks against the humanities from outside. There is an increasing skepticism of humanities programs as being superfluous to a contemporary higher education curriculum. This skepticism is evidenced in the “Sokal Affair” that extended far beyond the academy’s confines and increased skepticism of the humanities (specifically lit-crit and cultural studies) in the popular media. After the physicist Sokal published a mocking essay in the literary criticism journal Social Text, the critique of the humanities—and more specifically, deconstructionism/postmodernism—hit the road. Sokal’s surprise attack prompted interest from the popular media, resulting in numerous interviews, book deals, and discussions concerning the relevance of the humanities in the contemporary academy (Ihde, 2009). Although not directly related, one can see the connections between Gaonkar’s critique of globalized rhetoric and the attacks leveled against the humanities from outsiders. As reduced funding for humanities programs in higher education becomes an increasing problem, the fallout from the expansion of rhetoric becomes more than a theoretical and methodological debate within the academy.
The expansion of rhetoric, including epistemic rhetoric, reinvented the scope and role of mid- to late 20th-century rhetoric. The effects of these changes in rhetorical theory are ambiguous regarding their interpretation as beneficial or detrimental, depending on who is making the argument and their theoretical predisposition. Is controversy an indicator of positive change? Is a critique of the humanities from outside of the academy serving as a wake-up call to the expansion of rhetoric, a positive effect of the epistemic turn? Either way, it has effected change in the trajectory of rhetoric, the political discourse surrounding the state of the humanities, and the response to the notion of objectivity. Responding to the notion of objectivity, the uncovering of universal truths, and the creation of meaning is where the import of contemporary rhetoric lies. I now return to the work of Hyde and Smith and the relationship between rhetoric and continental philosophy.

Rhetoric and Continental Philosophy

Another effect of epistemic rhetoric in relation to interdisciplinarity was to further bridge rhetorical theory with continental philosophy, specifically phenomenology. The influential journal *Philosophy and Rhetoric* was established in 1968 at The Pennsylvania State University. Several important essays in rhetorical studies were published in this journal, including “Words Without Things: Toward a Social Phenomenology of Language” (Deetz, 1973), “Toward a Hermeneutic Phenomenology of Communication” (Hawes, 1977), and “Hermeneutics and Rhetoric: A Seen But Unobserved Relationship” (Hyde & Smith, 1979). Phenomenology has occupied a contentious relationship to continental philosophy since its inception in the late 19th century with the work of Husserl and has struggled for acceptance as the shift away from idealism became
ubiquitous. The historical and thematic connections between phenomenology and rhetoric offered fertile ground for inquiry. I will now discuss Hyde and Smith’s work on rhetoric, ontology, and Husserlian phenomenology.

In Michael Hyde and Craig Smith’s (1979) essay “Hermeneutics and Rhetoric: A Seen But Unobserved Relationship,” the authors articulate a relationship between hermeneutics and rhetoric that is circular and interdependent. Hyde and Smith’s position on the relationship between rhetoric and hermeneutics can be described as rhetoric and hermeneutics, as opposed to rhetoric as hermeneutics. I will describe this distinction in greater detail in the next section, but for now, the difference can be understood as rhetoric functioning in a complementary fashion with hermeneutics (and) or rhetoric functioning as a hermeneutic (as).

Hyde and Smith articulate a relationship between hermeneutics and rhetoric that is circular and interdependent. The authors contend that if rhetoric is the “telos of interpretation, the rhetoric is essential to understanding” (Hyde & Smith, 1979, p. 363). Rhetoric constitutes the linguistic possibilities of the subject, providing the fore-structure used in interpretation; that which can be interpreted and how it is interpreted is a product of rhetoric. To interpret phenomena, the “fore-structure” constituted by rhetoric must exist for the interpretation to occur. Heideggerian fore-structures are inherited through culture from birth. The fore-structures can be understood as a set of prejudices that constitutes our ability to interpret and understand in a certain way. Fore-structures are how Heidegger describes the “experiential form of understanding” (Hyde & Smith, 1979, p. 351). For Hyde and Smith (1979), “the development of understanding is a function of how human beings ‘work-out’ the linguistic possibilities that constitute and are projected
in understanding. An act of interpretation is structured by the understanding (i.e., those linguistic possibilities) that it, it-self, is” (p. 351). We interpret the world based on our understanding, and our understanding is made possible by the linguistic opportunities that our culture provides. We interpret new things based on these pre-existing fore-structures. There are three parts that constitute the fore-structure: fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception, which Heidegger refers to as the “hermeneutic situation” (Hyde & Smith, 1979, p. 351). Fore-having consists of the linguistic possibilities that a culture makes available before interpretation. Fore-having exists before any act of interpretation, and changes over time as one interacts with the world. Intersubjective thought and communication requires a foundation that exists prior to the possibility of interpreting in a way that makes sense in a given culture. One cannot interpret without an understanding of what is in the realm of possibility for understanding without the fore-having.

Fore-sight is when one appropriates the linguistic possibilities made available to them from a culture at a specific time. Here, a member of a culture appropriates what is possible to create a perspective and point of view when interpreting. Again, this appropriation occurs before any act of interpretation and is specific to a cultural-temporal historical moment. Fore-sight can be understood as utilizing fore-having for a specific interpretation of a discrete phenomenon. Fore-conception is the way that anyone categorizes and structures the linguistic possibilities before any act of interpretation. It is employing the possibilities for understanding of the fore-having, directed to an object of interpretation of the fore-sight, and categorizing these possibilities based on the method suitable and appropriate for interpretation within a given culture (Hyde & Smith, 1979).
Hyde and Smith (1979) argue that the “experiential form of understanding” or fore-structures, “is linguistic by nature” (p. 351). This experiential form of understanding can be expanded to include materials and non-linguistic symbols if we accept the premise that we make meaning in the world through objects and communication outside of language. As discussed in Chapter 2, objects and materials have consequences for human-to-human communication and interaction, as well as human-to-object communication and interaction. I will address the material form of rhetoric later in this chapter, but for now I will argue that material rhetorics can offer ways to understand how rhetoric works as a material by acting as a force in the world once present, or how materials are rhetorical by acting on the person, creating meaning through their materiality, and interacting with other texts, material and linguistic. Carol Blair (1999) argues that

rhetoric is not rhetoric until it is uttered, written, or otherwise manifested or given presence. Thus, we might hypothesize as a starting point for theorizing rhetoric that at least one of its basic characteristics (if not the most basic) is its materiality. (p. 18)

Therefore, materials can constitute a fore-structure. A material fore-structure, similar to a linguistic fore-structure, employs what materials mean, and what you can and cannot do with them for understanding and interpretation. One is born into materials, along with language, and uses them to interpret and make meaning from the world around them. Similar to linguistic fore-structures, material fore-structures are specific to different cultures at different times and change as one interacts intersubjectively with the world.

Hyde and Smith’s (1979) claim that “rhetoric underlies knowledge even at the intrapersonal level” (p. 363) is supported by their interpretation of Husserl’s (1970) anti-
Cartesian tendencies in *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*. For Husserl, consciousness is understood as the intending subject’s relation to the life-world or “hermeneutical situation and fore-structure” (Hyde & Smith, 1979, p. 353). Intending toward an aspect of the world necessitates a fore-structure that is specific to the subject-position. Rhetoric constructs the fore-structure that allows a specific intending-toward to occur. In the intending-toward, the motivation for fulfillment is anticipated by the fore-structures that privilege one intending-toward over another. Rhetorically constituted fore-structures allow for knowledge claims to be made at the intrapersonal level before an intersubjective claim occurs. Rhetorically constituted fore-structures must precede all knowledge claims, thus providing a strong relationship between rhetoric and philosophy. But which fore-structures? How can a knowledge claim be made that is ontologically grounded in our fore-structures, articulated through rhetoric, and useful for the perpetuation of a horizon? Now I turn to an analysis of how we come to access the world around us, using Hyde and Smith’s work, to connect further the roles of epistemology, ontology, rhetoric, and hermeneutics.

The question of subject-agency and the limits of phenomenological horizons becomes salient at the intersection of Husserlian epistemology and hermeneutical rhetoric. For Hyde and Smith, phenomenology provides the necessary tool to describe the ontological base for the relationship between hermeneutics and rhetoric. Husserl’s epistemology makes explicit the need for *Evidenz* to fulfill the meaning-intention of cognitive processes. But, meaning-intention presupposes evidence; it is the making use of a fore-structure (ontological) that allows for an instance of knowledge to be described as such. Understanding the intentional-acts of objects as fulfillment (epistemology) is only
possible if the fore-structure (ontological) provides the necessary linguistic capabilities to interpret them as such. Again, fulfillment is not a result of the real and intentional object disclosing the “essence” of its actualization, existentially. The intentional object of acts is never fully disclosed, it recedes as an object, and adequate fulfillment is rarely attained due to the relationship between the ontological fore-structure of the intending subject. Hence, the problematic is as follows: If, in any given context, the same language is used and can establish intersubjective relationships that have already constituted a particular contextual fore-structure, how does the disclosure of the intentional object of acts exhibit a different “givenness”? And, furthermore, how does this constitute a knowledge claim? Limitations on adequate fulfillment relate directly to the limitations on human understanding, or the finitude of the human condition. Tradition provides the context to gather information on the limits of human understanding, or the fore-structures that permit certain fulfillments to actualize. From the understanding of tradition as fore-structure, Joseph Kockelmans (1994) provides a map for navigating the limitations of tradition as ontology:

A Man belongs so deeply to his tradition that the tradition’s pre-judgements much more than his own judgements are the historical reality of his being. Before these pre-judgements can ever become an epistemological problem, they are an ontological fact, necessarily connected with his standing in a tradition which has already been handed down to him and on the basis of which he understands whatever he is able to understand. Thus the basic problem of our finite understanding is not a matter of discarding our pre-judgements in order to begin absolutely, but to distinguish between legitimate pre-judgements and pre-judgements which obstruct understanding. The tradition is not to be rejected, but to be taken up in such a manner that, by giving us access to our past, it continually opens up new possibilities for the future. (pp. 105–106)

Before we can problematize the epistemological and ontological limitations of tradition, we must take into account the ontological fore-structure of the epistemologically
grounded entering-into of a particular tradition. We are what we are, both at the level of epistemology as meaning-making as well as ontologically, or as capable of making meaning through tradition. But, again, what tradition? That which is given to us? For Kockelmans (1994), we belong more to our tradition than we belong to ourselves, thus implying a singular tradition, a singular ontological fore-structure that permits only certain epistemological claims to what is adequate fulfillment in any given intentional act resulting from a meaning-intention. This view of tradition both restricts the opportunities available for consideration of alternative realities and provides the framework for a multiplicity of traditions that one can choose from. Tradition is both the delimiting factor of making knowledge claims through Husserlian fulfillment and the call to craft one’s own epistemological framework around distinguishing between “legitimate pre-judgements and pre-judgements which obstruct understanding” (Kockelmans, 1994, pp. 105–106). If our knowledge claims are more than mere presentations of that which is the case, and are founded in the intended object through the rhetorical development of ontological fore-structures, we are open to the possibility of choosing traditions and fore-structures among a multiplicity of options.

The first function of rhetoric “is to ‘make-known’ meaning both to oneself and to others. Meaning is derived by a human being in and through the interpretive understanding of reality. Rhetoric is the process of making-known that meaning” (Hyde & Smith, 1979, p. 348). The relationship between rhetoric and interpretation, as stated before, provides the “structure of the concrete and hence is that which, when it is disclosed, provides the concrete with its conceptual clarification” (Hyde & Smith, 1979, p. 348). This structure of the concrete allows the Husserlian historical ego the
intentionality of this and not that, and for the contingent givenness an object (either as material or act). Furthermore, if one intends to an object through the intentional object of acts, the empty meaning-intuition can only be fulfilled in any adequate sense through the fore-structures that are ontological and rhetorically constituted. The meaning that is communicated is not of the real intentional object, rather the meaning-making of the intentional object of acts. The contingent nature of Husserlian epistemology opens the conversation between rhetoric, ontology, and hermeneutics. A salient point of contact is the historical ego issue: What does tradition mean if not the contingent use of a pre-existing linguistic structure that precedes the individual as an intending ego? Can we move beyond the linguistic structure to include material rhetorical artifacts that function in a similar way?

A multiplicity of tradition and the explicit understanding of the possibility, or necessity, of selecting traditions from among many allows for concomitant fulfillment of empty meaning-structures within a single subject. Husserlian epistemology, as the groundwork for the possibility of knowledge, is contingent on the historical context. Since the validity of a knowledge claim is not the correlation between the claim and the object, the historical context provides the fore-structure of tradition to make meaning through the act of intending. Furthermore, the historical context of an assortment of traditions from which one can choose provides the option for tailoring ones’ fore-structure, with the ultimate consequence of selecting the best approach to create the desired fulfillment. What is given to us as the possibility for interpreting the world around us creates the very beings that we are.
In a multiplicity of socially constructed traditions, one can create the very fore-structures that provide Husserlian *Evidenz* the fulfillment of a meaning-intention. The creation of the fore-structure for fulfillment of the meaning-intention constitutes meaning as knowledge. Applied to the world of architecture and design, the built environment can be assembled into providing a multiplicity of fore-structures. But, as in the case of employing a fore-structure that necessitates an awareness of the meaning supplied through various rhetorical engagements, the use of objects and material as constituting a fore-structure is not the same for each individual. Both language and objects, as rhetoric, must exist in a meaningful way prior to the creation of a fore-structure. Hyde and Smith placed rhetoric squarely in the production of meaning using the work of 20th-century hermeneutics and phenomenology.

While much of the scholarship that stresses the complementary relationship between rhetoric, hermeneutics, and our ability to comprehend the world focuses on language, Hyde and Smith’s work opens the door for a stronger connection to new materialism, material rhetoric, and the onto-anthropology of Peter Sloterdijk. By shifting toward the material and non-linguistic, the relationship between rhetoric and ontology moves beyond language to our built environments. I will turn to a discussion of material rhetoric.

**Material and Visual Rhetoric**

As the scope of rhetoric expanded following the publication of Robert Scott’s (1967) essay on epistemic rhetoric, the inclusion of non-linguistic rhetoric emerged. Kenneth Burke’s (1969) claim that in all verbal and non-verbal situations “the nonverbal element also persuades by reason of its symbolic character” (p. 172) set the stage for a
materialist and visual rhetoric. Early materialist rhetoric theory questioned the view of rhetoric as a means to determine whether a speech is good or bad. This questioning continued the trajectory established by post-World War II rhetorical theory that viewed rhetoric as complicit in the structuring of society and the constitution of the individual in society.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, materialist rhetoric is akin to many of the dominant themes in posthuman theory: the decentering of the human subject in social and environmental concerns, the position of non-human animals and objects as having greater force in the production of society, and the force of objects in constituting the human itself. Materialist rhetoric can be conceptualized in various ways, including rhetoric as an object that has a consequential force on society, and non-linguistic objects as an appropriate unit of analysis and theoretical exploration for rhetoric. Michael C. McGee’s (1982) “A Materialist’s Conception of Rhetoric” argued for rhetoric to be understood as an object, or a social and political force. McGee argued that a theory of rhetoric must be measured against that which it seeks to describe and analyze. McGee argued that rhetoric should once again work with the real and material world instead of functioning as a continued discussion about what has been said about rhetoric over the past 2,000 years. Other materialist rhetorical theorists have taken this call to a return to the real and expanded the scope of rhetoric to the material objects surrounding us. I will discuss Carol Blair’s and Barbara Dickson’s work and their materialist rhetoric essays in Rhetorical Bodies.

Rhetorical Bodies, edited by Jack Selzer and Sharon Crowley (1999), focuses on the question of the body and embodiment, as well as the treatment of non-verbal
communication, in rhetorical theory. Carol Blair’s work on material rhetoric focuses on
the rhetorical act as having a life of its own once produced by the rhetor and as being
introduced to the world. Her essay “Contemporary U.S. Memorial Sites as Exemplars of
Rhetoric’s Materiality” analyzes the intended and unintended consequences of war
memorials as rhetorical artifacts. Similar to Eco’s “open work of art” discussed in
Chapter 1 of this dissertation, Blair (1999) argues that, whether purposively or not, a
rhetorical artifact has multiple readings and functions as a consequence-producing object.
These artifacts can be linguistic and non-verbal, from memorial walls, to statues, or
written texts. Each instance of the rhetorical act coming into the world opens the
possibility for a variety of consequences, predicted and unforeseen.

For Blair (1999), a material rhetoric must go beyond spatial and satisfy two
criteria: “its capacity for consequence, and its partisanship” (p. 20). Blair argues that the
history of classical rhetoric privileges the conceptualization of rhetoric as a rhetor,
producing a text for a specific reason with a distinct goal. She contends that this does not
capture the full presence of rhetoric, as the introduction of a rhetorical artifact (linguistic
and non-verbal) has consequences that are produced after the artifact takes on a life of its
own.

Blair’s notion of the partisanship of rhetoric is in the possibility and
acknowledgment of the two possible outcomes: that which the rhetor intended and the
unforeseen consequences. The memorial sites and the written and oral texts have the
same potential for producing both intended and unintended consequences. Blair (1999)
provides five conceptual steps for assessing the materials as texts:

(1) What is the significance of the text's material existence? (2) What are the
apparatuses and degrees of durability displayed by the text? (3) What are the texts
modes or possibilities of reproduction or preservation? (4) What does the text do to (or with, or against) other texts? (5) How does the text act on people? (p. 30)

Blair admits that these are not the only important questions to ask when assessing the materials as texts. Still, they serve to open the discussion about the artifacts and material rhetoric.

In “Reading Maternity Materially: The Case of Demi Moore,” Dickson (1999) uses her conception of material rhetoric to analyze a pregnant and nude photograph of Demi Moore alongside written texts from maternity magazines to uncover how women inscribe these texts onto their bodies. Dickson (1999) defines material rhetoric as “a mode of interpretation that takes as its objects of study the significations of material things and corporal entities—objects that signify not through language but through their spatial organization, mobility, mass, utility, orality, and tactility” (p. 297). This definition makes explicit the connection between spatiality and the arrangement of objects in our environments, and how these artifacts inscribe corporeal bodies. Our bodies are socially produced, and the spaces we inhabit play a central role in what will be produced.

Dickson’s approach to material rhetoric is concerned with what it can do, not what rhetoric is as an object.

Barbara Dickson (1999) argues that the purpose of material rhetoric is to examine “how multiple discourses and material practices collude and collide with one another to produce an object that momentarily destabilizes common understanding and makes available multiple readings” (p. 298). Dickson’s conceptualization of a material rhetoric seeks to better understand the relationship among who we are as people, how our bodies are culturally inscribed, and the spaces that we occupy. The non-verbal materials, like the
multiplicity of fore-structures in Hyde and Smith’s ontological rhetoric, are open to interpretation and have myriad ways to be read by an audience. For Dickson, material rhetoric provides a tool of analysis to provide greater agency in resisting the dominant or hegemonic inscription in our lived environments. It

seeks invention in the improvisations of the bodily writings; agency, in the ways these improvisations resist hegemonic structurings of the body and so change the relationships between these corporal bodies and the structures they inhabit; and persuasion, in the ways these changed relationships more fully satisfy the desires of the acting body. (Dickson, 1999, p. 298)

We inscribe our bodies with materials that do not signify through language, and material rhetoric is the lens to better understand humans’ social production in their embeddedness. Dickson’s material rhetoric serves an additional function. It “reads for the ways persons inscribe on their corporal bodies the culture that produces them and that they mutually produce” (Dickson, 1999, p. 298). The object of analysis is the rhetorical artifact of the lived-in space as well as the way that the culture that produced that space has written its meaning on the body of the audience. Both Blair and Dickson introduce the material object as a rhetorical artifact of inquiry and focus on the potential for a multiplicity of alternative readings and the production of unforeseen consequences. Material rhetoric is compatible with many of the major themes of posthumanism, postanthropocentrism, and the questioning of what constitutes a human.

**Sloterdijk and Contemporary Rhetoric**

As discussed in this chapter, contemporary rhetoric can be understood as the expansion of rhetoric. Sloterdijk’s spherology and domestication theory can be understood as an expansion of ontology to the intimate connection between the human and spatiality, and objects and materials situated in space. As stated in the introduction to
this chapter, Sloterdijk is not a rhetorician. However, his theoretical work on space, dyadic ontology, and domestication is concerned with the use of space to create the idea of the human, and the sharing of that meaning. This focus goes beyond what an object communicates; it participates in the constitution of the human, a demarcating of animality from the human. For Sloterdijk, and contemporary rhetorical theorists such as Hyde, Smith, Dickson, and Blair, the objects and spaces that we inhabit, move through, and interact with have the consequence of shaping the human and creating meaning.

Sloterdijk’s use of the spheres to address our relationship to being with others in a variety of contexts is an ontology that functions as primordial. It is primordial in the sense of the originary dyadic coupling of the fetus-placenta, as described in *Bubbles* (Sloterdijk, 1998, 2011), yet continues to function as a domesticating process throughout the life of the human. This process is an attempt to return to the dyadic ontological state of the originary, and the means of performing this process are afforded by what is available to the human at a given time, what means of interpreting the world are given, and what objects and structures are imbued with specific meaning. For Sloterdijk, it is more than just the space and the return to the originary dyadic coupling; it is the meaning that each of these objects and others are imbued with and what meaning they communicate. In *Globes*, Sloterdijk (1999b, 2014b) addresses the macro-spherology that addresses the concept of the expansion of our understanding of what contains us, what protects us, and the limits of our understanding of the scope of the world. What objects can protect us from the outside and one another, while providing a sense of connection to those who provide our constitution as humans? For Sloterdijk, this contingency of being is rhetorical. In *Foams*, Sloterdijk (2004, 2016) addresses the historical moment of being
with others yet separated. We are separated through the very things that connect us (single-unit apartment complexes). These objects give a sense of meaning through their messaging of domestication, immunization, and the hope for a return to the originary state of dyadic coupling.

Sloterdijk’s focus is on the objects that we spend our time with, and in the materials that are both imbued with meaning and create meaning. In the context of a material rhetoric, Sloterdijk’s objects and special relations are rhetorical in the sense of being imbued with meaning and of being a force in this world. Here we have the connection of Sloterdijk to Hyde and Smith (1979), Blair (1999), and Dickson (1999). Dickson’s connection between spatiality and the objects in our environments, and the relationship to how these artifacts inscribe corporeal bodies, is the writing of the human in Sloterdijk’s sphereological spatiality and domestication. Our bodies are socially and spatially produced, and the spaces we inhabit play a central role in what will be produced. For Blair and Sloterdijk, objects are the rhetorical non-verbal materials, similar to the multiplicity of fore-structures in Hyde and Smith’s ontological rhetoric. They are open to partial interpretation by an audience. Each object and space provides a variety of meanings based on the audience and their fore-structures.

Our fore-structures allow us to interpret the world around us, and those fore-structures are both material and linguistic. For Sloterdijk, the world around us, the physical space we inhabit, is imbued with meaning, communicates that meaning, and has a force of its own. Spatiality is both meaning and a way of making meaning. We use objects to better understand spatiality, and those objects communicate with us. We construct reality in the same way that we construct our inhabited spaces, our interior
design, and our shared spaces. This construction is a shared enterprise of meaning-making and making known that meaning to those we share our spaces with, including those who constitute us as human or exclude us from the category. In the next chapter, I analyze specific objects that are intimately connected to spatiality, the constitution of the human. I will analyze how the meaning of who is included and excluded from what it means to be human is created for different audiences.

**Conclusion**

Treating space and objects as rhetorical artifacts allows for a fuller understanding of why the embeddedness of a human subject is—returning to Sloterdijk’s posthumanism—a constitution of the human through the very spaces that she is born into and creates. Hyde and Smith’s view that rhetoric is ontological and that we are born into fore-structures that allow us to interpret and make sense of our lives is compatible with a materialist rhetoric if we, as discussed previously, take fore-structures to include built structures.

One of the major themes in contemporary rhetoric addressed in this chapter is the importance of context; Sloterdijk’s spherology and the theories of domestication, auto-domestication, and hominization are focused on spatio-temporal contexts. To many contemporary rhetorical theorists, the locality of the context and environment will differ greatly in time and place. The universality of a single rhetoric or a single conception of the human is impossible. For Sloterdijk, we are products of our environment, our dwellings, our interior design, and that will be different for each co-isolated individual. In the following chapter, I conduct a visual and materialist rhetorical analysis, grounded in Hyde and Smith’s (1979) ontological rhetoric, of hostile urban architecture and design,
including barbed wire. Through this rhetorical analysis, the relationship between Sloterdijk’s posthumanism, material and ontological rhetoric, and the role of our built environments will be further explored.
Chapter 5. Material and Visual Rhetorical Analysis of Hostile Urban Design

Introduction

The history of contemporary rhetoric paved the way for a turn toward analyzing objects of the world, beyond language, as rhetorical artifacts. The expansion of rhetoric following the Second World War ushered in a greater emphasis on context, audience, continental philosophy, and materiality in the scope of what could be considered in the purview of rhetoric. Having discussed the connections between epistemic rhetoric, Hyde and Smith’s ontological rhetoric, material rhetoric, and the posthumanism of Peter Sloterdijk, I now turn to a rhetorical analysis of specific artifacts in our constructed environments.

Visual rhetoric shares many of the same analytic and theoretical interests and concerns as material rhetoric. Visual rhetoric, a branch of rhetoric connected to Barbara Dickson’s and Carol Blair's material rhetoric, is a “term used to describe the study of visual imagery within the discipline of rhetoric” (Foss, 2005, p. 141). The first call for a formal rhetorical analysis of visual imagery came in 1970 at the National Conference on Rhetoric. Participants called for an expansion of rhetoric to include subjects that have in the past been outside of the scope of rhetoric, including the non-discursive and the non-verbal. Furthermore, they argued that rhetorical analysis “may be applied to any act, process, product, or artifact” that “may formulate, sustain, or modify attention, perceptions, attitudes, or behaviors” (Sloan et al., 1971, p. 220). Using Hyde and Smith’s ontological rhetoric, I extend this list of the effects of rhetoric to include the constitution of the human. If architecture can affect our behavior and perception, it can affect our
conceptualization of being human, given the role of fore-structures in providing the possibilities for creating meaning and communication. Our built environments, as non-verbal or nondiscursive objects, are rhetorical through and through.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Douglas Ehninger (1968) proposed a definition of rhetoric where humans “may influence each other’s thinking and behavior through the strategic use of symbols” and included architecture, as well as art, dance, and dress, as appropriate artifacts (p. 3). Placed in the context of the material rhetorical theorist’s emphasis on the unintended consequences of rhetorical artifacts once presented to the world, the “strategic” in his definition is of major import for the following rhetorical analysis. What elements of architecture and design can be considered purposive in the context of how humans will perceive and, subsequently, be constituted through their interaction with their lived-in space? As a result of the unintended consequences of the effects of architecture and design on the constitution of the human and in conversation with Sloterdijk and posthumanist theories, can we extend this conceptualization of visual and material rhetoric to include the objects themselves as the agents of affect? Although visual and material rhetoric are two distinct forms of rhetorical theory and analysis, I argue that they are complementary. In this dissertation, I use a visual rhetoric method to analyze the perceptual rhetorical features that are a part of material rhetoric’s focus on the physical objects we engage with daily. I discuss how they are related and the reasons for using both in the following analysis later in this chapter. I begin by discussing visual and material rhetoric as a method of analysis, using the methods of Sonja Foss, Valerie Peterson, and the material rhetoric of Carol Blair, situated in the ontological rhetoric of Hyde and Smith.
Architecture and design are rhetorical and contribute to the constitution of being human. As discussed in Chapter 2, posthumanism is a network of related theoretical concepts that argue for the continued contingency of the concept of human. I have argued that Sloterdijk is a posthumanist who contends that “we have always been posthuman,” or that we are always in the process of domesticating ourselves as human. For Sloterdijk, space, structures, and design help bring us back to our originary dyadic-ontological state and separate the animal from the human. I have argued that contemporary rhetorical theory, especially Hyde and Smith’s ontological rhetoric, helps us to understand how we are born into structures, both linguistic and physical, that have been imbued with meaning. Rhetorical theory allows us to explain how we interpret and use the meaning that we are given from our interactions with architecture and design to understand and make claims about what is and is not human. I now provide a rhetorical analysis of hostile urban architecture and design to ground these ideas in specific examples from our lived experience. I argue that we are born into meaning that comes from our lived spaces. We use that meaning to interpret the world of architecture and design that we are embedded in, and that meaning is part of what we use to separate the human from the non-human.

**Visual and Material Rhetorical Analysis Method**

Combining Sonja Foss’s (1982, 1986, 1992, 1994, 2005) approach to visual rhetorical criticism and Carol Blair’s (Blair, 1999; Blair et al., 1991) material rhetoric, I use a method of visual and material rhetorical criticism to analyze architecture and design through the lens of Hyde and Smith’s ontological rhetorical theory. Specifically, I analyze hostile urban architecture as both an explicit and implicit design.
Valerie Peterson (2001) identifies three ways that visual objects and imagery have been analyzed rhetorically. The first approach is the rhetorical analysis of visual metaphors. This approach analyzes visual metaphors created to induce a visual object in the audience’s mind and is also referred to as “verbal-visual rhetoric” (Peterson, 2001). The second approach identifies how images influence our understanding of oral arguments (Morello, 1992). The third approach is a traditional rhetorical analysis of visual objects, where visual texts were seen as designed to influence belief and action, as having objectives, and as having creators with motives and intentions who made design choices relevant to particular audiences. Traditional rhetorical theory was used to assess the speaker (artist and/or creators), speech (visual artifact), audiences of the artifact, and audiences’ receptions of the artifact. (Peterson, 2001, p. 20)

Although the third approach privileges the visual object, it is only suitable for visual objects that have purposively been created to persuade. As our environment becomes more visual, the need to treat visual objects and imagery as rhetorical is pressing.

Sonja Foss’s (1982, 1986, 1992, 1994, 2005) approach to visual rhetorical analysis has consistently provided a suitable method for rhetorical analysis. Stated simply,

> visual rhetoric, like all communication, is a system of signs. In the simplest sense, a sign communicates when it is connected to another object, as the changing of the leaves in autumn is connected to a change in temperature or a stop sign is connected to the act of stopping a car while driving. To qualify as visual rhetoric, an image must go beyond serving as a sign, however, and be symbolic, with that image only indirectly connected to its referent. (Foss, 2005, p. 144)

Visual rhetoric highlights the communicative aspect of visual images and objects. A visual image or object must have three components to be considered visual rhetoric: It
must be symbolic, involve human intervention, and be presented to an audience for the purpose of communicating with that audience (Foss, 1994). For Foss (2005), “visual rhetoric constitutes a theoretical perspective that involves the analysis of the symbolic or communicative aspects of visual rhetoric” and moves beyond treating the visual object as the same discursive rhetoric (p. 145). This method of visual rhetoric approaches a visual object either deductively or inductively. The deductive approach treats visual objects the same as a language-like symbol and utilizes discursive rhetorical constructs to understand visual objects. The inductive approach works from the presupposition that visual objects are unique and distinct from verbal discourse. Inductive visual rhetoric seeks to generate theories about visual objects as rhetorical that are unique to visual objects (Foss, 1994).

Three steps are involved in analyzing visual rhetoric, whether inductively or deductively (Foss, 1994). The first is a description of the nature of the visual object. This step involves describing the \textit{presented} elements, or the denotative elements that are visible (a gold frame around a baroque painting) and the \textit{suggested}, or connotative, elements of the object. The suggested elements are the concepts, ideas, and themes that a visual object would likely imply (the gold frame meaning wealth and power). The next step is identifying the function of the visual object or the action that the image communicates and how it acts upon the viewer. The third step is the evaluation of the image. This involves an analysis of whether or not the visual object achieved its goal. The critic may employ some or all three steps in a visual rhetorical analysis (Foss, 1994, 2005).

I will use an inductive method to focus on the unique qualities of the visual and material object of architecture, incorporating some of Valerie Peterson’s (2001)
methodological critiques of Foss’s approach. Peterson argues that Foss’s approach to the image or visual object places interpretation before perception, ignoring the importance of how an image can be understood as a certain thing in the first place. Furthermore, she argues that visual rhetorical analysis should begin with a description of the perceptual properties, such as colors, textures, edges, light, and motion (aesthetics), before discussing the image’s function.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Carol Blair’s and Barbara Dickson’s material rhetoric provides a theory of the material as rhetorical, and a theory of rhetoric as material. Rhetoric as material conceptualizes rhetoric as a force in the world, and material as rhetorical conceptualizes materials in the world as being rhetorical artifacts, having the ability to affect our perceptions, attitudes, and, as I argue, our constitution of being human. For Blair (1999), a material rhetorical analysis must focus on the effects on the mind and the body of the audience: “Rhetoric’s materiality constructs communal space, prescribes pathways, and summons attention, acting on the whole person of the audience” (p. 48). The material rhetorical analysis must consider how the entire person, and their very being as a person, is impacted by the rhetorical artifact of the material environment.

I now return to Carol Blair’s list of five conceptual questions that she argues can be used to better understand material rhetoric. Blair’s (1999) five conceptual questions offer a heuristic for analysis of materials as rhetorical:

(1) What is the significance of the text's material existence? (2) What are the apparatuses and degrees of durability displayed by the text? (3) What are the texts modes or possibilities of reproduction or preservation? (4) What does the text do to (or with, or against) other texts? (5) How does the text act on people? (p. 30)
The ideal situation for using Blair’s material rhetorical analysis method—the five conceptual questions—would be to observe both the structure or artifact, and those who interact with the spaces (Schuster, 2006). In Dickinson and Aiello’s (2016) revised material rhetorical analysis methodology, the authors argue for a “being through there” approach to analyzing the materiality of urban environments (p. 1,295). Dickinson and Aiello (2016) state,

Our cities, our bodies, our things, and our selves are performed together, a performance that is moving (in all the richness of that word). Methodical movement through the city offers the soundest and in some senses most empirical—or at least “experimental” … way of studying the city as communicative. (p. 1,296)

The methodical movement through the city is different than an analysis of images of the city. Although the movement through the city and analysis of images of the city are different approaches, the authors state that analyzing images of the city, or “communication about the city,” is not always a worse approach than being there in the city (Dickinson & Aiello, 2016, p. 1,301). Different material rhetorical artifacts under analysis will require a different set of practices. As the being there approach to material rhetorical analysis requires a visual component, I synthesize the visual and the material through images to better understand how these artifacts under analysis work as communicative objects.

I use images of the materials that I will analyze, as opposed to direct observation, for the following reasons: (a) Implicit hostile urban architecture and design is purposively constructed to deter its target audience, making it difficult to observe interactions; (b) explicit hostile urban architecture and design (barbed wire) functions as a separating, or herding, material technology that fades into the background for some target audiences,
making their interactions challenging to observe; (c) other target audiences of explicit hostile urban architecture and design (prison populations and those living on other sides of national borders) are not easily accessible for observation; and (d) I am conducting this rhetorical analysis in a global pandemic, thus making direct observation a challenging task. That being the case, I rely on images of the material rhetorical artifacts that I analyze, as well as discourses surrounding the rhetorical objects. I use three of Blair’s heuristic questions in conjunction with Foss’s method of visual rhetorical analysis of hostile urban architecture and design. By doing so, I am able to analyze images of the material rhetorical artifacts, addressing both their visual and material elements.

Using Hyde and Smith’s (1979) conceptualization of rhetoric, I look at architecture as a material rhetorical artifact that shifts the role of architecture from a mere communicative object to an ontological fore-structure that allows the human to make meaning and constitute itself in an environmental and dyadic ontological way. For the human animal (ontic) to separate itself from the danger of nature and move into the clearing of the ontological, the structure or literal dwelling functions as the primordial act of meaning-making and communicating humanness. We are born into the fore-structures of domestication, auto-domestication, and architecture, and our built environments are the literal dwellings we use to constitute ourselves. Architecture communicates being human and provides fore-structures through the various iterations of architectural movements, styles, and functions.

Architecture, as a rhetorical artifact, provides the fore-structure to interpret oneself and the world as human and non-human. Our structures provide a significant and rhetorically powerful component of our lives. Through a material and visual rhetorical
analysis of different examples of architecture and urban design—grounded in the ontological rhetorical theory of Hyde and Smith—I explicate the role of architecture as it relates to our journey of hominization, dehumanization, domestication, and auto-domestication of the human subject.

**Visual and Material Rhetorical Analysis**

**Hostile Urban Design**

Architecture is more than the construction of buildings and spaces. One cannot understand the impact of architecture through a simple description of the parts that make up the whole, or the whole as an integrated entity. Le Corbusier (1970), one of the leading architects of the 20th century and a founder of the modernist International Style of architecture, said, “Space and light and order. Those are the things that men need just as much as they need bread or a place to sleep” (“Le Corbusier, Pioneering Architect, Is Dead,” 1965, para. 4). Le Corbusier combines the material and perceptual aspects of architecture to demonstrate its primary power as being visual, material, and a necessary element for the existence, or being, of the human. Architecture and design are something that we experience, move in and around, use to communicate with and through, and use for survival. Le Corbusier (1970) often emphasizes the beauty of architecture, focusing on space, light, and order. The same experiences—movement and communication—can also be found in the context of the violent, the cruel, and the hostile spaces that we inhabit. In the same way that depriving humans of bread or a place to sleep dehumanizes them, a space that functions to communicate humanness in a particular cultural context is a necessary part of our existence. Not all spaces communicate the same meaning, and some spaces are designed to eliminate access to the basic necessities of survival, bread,
and protection. In order to theorize the role of architecture in domestication, auto-
domestication, and the perpetuation of hominization, I analyze hostile urban architecture
and design. But first, I introduce the concept of hostile urban architecture and design.

When writing about hostile urban design, Ella Morton (2016) stated, “Think your
city doesn’t like you? You’re right” (para. 1). But that depends on who you are and your
experience of the material artifacts used to construct your lived space. Hostile urban
design and architecture is the purposive use of architecture and urban design to deter
certain groups of individuals from using and congregating around specific built
environments. Often, hostile urban design is seamlessly integrated into the urban
landscape and appears to be an aesthetic choice. For example, strategically placed
bollards appear as decoration, yet prohibit vehicles from gaining close access to buildings
or driving along sidewalks (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

*Bollards used to prevent access to property*

*Note:* (McKay, 2010)
Although the origin of the term is contested, Cara Chellew (2021) from the Global Suburbanisms Project at York University describes the purpose of hostile urban design as “an intentional design strategy that targets people who use or rely on public space the most - like people who are homeless and youth - by restricting behaviours they engage in like sleeping in public and skateboarding” (para. 4). The persuasive design is intended to regulate bodies and their activities. Chellew (2019) further defines hostile urban design and architecture:

Defensive urban design, also known as hostile, unpleasant, or exclusionary architecture is an intentional design strategy that uses elements of the built environment to guide or restrict behaviour in urban space as a form of crime prevention, protection of property, or order maintenance. It often targets people who use or rely on public space more than others, like people who are homeless and youth, by restricting the behaviours they engage in. From benches specially designed to prevent lying down to the addition of elements that are meant to deter skateboarding, forms of defensive design vary according to the behaviour it is intended to restrict. (p. 19)

Chellew cites the specific forms that hostile urban design most commonly takes and the activities that it is designed to deter (sleeping, skateboarding), and the populations that are often targeted (youth and the unhoused). Other examples include sloped or slanted benches, which make sleeping all but impossible (see Figure 2); armrests on public benches, which also eliminate the possibility for sleeping (see Figure 3); a mosquito device mounted outside a store in Philadelphia used to deter youth from loitering by the use of audio frequency (see Figure 4); street dividers, often in the form of large potted plants that direct pedestrian flow to eliminate sidewalk shelter for the unhoused (see Figure 5); large boulders placed in public spaces to reduce the ability to sleep under bridges, underpasses, and other public spaces (see Figure 6); and specific hues of blue and pink lights in public restrooms and public areas used to deter intravenous drug users.
and youth from congregating (the color emphasizes blemishes and makes locating veins impossible) (see Figure 7).

**Figure 2**

*Sloped bench to prevent sleeping*

*Note. (Sun, 2007)*
Figure 3

*Bench with armrests to prevent sleeping*

*Note.* (Lerman, 2011)
Figure 4

A mosquito device mounted outside a store in Philadelphia used to deter youth from loitering

Note. (Sunmist, 2018)
Figure 5

_Potted plants placed on the sidewalk to deter the unhoused from sleeping outside_

*Note.* (Leung, 2018)
Figure 6

Boulders to prevent outdoor sleeping

Note. (Graywalls, 2020)
This list of examples is not exhaustive but contains some of the most common forms of hostile urban architecture and design (Chellew, 2021; Hidden Hostility DC, n.d.). Hostile or defensive design, as described above, is aimed at controlling populations within a specified space by targeting those demographics with unique design and architectural qualities. Those target populations have already been dehumanized in a larger societal court of opinion, in the legal system, economically, and by the medical establishment. It intends to control the behavior of the dehumanized.

The regulated bodies and their attendant activities are the material objects of determent and discrimination, but the embodiment of the human being is only part of the regulatory practice. When the design of public spaces controls the bodies of the inhabitants, the regulation of the very being and humanness of those bodies is constituted. I will return to the persuasive element of this design as rhetorical in the context of Blair’s
and Dickson’s conceptualization of material rhetorical artifacts as having a life of their own that is not always the intention of the rhetor or creator. I will also return to the idea of the regulatory and determent practices of hostile urban architecture as affecting more than just the body.

James Petty (2016) conceptualizes *hostile urban architecture* as a new feature or form of urban securitization. Beginning in 2014 with controversy in London over “anti-homeless spikes,” he argues that a new wave of attention was brought to the architecture and design that urban environmental planners, both public and private, used to “design out” specific demographics, identities, and populations for demarcated public and private places (Petty, 2016, p. 68) (see Figure 8).

Figure 8

*Spikes used to prevent the unhoused from sleeping and finding shelter*

Note. (Williams, 2014)

Petty (2016) refers to hostile urban architecture as a term that “loosely describes various structures that are attached to or installed in spaces of public use in order to
render them unusable in certain ways or by certain groups” (p. 68). The London anti-homeless spikes are one-inch high metal studs placed intermittently in the alcove of a luxury apartment building in South London (Petty, 2016). The purpose of these spikes is clear—to deter “rough sleeping” or occupancy by the unhoused. “Rough sleeping” is the practice of sleeping by the unhoused in places that are not considered residences or dwellings, and that often lack adequate shelter from the environment. Rough sleepers are considered the most salient and noticeable manifestation of homelessness.

The explicit act of designing individuals out of public spaces reflects on more than just the issue of securitization. It speaks to our society’s feelings about homelessness and the use of space to define specific demographics and populations, or, in the language of Sloterdijk and Hyde and Smith, the very constitution of the human being. Petty (2016) argues that after the controversy of the London spikes, the existence of the spikes raised awareness and prompted debates over “urban space, homelessness and an apparently new and novel feature in the urban landscape: ‘hostile architecture’” (p. 68). In addition to raising the above-mentioned issues surrounding hostile architecture, the controversy highlighted attitudes toward the unhoused in our environments. The issue of homelessness would appear to be antithetical to a modern society, and according to Kramer and Lee (1999), “[T]he existence of the ‘homeless’ tells us very much about the society that gave birth to such a designation” (p. 136). The response to the London anti-homeless spikes was one of public outrage. But the controversy went beyond the question of right and wrong; it spoke to deeper understandings of the role of space in our society and what it communicates.
In *Callous Objects*, Robert Rosenberger (2017) analyzes hostile urban architecture using a post-phenomenological approach. Using the post-phenomenological theory and method of Don Ihde (2009, 2012), Rosenberger explores anti-picking garbage cans, fences, signage, and benches to argue that each urban technology has a larger political agenda under the surface. Through their purposive design and a reconfiguration of potential uses by their audiences, these technologies play a role in the anti-homeless ideologies of contemporary societies.

Rosenberger’s post-phenomenological approach analyzes the affordances that each technology and regulatory policy gives, and who has access to these affordances in the context of regulatory and determent practices of hostile urban architecture and planning. Rosenberger’s definition of hostile urban architecture and design is similar to that of Chellew (2019, 2021) and Petty (2016), but his work uncovers the multiplicity of uses that are regulated with the knowledge of how specific demographics—often unwanted by political and economic forces—will employ them. Anti-homeless policy and hostile urban architecture work in tandem to create determent practices that, on the surface, do not always appear to be strategically or knowingly connected. This always present material technology of hostile urban architecture is often unseen by many inhabitants of public urban spaces because they are not the intended audience. In an interview on anti-skateboarding designs, a variant of hostile urban architecture, the architectural historian Ocean Howell stated that “other people might not see it, but you will. The message is clear: you are not a member of this public, at least not of the public that is welcome here” (Andreou, 2015a, para. 7). In an article in *The Atlantic*, Rosenberger (2014) states,
The point is that it’s easy to imagine a non-skateboarder walking by skateboard deterrents every day and taking no notice of them at all, remaining entirely unaware of the social role of these devices. Such a person would be oblivious to the power relations at work in their surrounding environment. These dynamics are especially important in the case of homelessness. (para. 5)

While I am not analyzing anti-skateboarding hostile urban design in this analysis, the same can be said of most other forms of implicit hostile urban architecture and design. The implicit forms of hostile urban architecture and design are invisible to some. For others, those to whom the implicit meaning is visible, the message is clear: You are not welcome here. The implicit nature of some forms of hostile urban architecture, only made visible through functioning deterrent, communicates that you are the target audience and that you are undesirable in this public space. Hostile urban architecture and design will have three types of audiences and attendant messages: first, an intended audience with a particular and direct message; second, an intended audience with a multiplicity of unintended messages and consequences; and third, an unintended audience with a multiplicity of unintended messages and consequences. Although there are multiple audiences for hostile urban design and architecture, each audience that interacts with this form of design will be in some way affected:

The psychological effect is devastating [for those the architecture is designed against]. . . . Ironically, it doesn’t even achieve its basic goal of making us feel safer. There is no way of locking others out that doesn’t also lock us in. The narrower the arrow-slit, the larger outside dangers appear. Making our urban environment hostile breeds hardness and isolation. It makes life a little uglier for all of us. (Andreou, 2015a, paras. 7, 27)

This multiplicity of consequences and intended/unintended audiences changes based on the types of hostile urban architecture and design produced—both explicit and implicit forms. The explicit and implicit distinction results from having particular audiences:
What is implicit and goes unnoticed for some people, such as anti-homeless benches used for sitting, will be explicit for other demographics, the target audience. Other times, the explicit form of hostile urban architecture or design, such as barbed wire, is readily accessible and visible to all people. But it holds different meanings for each audience based on their rhetorical fore-structures. It asks: What does this type of environmental object mean to you based on who you are as a person? I am using the term “implicit hostile urban architecture and design” to refer to anti-homeless spikes, anti-homeless/anti-rough sleeping benches, specific lighting used to deter intravenous drug users, etc. Also, I am using the term “explicit hostile urban architecture and design” to refer to barbed wire. Not everyone can see the anti-homeless bench as an artifact of hostile urban design, but everyone can read the presence of barbed wire.

The use of design to regulate public spaces has a long history, but contemporary conceptualizations of hostile urban design, hostile architecture, hostile design, or defensive architecture date back to the 1960s with architect Oscar Newman and criminologist C. Ray Jeffrey (Chellew, 2019). Newman’s (1976) defensible space is a theory on community design and the relation to criminology and social control, which he defined as “a residential environment whose physical characteristics—building layout and site plan—function to allow inhabitants themselves to become key agents in ensuring their security” (p. 4). Newman argues that criminal behavior decreases in geographic and architectural spaces that are monitored, surveilled, and controlled by the very inhabitants of those spaces. Additionally, territorialism, or the feeling that a space is sacred, should be protected; it instills a sense of ownership by the inhabitant and is the highest form of crime prevention. Newman’s theory is that good design aimed at allowing occupants the
ability to surveil their neighbors and to control psychogeography through movement and function plays a key role in getting said occupants to perform the policing labor that defensible space requires. The design not only makes the surveillance possible, but it also motivates the community to keep a watchful eye on the intrusion from outsiders. Figure 9 is an example plan for utilizing this type of crime prevention, the design of the street in relation to the houses. This plan demonstrates the carefully constructed approach to eliminate places of hiding while making explicit the division between public and private. Coupled with criminologist C. Ray Jeffery’s (1971) Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED), which was an expanded version of Newman’s approach, the modern era of hostile design and architecture was born.

**Figure 9**

*Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design plan*

*Note.* (National Institute of Building Sciences, 2018)
This approach to urban planning sought to counter the “broken window” concept, which posits that the material decline of urban living spaces leads to increased crime (Newman, 1976). In addition to a pride of ownership, or pride of inhabiting approach, strategic urban design was believed to increase the likelihood of exposing criminal activity, thus deterring it pre-emptively. The process of pre-emptively deterring criminal activity through a form of indirect surveillance and observation finds its roots in Jeremy Bentham’s panopticon prison design, analyzed in Foucault’s (1995) *Discipline and Punish*.

As described by Foucault, the panopticon design is a metaphor for the modern surveillance society that seeks to render the population obedient and docile. For Foucault, the panopticon is more than a building; it is a method for control and the subjectification of humans. We see this thread through Jeffery’s CPTED plan for territorial reinforcement. It is important to note that the defensible space theory and the work of C. Ray Jeffery did not make explicit attempts at being hostile. These theories provide one historical reference for the development of what is now known as hostile urban design and architecture. The goal was to target all criminal activity through design and planning, which signaled the possibility of a failure at control through other means of explicit surveillance and crime prevention techniques. Jeffery’s and Newman’s approaches to urban design and surveillance aimed to regulate the potential behaviors of a population by directing their bodies through walkways and demarcated spaces, making certain activities impossible, and eliminating spaces for certain bodies to be present. Design of the space allows for a design of the population and what they are capable of being.
Implicit Hostile Urban Architecture: The Camden Bench, Anti-Homeless Spikes, and Anti-Intravenous Drug Use Blue Lights

Implicit hostile urban designs are materials and design practices intended to go unnoticed by their unintended audiences. They are designed to communicate meaning to the intended audience by reducing the affordances offered by the object. I now turn to the specific forms of implicit hostile urban architecture and design that I analyze in this chapter. Here, I group certain examples of explicit hostile urban architecture and design together for the purposes of this analysis, introducing the background of each example. Then I work through Foss’s steps for analysis, followed by a material rhetorical analysis using Blair’s five conceptual questions for analysis.

I will now describe the examples of implicit hostile urban architecture and design beginning with the three steps of Foss’s visual rhetorical analysis—describing the elements of the rhetorical artifacts; identifying the function of the visual or material object, or the action that the image communicates, and how the image acts upon the viewer; and finally evaluating the visual and material artifact. The second step is important for the objects under analysis, as the function of hostile urban architecture and design is radically different for intended and unintended audiences.

Analysis: Camden Bench. Aside from the infamous anti-homeless spikes that were brought to widespread attention through the London anti-homeless spikes controversy in 2014, the Camden Bench (see Figure 10) is the most recognizable example of hostile urban design and architecture.
As Swain (2013a) writes, “Behold the Camden Bench. This pale, amorphous lump of sculpted concrete is designed to resist almost everything in a city that it might come into contact with” (para. 1). This concrete bench is designed to eliminate the possibility of anything but sitting, and for a short time at that. At first glance, the public bench does not seem to convey or capture the meaning intended by its designers:

Homelessness should never be tolerated in any society and if we start designing in to accommodate homeless then we have totally failed as a society. Close proximity to homelessness unfortunately makes us uncomfortable so perhaps it is good that we feel that and recognise [sic] homelessness as a problem rather than design to accommodate it. (Heinzerling, 2020, para. 4)

Here, Factory Furniture, the creators of the Camden Bench, explain the bench’s purpose under no uncertain or ambiguous terms: The function of the bench is to not accommodate homelessness, and any attempts to accommodate homelessness are a sign that we have failed as a society. Failing to acknowledge the larger systemic issues that contribute to
homelessness, the designers admit that “close proximity to homelessness makes us uncomfortable” (Heinzerling, 2020, para. 4). According to their website, Factory Furniture advertised the Camden Bench as a piece of street furniture “aimed at addressing the kinds of anti-social and criminal behaviour that typically plague city centre benches,” such as rough sleeping, drug dealing, bag theft, and vehicle security barrier (nak dednindza, n.d.).

Considered a “masterpiece of unpleasant design” (Swain, 2013b, para. 10), the Camden Bench was first installed in Camden, London, in 2012. Subtle in its design, with sloping concrete surfaces, the bench appears at first glance to be an unnoticeable piece of modern urban design, without any nefarious subtext. That is until you attempt to sleep on it, spraypaint it with graffiti, or move it. Weighing two tons, the Camden Bench cannot easily be moved, thus making it useful as a vehicle barricade. It is coated with a special paint that resists spraypaint. It lacks crevices, making it impossible to hide drugs. Unlike some other forms of hostile urban architecture and design, the Camden Bench can be used by all of the population, both the intended and unintended audience, for one purpose. While both audiences can use it, the hostile meaning will remain invisible to the unintended audience, even while the bench is being used.

Although not comfortable, one can sit on the bench for short periods, offering pedestrians respite in an urban environment. But the sloped surfaces eliminate the possibility for sleep, thus sending a message for the unhoused that, in conjunction with anti-homeless laws, you are not welcome here. To the unintended audience of the hostile urban architecture message, the Camden Bench directs our attention to its immediate use as a place to sit. For the intended audience, the bench directs attention to the restricted
multiplicities afforded by urban design—the option for sleeping has been eliminated through subtle shifts in the flat plane of the surface of the bench. The bench communicates what a sign fails to do—that the unhoused are not just discouraged from seeking shelter and a place to rest, but also that they are outright denied these basic needs. Anti-homeless laws, discussed below, make it illegal to sleep outside in public space—the Camden Bench makes it impossible. The Camden Bench operates symbolically to communicate that one is unwelcome here. It communicates functionally to preclude the possibility of a subversive reading of the symbolic message. This form of hostile urban architecture and design both places the intended audience in increased danger (lack of surfaces to sleep on) and stigmatizes them through the symbolic message of being undesirable.

The unintended audience—those who do not need to sleep outdoors in public spaces—are presented with a rhetorical artifact that communicates a certain aesthetic. The solid concrete block is standard design practice for much modern urban design and architecture, so the symbolic design is merely read as a matter of architectural taste. The hostile meaning, intended for the unhoused, has no impact or effect on the unintended audience. At worst, the unintended audience can find meaning in a waste of public funds on such distasteful design. Functionally, the Camden Bench can be read as a place to sit for the unintended audience. The need to find a place to sleep, or shelter, in public places engenders a fore-structure that allows certain demographics and audiences to create meaning beyond the interpretive abilities of other audiences.

**Analysis: Anti-Homeless Spikes.** While London’s anti-homeless spikes came to the public’s attention in 2014, they are not unique to that area (see Figure 8). These
spikes can be found around the world but are ubiquitous in New York City. Between 2017 and 2019, the NYC comptroller found 193 violations from privately owned public spaces that were audited. These violations include the use of spikes to deter sitting and anti-homeless spikes (Hu, 2019). The spikes, or small metal studs, are strategically placed around areas where unwanted urban populations and unhoused people often seek shelter. Approximately one inch in length, anti-homeless spikes reduce or outright eliminate the possibility of rough sleeping. Anti-homeless spikes represent a more explicit form of implicit hostile urban design and architecture. Like the spikes used to deter pigeons from nesting in urban areas, anti-homeless spikes are less likely to be perceived as a human deterrent—that is, until it is brought to the public’s attention. Unlike the Camden Bench, the anti-homeless spike’s aesthetic element is deemphasized and only serves a hostile function. Yet, the object is not explicit to all those who interact with it in a public space. While modern design might not be pleasing to all audiences, the Camden Bench can be read as non-hostile, even if aesthetically distasteful. Even though not all audiences can access the hostile meaning of anti-homeless spikes, they are not designed to hide their hostile meaning.

**Analysis: Anti-Drug Use Lighting.** The final example of implicit hostile urban architecture and design I analyze is the use of blue lighting in public and private spaces to deter intravenous drug users (see Figure 7). Certain hues of blue light make locating veins difficult or impossible for intravenous drug users. When placed in public and public/private restrooms, such as public parks and Starbucks, the intended effect is to reduce spaces for people who use drugs to inject. Although the intended effect is to eliminate intravenous drug use, the results can vary.
While the goal of installing blue lights in public restrooms is to deter drug use, a 2013 study found that most intravenous drug users did not eliminate these spaces as possible injection sites (Crabtree et al., 2013). Although such spaces were not preferred by most of the study’s interviewees, the need for a fast injection site outweighed the negative consequences of injecting drugs using a blue light. Those effects are severe, including abscesses and damage to their veins (Winberg, 2019). The researchers argue that the use of blue lights might cause more fatalities due to the drug users’ need to find a private, or semi-private, injection site. In addition to drug users’ facing severe physical side effects and repercussions, the researchers claim that the implementation of blue lights has a stigmatizing effect on drug users through dispersing the injection sites to more public and visible locations. Daniel, one of the drug users interviewed for the study, stated that he valued privacy when injecting intravenous drugs because he felt he would be judged and “labeled as a junkie” (Crabtree et al., 2013, p. 13). Another interviewee, Bruce, emphasized the stigmatizing nature of drug use when privacy is not an option:

I’m invading their space and I’m doing something that’s not sociably acceptable. And I almost feel bad about it, felt bad about it, you know, a little bit. Had a child or something like that walked in and—I impacted their life somehow by them experiencing seeing me doing it or the after effects of me doing it, which has never happened, but if it did I would feel worse about it than I do. (Crabtree et al., 2013, p. 13)

The desire to remain invisible while injecting, yet retain a level of humanity, is noticeable here. The compromise between private and semi-private injection sites (public restrooms) allows the drug user to satisfy the needs of the addiction while simultaneously allowing for the privacy that is afforded to other, non-drug users. Daniel states, “[I]t’s private, you know what I mean. There’s one place where you go, just where you go in there, no one
else can. You know what I mean? You're okay in there ’till you come out, right” (Crabtree et al., 2013, p. 13). The public restroom affords the option of a public/private distinction for the drug user and provides a temporary shelter from the stigmatization of their drug addiction until they are forced to leave the restroom. Additionally, the semi-public space of public restrooms offers another source of safety for the drug user. In an NPR interview from 2019, Devin Reaves, a former drug user, stated,

People use in public spaces because they don’t want to die. A lot of people think that people who use drugs have some kind of death wish, and that’s not true. There’s a reason somebody uses in a public bathroom because if they do overdose, they’re hoping that they’ll be found. (Winberg, 2019, para. 8)

The blue light, when effective as a deterrent, places the intended audience (drug user) in a position to choose harm through injecting in the dangerous conditions, the stigmatization of injecting in a more visible environment, or the alternative of injecting in a private location and running the risk of dying from an overdose.

The blue lights force the drug user to remain visible as a stigmatized subject, or be forced to compromise safety by injecting in the dangerous conditions created by the blue lights or a more private location. The blue lights offer no options that seek to humanize the individual. The researchers argue that the use of blue lights to deter intravenous drug use by authorities and decision-makers who know the ineffective results and potentially deadly and stigmatizing consequences is a form of “symbolic violence” (Crabtree et al., 2013, p. 10). Purposive symbolic violence that stems from actual violence to the body has dehumanizing implications for the target or intended audience.
The unintended audience of anti-drug use blue lights—those who are not looking for a semi-public yet invisible place to inject drugs—will not understand the purpose and utility of the blue light unless it is pointed out to them. Although a different aesthetic than the normal yellow or white fluorescent bulbs found in most public restrooms, the blue light is in no way functioning rhetorically as a form of hostile architecture and design to the unintended audience. Unlike other public locations that utilize anti-homeless signage in conjunction with hostile urban architecture and design, the blue light is not advertised as such. When describing this form of hostile urban architecture and design to acquaintances, the immediate response is surprise and amazement. Although anecdotal, this response is indicative of the ability to communicate through material objects that have a multitude of meanings for various audiences.

The fore-structures that one uses to create meaning out of their world include the material and the linguistic. These three examples of hostile urban architecture and design—the Camden Bench, anti-homeless spikes, and anti-drug use blue lights—function rhetorically to create a multiplicity of meanings for the intended and unintended audiences. One of these meanings is that these are the normal materials needed for the proper functioning of an urban space. Another meaning is that you are not welcome here, even if it compromises your ability to survive. If you are not welcome here, you are different than the unintended audience. Coupled with stigmatization and public policy against certain demographics (unhoused, drug users), the meaning that one is different communicates that your life is not valued the same as the lives of others. I will now briefly discuss anti-homeless policy and its relation to hostile urban architecture and design in the context of meaning-making.
Hostile Urban Architecture and Design in the Context of Anti-Homeless Policy

The materiality of hostile urban architecture and design that is purposefully anti-homeless should be understood in the context of anti-homeless policy and laws. In conjunction with policy designed to criminalize homelessness and criminalize drug use, these design elements further reduce options for basic needs and the increased chance of death for their intended audiences. Anti-homeless policies are typically centered on rough sleeping in public spaces and, by default, raise issues of denying basic needs necessary for survival to the unhoused. Rosenberger (2017) writes,

Cities enact ordinances that target the behaviors of people living unhoused. Seemingly every aspect of daily life is subject to legal scrutiny. There are laws against sleeping, sitting, and lying down in public (sometimes referred to as ‘sit/lie’ laws). There are laws against loitering and camping. It is often illegal to sleep in a car. Cities may outlaw pushing shopping carts in public space. Hygiene standards may be enforced by law. Panhandling is a crime. Some cities even ban others from giving out food to unhoused people. (p. 35)

The efforts to criminalize unhoused sleeping—and poverty, in general—play a part in the larger rhetorical force of hostile urban architecture and design. Legally, the practice of unhoused sleeping is prohibited, thus communicating that participating in basic human needs outside of society’s norms demonstrates a lack of humanity. When anti-homeless laws are coupled with the functional constraints of the materiality of hostile urban architecture and design, the unhoused human is criminalized and effectively deterred from participating in basic human needs for survival. Like the panopticon surveillance strategies of CPTED, if the legal prohibitions on deviant behavior are too cumbersome for authorities and decision-makers to enforce effectively, the functional design of public space will eliminate unwanted behavior and activity from targeted populations, including basic survival needs.
A 2009 landmark legal battle among the city of Boise, Idaho; the Obama administration; the Department of Justice (DOJ); and the plaintiffs (comprised of unhoused individuals) set a precedent for the legality of unhoused sleeping. Boise laws criminalized sleeping outdoors at the time, and a group of unhoused individuals who were charged with violating the sleeping ordinances filed a complaint against the city for criminalizing being unhoused (Rosenberger, 2017). At that time, the number of unhoused individuals exceeded the available spaces at local homeless shelters, effectively forcing these individuals to seek shelter outdoors in public areas. Initially, the DOJ under the Obama administration intervened and sided with the plaintiffs, citing cruel and unusual punishment, which violated the Eighth Amendment. A judge later reversed the decision, claiming that the plaintiffs were no longer unhoused and that, moving forward, other, more suitable plaintiffs could bring the case to court again. A precedent was set. Cities could continue prosecuting individuals for sleeping outdoors, as well as for other activities that have been criminalized for the unhoused. Anti-homeless laws could be enforced. At the same time, unhoused individuals could file new complaints against these laws. That put the legal burden of proof for being denied shelter when they were cited for violating the anti-homeless ordinances on the unhoused individual. The requirement to prove oneself as a viable plaintiff adds another element to the difficulties of proving one’s humanity in a normative way. Rosenberger (2017) claims that the multiplicity of ways that the unhoused are criminalized to the point of extinguishment from the public eye is a “politics of invisibility” (p. 36). The desire to make invisible the physical manifestations of the unwanted public or societal problem of homelessness is a politics of dehumanization. In conjunction with the implementation of hostile urban architecture and
design, the unhoused, the unwanted, and the dehumanized are forced into a state of public
invisibility. Their humanity is symbolically and materially eliminated. Having covered
the description of the rhetorical artifacts, their meaning, and an evaluation of their
rhetorical efficacy, I now turn to Blair’s conceptual material rhetoric questions for
analysis.

Carol Blair’s Material Rhetoric: Implicit Hostile Urban Design and Architecture

Carols Blair’s list of five conceptual questions is a heuristic device to analyze
material rhetoric artifacts. In this analysis, I use three of her five questions. As stated
before, a material rhetorical analysis focuses on the effects on the mind and the body of
the audience: “Rhetoric’s materiality constructs communal space, prescribes pathways,
and summons attention, acting on the whole person of the audience” (Blair, 1999, p. 48).
The material rhetorical analysis considers how the entire person, and their very being as a
person, is impacted by the rhetorical artifact of the material environment. I now address
the first question: “What is the significance of the text’s material existence?” (Blair,
1999, p. 30).

For Blair (1999), this question addresses the following question: “[W]hat is
different as a result of the text’s existence, as opposed to what might be the case if the
text had not appeared at all?” (p. 35). The material significance of the Camden Bench,
anti-homeless spikes, and anti-drug use blue lights is the effect they have on the bodies
and the minds of the intended audience. Hostile urban architecture and design function at
the level of communicating meaning to the intended audience based on their fore-
structures—how they interpret the material object—and what the material affords and
eliminates physically in the space of interaction. Blair (1999) argues that materials have
an agenda-setting function. By entering into the landscape, hostile urban architecture and design direct our attention, albeit in different ways, for different audiences. In the case of the Camden Bench, the intended audience is drawn to its materiality as determent from rest and the meaning of not being welcome. The unintended audience’s attention will only be directed to the bench if they require rest and find an empty seat to sit. It creates the meaning of a welcoming, although uncomfortable, place to sit, not sleep. In the three examples described above, the material objects function to direct, deter, and ultimately alter the bodies of their intended audiences. If the Camden Bench did not exist, the possibility of sleeping for the intended audience would not be affected, but the meaning of not being welcome would be removed. This statement does not imply that hostile urban architecture is the only source of meaning for the intended audience that they are not welcome. Rather, this material artifact, through its existence, conveys this meaning explicitly to the intended audience.

For the unintended audience, the absence of the bench would mean that another, less hostile version would take its place, having no real impact on the meaning for that audience. The very existence of the Camden Bench communicates, in a larger system of anti-homeless material and linguistic fore-structures, that to be properly domesticated and ontologically grounded as a human, you should not be able to decode this message as hostile. The very act of understanding the existence of the object as hostile is the significance of the rhetorical object. The hominization of the unintended audience remains intact with or without the presence of the bench. The anti-homeless spikes and anti-drug use blue lights function in a similar way, although the anti-homeless spikes
offer no utility to the unintended audience. At best, the absence of the anti-homeless spikes would go unnoticed for the unintended audience.

Anti-drug use blue lights serve a material function for the unintended audience—providing light in public restrooms—but do not communicate hostility and would be unnoticed if replaced by white fluorescent lights. For the drug user seeking a semi-private public space to inject, the existence of the blue lights deters the stigmatizing act of injecting (or creates a dangerous condition for injection) and communicates the message of not being welcome. Both the Camden Bench and the anti-drug use blue lights exist to communicate not being welcome at the expense of the intended audience’s lives.

The dual messaging of the existence of the hostile urban architecture and design for the intended audience addresses Blair’s (1999) third conceptual question: “What does the text do to (or with, or against) other texts?” (p. 39). I only briefly address one aspect of the connection between hostile urban architecture and design and other texts, although, as Blair (1999) states, “the linkages among texts can be so varied and numerous” (p. 39). The most salient linkage is between the material artifacts of the hostile architecture and design, the stigmatization of drug users, and the anti-homeless laws discussed earlier. For the intended audience, these linkages are salient in creating the larger messaging and meaning of dehumanization through language, behavior, and materiality in society. The significance of the material existence of hostile urban design would not be as impactful if a larger system of deterring certain populations from the basic necessities for survival was absent. Camden Benches would still eliminate the possibility of sleeping in that location, but without the text of anti-homeless laws and policy, other options would be
available and the messaging of not being welcome—to the extent of creating harm to the body—would be absent.

Blair’s final question in the list of conceptual questions for a material rhetorical analysis is, in the context of hostile urban architecture and design, closely related to the first question concerning the significance of the existence of the material artifact. In the final question, Blair (1999) asks, “How does the text act on a person(s)?” (p. 47). Here we return to Blair’s (1999) argument that material rhetoric acts on

the whole person—body as well as mind—and often on the person situated in a community of other persons. There are particular physical actions the text demands of us: ways it inserts itself into our attention, and ways of encouraging or discouraging us to act or move, as well as think, in particular directions. (p. 46)

As stated before, hostile urban architecture and design are created to discourage specific bodily behavior: rough sleeping, skateboarding, intravenous drug use, etc. By directing the attention of the intended audience to the material object, the message of not being welcome discourages sleeping outdoors and, in the case of anti-drug use blue lights, the injecting of drugs in a semi-private public space. To find a place to rest and sleep, the intended audience’s attention is directed to where not to go. Through directing attention to where not to sleep, the material artifact directs attention to the messaging of not being wanted, and ultimately to the stigmatizing and dehumanizing context in which both the intended audience and the material artifact are situated. For the unintended audience, the material presence of the hostile urban architecture and design directs our attention to a place to rest or a public restroom to use. This unintended audience’s attention is not directed to the stigmatizing and dehumanizing meaning purposively created by the designers, architects, and decision-makers to the minds and bodies of the intended
audience. The hostile meaning of properly functioning implicit hostile urban architecture and design, through its material existence, should go unnoticed and be invisible to the unintended audience.

Collectively, the material presence of hostile urban architecture is part of a larger process of hominization, domestication, and auto-domestication that moves the human from the animality of the ontic to the rhetorically constituted ontological human if the material object’s hostile function and meaning remains invisible. The visibility of the object’s intended material utility and messaging of not being welcome functions as a form of limiting the hominization of the intended audience. Hostile urban architecture’s material existence is an anthropotechnology to keep some humans at the animal level, the pre-ontological.

**Explicit Hostile Urban Architecture and Design: Barbed Security Fencing**

Having analyzed implicit hostile urban architecture and design, or material rhetorical artifacts whose hostile meaning is visible for the target audience, I now analyze a form of explicit hostile urban architecture and design. Explicit forms of hostile urban architecture or design are readily accessible and visible to all people, but with a different meaning for each audience based on their rhetorical fore-structures. Explicit hostile urban architecture and design are read as hostile by all audiences, but what this type of environmental object means to each audience depends on who you are as a person. The form of explicit hostile urban architecture and design that I will analyze is barbed wire and its variation, concertina wire. I describe barbed wire as an example of explicit hostile urban architecture and design, beginning with the three steps of Foss’s visual rhetorical analysis—describing the elements of the rhetorical artifacts; identifying the function of
the visual or material object, or the action that the image communicates, and how the image acts upon the viewer; and finally evaluating the visual and material artifact. As with the implicit variation of hostile urban design and architecture, the second step is important for these objects under analysis, as the function of hostile urban architecture and design is radically different for different audiences. Following the analysis using Foss’s approach, I use three of Blair’s five conceptual questions for further analysis. I will now provide a brief history of barbed wire, beginning with its explicit usage for agricultural purposes and to keep unwanted human intruders from private property, through the contemporary version of concertina wire used in prisons and as border fencing today.

**A History of Barbed Wire**

Similar to barbed wire, but predating it and with an explicitly different purpose, the *cheval de frise* security fencing functions as a precursor to the multiplicity of meanings imbued in barbed wire. In 1822, White slaveholders in the antebellum South were on high alert following the thwarted attempt at a slave uprising in Charleston, South Carolina. Denmark Vesey, a former slave, was a leader in Charleston’s free and enslaved Black community. The alleged leader of a plot to kill local slaveowners, free their slaves, and sail to Haiti, Vesey was one of the first of the group to be arrested when the alleged plot was uncovered after being reported by two slaves. In a hastily performed court proceeding abandoning all due process, Vesey and five slaves were convicted and executed by hanging in the following days. Thirty others were eventually found guilty and executed (Higginson, 1861). Although the uprising was uncovered before it could be carried out, it struck fear in the minds of White slaveowners in the South.
In response to the uprising, a *cheval de frise* was constructed on the perimeter of wealthy slave-trader Miles Brewton’s home in downtown Charleston (see Figure 11) (Poston, 1997).

**Figure 11**

*The cheval de frise outside of the Miles Brewton House, Charleston, South Carolina*

*Note.* (Means, 2021)

The message is clear: The only way into this home is through the gate, by invitation. Otherwise, you are not welcome here. If you are not welcome here, you are not fully human. Two things should be noted here: First, at this time, the Three-Fifths Compromise of 1787 counted slaves in the U.S. as 3/5 of a person for purposes of determining legislative representation in the House of Representatives. Second, unlike barbed wire, which I will analyze later, the Miles Brewton fence was not a cheap alternative to wooden fencing. It required significant resources to construct the ominous *cheval de frise*. The spiked fence was a significant symbol of dominance and control, alerting
everyone to the horrific consequences of transgressing the dividing line between the White and the enslaved populations, the human and the less-than-human. Everyone was reminded of the contingency of humanity as they passed this fence and the consequences of interacting with the material in a way that transgressed one’s standing as a human. While the cheval de frise has a different history than agricultural barbed wire, the roots of hominization, domestication, and its purpose as an anthro-technology are connected. Whether barbed wire or the cheval de frise, security fencing is a visible reminder of the separation of humans from animals. Like many contemporary rhetorical theories, the meaning produced by the fencing is contingent upon context and the fore-structures of the audience. I will now discuss the history of barbed wire as agricultural fencing and security fencing.

A new form of security fencing with a multitude of purposes, barbed wire was issued its first patent in 1867. Joseph Glidden first developed the modern version in 1874. Glidden’s design uses the well-known construction of two wires twisted around each other, holding mill-ground protruding barbs in place. The sharp points were designed to serve multiple purposes. Before 1870, westward expansion in the U.S. did not involve much in the way of permanent settlements. This changed following the Civil War, as large cattle farms and agricultural properties were established in the expansive plains area. As the newly settled ranches grew in size, the need for a cheaper alternative to wood and stone fencing grew. Barbed wire could both restrain cattle and protect against encroaching cattle farmers at a fraction of the cost. Yet, it is important to note that only two of six barbed wire patents from 1867 addressed cattle deterrence: It was also
marketed for keeping others out. From its very inception, barbed wire was a highly politicized invention (Razac, 2002).

Glidden described the devil’s rope, as it was called by Native Americans in the area, in the following way: “It watches with argus eyes the inside and outside, up, down, and lengthwise; it prevents the ‘ins’ from being ‘outs’; and the ‘outs’ from being ‘ins’; watches at day-break, at noontide, at sunset and all night long” (Onion, 2018, para. 3). Those outs and ins were not merely spatial descriptors of the two sides of the wire; the earliest advertisements for barbed wire marketed it as a means of protecting against specific populations. In the *Glidden Barb-Fence Journal*, the idea that barbed wire could serve to keep out unwanted humans was made explicit: “The government should by all means adopt for this purpose the Glidden ‘Thick set.’ It makes the best ‘hog fence’ in the world. It might scratch the deviltry out of Geronimo and his gang” (Onion, 2018, para. 6).

Rebecca Onion notes that “farmers and ranchers interested in buying knew that they could keep Native Americans, black people, children, beasts owned by others, and poor people out with the new invention” (para. 6). For the ranchers, this knowledge came from both the barbed wire advertisements and the argument by analogy that if the wire were effective at providing a deterrent to cattle, it would work on other animals as well. Here, we have an early account of how barbed wire can function as a material artifact that communicates how different types of people should interpret its material existence: You are either a human being protected or something closer to an animal, needing protection against.

Years later, the poet W. H. Auden often referenced barbed wire in his work as a symbol of control and violence: “Barbed wire proclaims that you are kept out or kept in,
and, when you resist, it rips you. . . . Other barriers weather, crumble, and grow moss; wire merely rusts, and keeps its sting” (Cummings, 2019, para. 13). That sting remains present both physically and psychologically, occupying the space wherever it is visible. The rhetorical artifact of barbed wire, in this early iteration, acts on the audience by demarcating spaces as welcome and unwelcome, human and animal.

As the popularity and proven efficacy of barbed wire grew, the development of new and far more lethal versions proliferated, far removed from the ranches of the American West (Netz, 2009; Onion, 2018; Razac, 2002). With the advent of barbed tape, or razor wire, during World War I, the damage caused by barbed wire was eclipsed by the near-continuous line of galvanized jagged edges designed to stop the attempt at trespassing before it even began. The psychological effect of razor wire was far more severe than the taut lines of spaced barbs. Concertina wire, a variant of razor wire, gained notoriety in the war when traditional barbed wire fencing proved to be easily destroyed by enemy mortar fire and tanks (see Figure 12) (Netz, 2009).
Figure 12

*Barbed wire destroyed by tanks during World War I*

In the aftermath of the shellings, the remaining coils of barbed wire laid tangled across the battlefield. They proved far more difficult to pass and more psychologically intimidating than the taut lines that had existed before the battle (Razac, 2002). In contrast, concertina wire consists of large coils of razor wire that can expand like an accordion. It is often used in prisons for riot control, in military operations, at detention camps, and along international borders (see Figures 13–15). Although far more conspicuous than the examples that have received attention over the last few years, security fencing should be considered a form of hostile design or architecture.

*Note. (A Portion of the “Old Front Line,” 1917–1920)*
Figure 13

Closeup of concertina wire wrapped around barbed wire

Note. (cobalt123, 2006)
Figure 14

*Concertina wire at U.S. federal prisons*

*Note.* (Federal Bureau of Prisons, 2008)
Figure 15

*Concertina wire along the U.S.-Mexico border in Nogales, Arizona*

*Note.* (Bushell, 2019)

**Visual and Material Rhetorical Analysis: Concertina Wire**

Concertina wire is present in many locations, environments, and contexts around the world. There are many opportunities for different demographics to see concertina wire outside of being fenced in by it: prisons and jails seen along roads, public utility sites, construction sites in urban environments, police stations, and private businesses. Instead of using a straight line of intertwined strands of wire, concertina wire is a coiled wire with galvanized razor-like barbs, often stacked in large bundles (see Figures 13–15). Often used at the top of non-lethal security fencing, as well as in large bundles on the
ground, concertina wire appears as a violent and lethal obstacle course, only to be traversed out of desperation.

As images of concertina wire show, it can be used in significant quantities with multiple rows of fencing or a single coil. The numerous overlapping rows of concertina wire at borders and prisons (see Figures 14–15) are reminiscent of the technology’s origins in the First World War. The psychological effect of a mass of razor wire can have the intended effect of determent, without the use of larger stacks of coils. Whether stacked high in large looping strands or haphazardly placed, concertina wire provides a material barricade separating space, communicating unwelcomeness on both sides of the space.

In his history of barbed wire, Reviel Netz (2009) claims that the wire is contagious and that “by enclosing a space, [barbed wire] is thereby automatically present in all areas bordering on that space” (pg. 35). He continues, stating that “a topology does not distinguish ‘inside’ from ‘outside’—violence is projected in both ways” (Netz, 2009, p. 35). Netz’s usage of inside and outside in the topological sense is significant for the materiality of the barbed wire fencing—the environment that barbed wire is placed in has no sense of interior and exterior before the introduction of the material artifact. The existence of barbed wire is materially violent and introduces the interior/exterior divide into the audience’s minds. As the barbs protrude in to restrain and outward to prevent trespassing, a distinction between the audience’s relationship to the wire is established. Concertina wire establishes a multidirectional zone of potential and actualized violence, establishing and demarcating a hierarchy among its many possible victims. The
possibility of being a victim depends upon the audience’s access to alternative means of getting from one side to the other. Netz (2009) states that

[w]ith a closed line (i.e., a curve enclosing a figure), and the prevention of motion from outside the line to its inside, you derive the idea of property. With the same line, and the prevention of motion from inside to outside, you derive the idea of a prison. With an open line, (i.e., a curve that does not enclose a figure), and the prevention of motion in either direction, you derive the idea of a border. Properties, prisons, borders: it is through the prevention of motion that space enters history. (p. xi)

As a material rhetorical artifact, concertina wire limits motion through the very material of the coils. This materiality communicates the possibility or lack of opportunity for moving to the other side of the coil through other means. Most enclosures have gates, and those gates are only accessible by those protected by the concertina wire. Returning to the *cheval de frise* at the Miles Brewton House, we can also see the existence of a front gate (see Figure 16).

**Figure 16**

*Entrance gate to the Miles Brewton House in Charleston, South Carolina*

*Note.* (hdes.copeland, n.d.)
Yet, this gate, in spatial conjunction with the spiked security fencing, and with the understanding of the stark difference between who is welcome to use the gate and who is not, the anthropo-technicality is understood. If you are welcome to cross the line through the gate, you are welcome to the side of being human. If you are not welcome to cross the line through the gate, you are forced to risk your life on the spikes, and your survival is compromised. Barbed wire functions both as a physical barrier and as a rhetorical artifact through communicating the value of your life and whether or not you are, like the origins of barbed wire, a human or reduced to animality.

There are two audiences for barbed wire and concertina wire, and the material artifact is visible to both. Unlike implicit hostile urban architecture and design, concertina wire and barbed wire are rhetorically successful when they are visible to everyone. Similar to implicit hostile urban architecture and design, the material presence of explicit hostile urban architecture is part of a larger process of hominization, domestication, and auto-domestication that moves the human from the animality of the ontic to the rhetorically constituted ontological human. But in the case of barbed wire as an explicit form, the material object’s hostile function and meaning must remain visible for all audiences. The visibility of the object’s intended material utility and messaging of not being welcome or being welcome for others functions as a form of limiting the hominization of some audiences while aiding in the hominization of others. For those who see concertina wire as protecting them from others, the materiality of the protection aids in the hominization through creating a sense of security. For those who see concertina wire as protecting others from them, the materiality of the restraint from the process of hominization, or becoming human, aids in the dehumanization process. Hostile
urban architecture’s material existence is an anthropotechnology to keep some humans at the animal level, the pre-ontological, while functioning to promote the humanness of others.

**Carol Blair’s Material Rhetoric: Explicit Hostile Urban Design and Architecture**

As stated before, Carol Blair’s (1999) list of five conceptual questions is a heuristic device to analyze material rhetoric artifacts. In this analysis of explicit hostile urban architecture and design, I again use three of the five questions. Blair (1999) argues that a material rhetorical analysis focuses on the effects on the mind and the body of the audience: “Rhetoric’s materiality constructs communal space, prescribes pathways, and summons attention, acting on the whole person of the audience” (p. 48). The material rhetorical analysis considers how the entire person is impacted by the rhetorical artifact of the material environment. The first question, “What is the significance of the text’s material existence?” addresses “what is different as a result of the text’s existence, as opposed to what might be the case if the text had not appeared at all” (Blair, 1999, p. 35). The existence of barbed wire and concertina wire creates a material and cultural line in the sand, separating those who are protected and able to cross the line (through the gates) from those who are protected against and unable to cross the line. As a means of control, the sharpness of its barbs communicates violence that, if absent from the environment, would open space to all audience members. Netz (2009 states,

> The ubiquitous presence of potential force is indeed a universal of history. Force, brute or refined, is what societies and histories are built of. Note, however, that with the prevention of motion, force—in its most literal sense, of applying physical pressure to bodies—assumes a special kind of necessity. Quite simply, being in a place is something that you do with your body—nothing else—and therefore, to prevent your motion from one place to another, your body must be affected. The history of the prevention of motion is therefore a history of force upon bodies: a history of violence and pain. (pp. xi–xii)
Controlling movement in space is controlling bodies in space—what they can and cannot do, where they can and cannot go, and, what will happen if the control is tested and transgressed. The meaning created by the existence of the materiality of the rhetorical artifact of concertina wire is a spatializing of humanness and dehumanization. Its material presence separates and controls movement. This separation and control of movement divides the human (the domesticated) from the animal (the undomesticated that exists in a different space).

**Concertina Wire in the Context of Other Texts**

Blair’s (2009) third conceptual question—“What does the text do to (or with, or against) other texts?” (p. 39)—seeks to understand how the material rhetorical artifact under analysis is in conversation with other texts. As stated before, the number of linkages that each material rhetorical artifact, or any rhetorical artifact for that matter, will have is incalculable. I address two rhetorical text linkages in the context of concertina wire as border fencing (see Figure 15) and concertina wire used in prison control (see Figure 14).

As stated in the first chapter, in November of 2018, then-President Donald Trump, referencing border fences, told a group of supporters at a rally in Montana that “I noticed all that beautiful barbed wire going up today. Barbed wire used properly can be a beautiful sight” (Rogin, 2018, para. 6). This statement communicates two things worth noting: used properly and a beautiful sight, or utility visibility. What is the proper use of barbed wire? In this context, it is erected along the U.S.-Mexico border to keep unwanted and “illegal” foreigners from crossing into the United States. This conceptualization of barbed wire as beautiful only works in the context of a larger system of meaning
concerning immigration in the U.S. It is only beautiful when it explicitly and visibly fulfills its purpose. Although the dehumanizing rhetoric of immigration is not unique to our contemporary historical moment, the Trump administration heightened the use of anti-immigrant language and policy (Nagel, 2019).

From “anti-Muslim bans” to chants of “build the wall,” anti-immigrant rhetoric and policy create a larger system of meaning where the razors of concertina wire can be seen as beautiful to some audience members and dehumanizing to others. The connection between those considered unwelcome (the less than human) is seen in the language used to dehumanize this demographic and the policies created to deter or outright eliminate their ability to cross the line. In a secretly recorded conversation from January of 2018, Trump referred to Haiti, El Salvador, and African nations as “shithole countries” (Dawsey, 2018). In January of 2020, the U.S. Supreme Court supported the Trump administration’s ban on anyone entering the U.S. deemed likely to use public benefits. This decision was followed by the extension of the “Muslim ban” to an additional six countries, all considered economically disadvantaged (Liptak, 2020).

The Trump administration also announced the termination of the Deferred Action for Child Arrivals (DACA) program, thus eliminating the protected status of approximately 800,000 unauthorized immigrants that entered the U.S. as children (Nagel, 2019). Although by no means an exhaustive list of recent anti-immigration rhetoric and policy, the linkage to other texts demonstrates the material rhetorical power of the real and symbolic violence of concertina wire. Similar to the restricting of access to basic needs for survival found in implicit hostile urban architecture and design, the use of concertina wire on border fencing is symbolically and materially violent. One is either
deterred from access to safety and basic needs or forced to pass through the barbed wire. Border walls and concertina wire exist in the larger dehumanizing context of symbolic violence created through the texts of anti-immigration policy and dehumanizing rhetoric. Compared to the Camden Bench or the blue lights in the public restroom, barbed wire is significantly lacking in aesthetic beauty, at least for some people. Its beauty is in the eye of the humanized and domesticated, recognized as such, and that audience can choose to stay on one side of the fence.

Concertina wire used to control prison populations, like concertina wire used in border fencing, operates in a system of linkages with other texts. The parameter of the prison complex, lined with high-security fencing and concertina wire, communicates a strong message of control, symbolic and physical violence, and dehumanization. Like the cheval de frise surrounding the Miles Brewton House, entry into the prison is either through the fencing or through the gate. Given the larger context of prison guards and additional security measures, the options for using the gate are limited to one audience—the fully domesticated human working within society’s norms. The incarcerated prisoner is prohibited from using the gate, with the only other option being the jagged edges of the concertina wire fence. The message is clear: If you are protected against the use of the concertina wire, your separation and demarcation from the domesticated human can only be transgressed by risking life and limb. If you can use the gate, you are fully domesticated and in the fold of the norms of society—a human. The material rhetorical text of the concertina wire is linked with the use of prison guards and the entrance gate, as well as the larger system of meaning of incarceration in the U.S. In a poem published
by the *Prison Journalism Project* titled “Dark Halls,” inmate Ian Shaw (2021) describes his prison experience:

I live in a world

Surrounded by monsters.

Broken men.

Trapped behind barbed wire.

Imprisoned by cold concrete.

Nameless faces passing.

“How are you?”

Though the answer is known.

We are the Dead.

The lost and alone.

Wolves in sheep skin.

Sheep in wolves.

Another endless day

As loved ones pass away,

And forget our names.

I’m not alone.

Yet, I’m dying for a friend.

One day I’ll be free.

Can’t say that for many

Some will die in this place.

This house of pain.
Their ghosts to roam

Dark halls.

Shaw’s (2021) poem highlights the role of space, specifically the interior of the cold concrete and the barbed wire that creates an explicit barrier, as the material means of controlling “broken men” and “monsters” in a “house of pain” (lines 2, 3, 20). The materiality of the prison—the concrete walls and barbed wire—links with the larger text of the dehumanized incarcerated being. Shaw is the audience of barbed wire that society is being protected against. The dehumanizing message of the rhetorical artifact of hostile urban architecture and design is clear in his messaging. In the confines of the barbed wire, the inside that is separated from the outside through material and symbolic violence is the dehumanized, the “broken,” the “monster.”

In another essay published by the Prison Journalism Project, inmate David Jones (2020) describes his relationship to the “razor wire fence” that “keeps society safe from us” and the increasing cases of COVID-19 in prison populations (para. 5). Jones (2020) states that before the pandemic, he viewed the “razor wire fence” as something that “protects society from us criminals until we learn not to abuse trust, abuse others, and to have boundaries and rules” (para. 5). As COVID-19 cases steadily increased, Jones (2020) began to view the “razor wire fence” as his “full-fledged enemy”—one that continues to protect society from incarcerated populations but does nothing to stop the threats from the “outside” world (para. 15).

Jones’s view of barbed wire is that its purpose as protection is two-fold—it protects the outside from the inside, yet simultaneously allows all of the dangers from the outside to penetrate the inside, with the ultimate effect of being “burned alive” (Jones,
The linkage of the material rhetorical text of concertina wire to the larger contextual meaning of the degraded value of a life of a member of the incarcerated population is exemplified in his essay. The “razor wire fence” keeps society safe from those inside—the dehumanized—while offering no protection for the dehumanized against larger enemies that do not discriminate against the culturally constructed human status of its victims. Rather, the barbed wire creates a situation where “the very ones who guard us will be the ones who give it to us” (Jones, 2020, para. 15). Here, the incarcerated population is trapped by the barbed wire in a space where the virus will spread rapidly, with no chance of safety for the dehumanized.

Blair’s (2009) fifth conceptual question—“How does the text act on a person(s)?” (p. 47)—addresses the power of material rhetoric on the person. As stated before, hostile urban architecture and design are created to discourage certain bodily behavior, while barbed wire’s and concertina wire’s original material goal is to restrict movement. Restricting movement directs our attention to where we can and cannot direct our physical movement. By directing our attention to options available for movement, the concertina wire, based on an audience’s fore-structure and the meaning that barbed wire communicates, re-emphasizes one’s understanding of being human. The explicit presence of barbed wire communicates both symbolic and physical violence, a constant reminder for all audiences that they are either protected against or protected from one side of the fence.

What we see in the previous examples of implicit hostile urban design and architecture is implicit control. It goes unnoticed by those outside of the target or intended populations. The pure animality is reinforced, and those already dehumanized
remain unseen and outside of the fold of domestication. The already dehumanized do not choose to engage with the hostile design. Instead, it targets them. If the Camden Bench, the blue lights, or the anti-homeless spikes are present and speak to you as being hostile, you have already been dehumanized and not yet domesticated. Implicit hostile urban architecture and design are not visible to everyone.

But the use of barbed wire is different. Barbed wire is present to everyone. It speaks to everyone, clearly drawing a line in the culture. The warnings are everywhere, in every barb and every razor. You are on one side of the fence, and there are only two ways to get to the other side: through the gate or through its teeth. We are all reminded that the fence is either there to keep you safe, or to keep others safe from you. It reminds us that there are the domesticated and those of pure animality—the human and the dehumanized. It beckons you to challenge its technological control of domestication over all who encounter it.

**Sloterdijk and Hostile Urban Design**

Sloterdijk’s spherology and spatial theory focus on the objects that we spend our time with and in, the materials that are both imbued with meaning and the creators of meaning. It is the spaces that comprise our lived environments, the fantastic (Crystal Palace) and the mundane (the single-unit apartment building) (Sloterdijk, 2004, 2016). In the context of a material rhetoric, Sloterdijk’s objects and special relations are rhetorical in the sense of being imbued with meaning and of being a force in this world. The material and rhetorical analysis of hostile urban architecture and design connects the specific design strategies of these contemporary domestication technologies to Sloterdijk’s theory of domestication and to his theory of the always contingent nature of
the human. Anti-homeless street design and anti-drug use blue lights function as objects that make meaning and carry meaning through audience-specific fore-structures, and as materials that domesticate and dehumanize audiences.

Hostile urban design and architecture are examples of the overlooked spaces and mundane materials that Sloterdijk discusses in his theories of domestication and spherology. It exemplifies a longing for connection, a means of survival, immunization, and safety. It demonstrates a separation from our originary dyad and a primordial search for connection to a being that recognizes itself as human, and simultaneously places others outside of that fold. It is humanizing and dehumanizing through meaning-making of those that are domesticated and those outside of the domesticated. Anti-homeless spikes and blue lights are all materials used to domesticate some and dehumanize others. These objects are rhetorical in the sense that they create meaning for us, and we use them to create meaning of who is domesticated and who is not domesticated.

In the realm of the posthumanism, Sloterdijk views the human as a long-standing contingency, and the rhetorical materials of hostile urban design and architecture provide meaning that brings some into the fold of domestication while others are excluded. The anthropotechnologies of hostile urban architecture and design are a new iteration of the primordial objects that support the idea that “we have always been posthuman.” It provides meaning, and creates two sides of the fence (human and non-human). Hostile urban architecture and design domesticate, situated in a larger system of meaning, and create and express meaning. You are either welcome “here,” or you are uninvited. The “here” is spatial, and the “here” is the realm of the domesticated, the domain of the human.
Sloterdijk’s spherological theory of the domestication of the human through anthropotechnics is primordial and, at the same time, context specific and historically situated. It is primordial in the sense of the originary dyadic coupling of the fetus-placenta, as described in Bubbles (Sloterdijk, 1998, 2011), yet continues to function as a domesticating process throughout the life of the human. This process is an attempted return to the dyadic ontological state of the originary, and the means of performing this process are the consequence of what is available to the human at a given time, what means of interpreting the world are given, and what objects and structures are imbued with specific meaning. Anti-homeless spikes, curved benches, and concertina wire provide that meaning. For Sloterdijk, it is more than just the space and the return to the originary dyadic coupling. It is the meaning that each of these objects and others are imbued with and what meaning they communicate. Objects are rhetorical non-verbal materials, similar to the multiplicity of fore-structures in Hyde and Smith’s ontological rhetoric, and are open to a multiplicity of interpretations by an audience. Hostile urban design and architecture, both implicit and explicit, function as a humanizing and dehumanizing material object, based on the fore-structures for each audience.

Conclusion

Through a visual and material rhetorical analysis of hostile urban architecture, both implicit and explicit, the communicative, rhetorical, hominizing, and domesticating functions of these artifacts can be seen. Hostile urban architecture and design communicate welcomeness, unwelcomeness, acceptance, determent, and value. Using Hyde and Smith’s ontological rhetoric, one can create the very fore-structures that provide Husserlian *Evidenz* the fulfillment of a meaning-intention. As discussed in the
previous chapter, the creation of the fore-structure to fulfill the meaning-intention constitutes meaning as knowledge.

Applied to the world of architecture and design, the built environment can be assembled into providing a multiplicity of fore-structures. But, as in the case of employing a fore-structure that necessitates an awareness of the meaning supplied through various rhetorical engagements, the use of objects and material as constituting a fore-structure is not the same for each individual. Both language and objects, as rhetoric, must exist in a meaningful way prior to the creation of a fore-structure. We can see with the unintended and intended audiences of implicit hostile urban architecture and design that one must make meaning of their environment through fore-structures that are given to them. Each engagement with hostile urban architecture and design has meaning because of our fore-structures, constituted by language and materials, and those fore-structures will be different for different audiences. When we know something, it has meaning for us, and we know what we are afforded by the fore-structures that we enter into. As discussed in this chapter, we can see how different material rhetorical artifacts provide the foundations for meaning and perpetuate that meaning based on engagement in our lived environments. Each audience member must continually enter into, invent, and reinvent the meaning derived from their lived environments. For some, the meaning is being human, being welcome, while for others, the meaning is dehumanization and the perpetual state of being unwelcome.
Chapter 6. Conclusion

Review of Main Argument

Hostile urban architecture and design are a phenomenon and a material that communicates. This material is imbued with meaning by the designer to transmit meaning to an audience. However, hostile urban architecture and design can be understood as much more than a medium to transmit meaning. The objects, materials, and design of our environments are technologies that function as part of a larger system of meaning that contributes to the constitution of the human, domestication, and dehumanization. The materials and design that constitute our environments play a role in constituting who we are—the humanized, protected, and immunized, or the dehumanized, the protected against, and those outside of the fold of domestication. Sloterdijk’s spherology and ontological rhetoric provide an entryway to push the conversation about what role our environments play in the constitution of the human. Our fore-structures are given to us. We contribute to their evolution. And we learn to interpret the world based on them. These fore-structures that are used for interpretation are words as well as environments, materials, and objects. They are imbued with the meaning that we use to make sense of who, and what, we are. An analysis of hostile urban architecture and design provides a way to connect meaning-making as an act of domestication through materials. These materials speak to many audiences, but provide radically different messages. The message is clear: You are either domesticated, brought out from the animality of nature, or you are not welcome here in the environment of dyadic couplings. The materials used to domesticate are the same materials that can be used to sever the originary tie to a dyadic coupling that engenders the human. These materials create the
two sides of the fence that physically influence behavior, while simultaneously contributing to the larger system of meaning where each audience member’s interaction with the physicality of the materials is the meaning of being human or being dehumanized. I revisit the main arguments from each chapter to synthesize the material and visual rhetorical nature of Sloterdijk’s posthuman ontology of domestication and anthropotechnics.

Overview of Chapters

To begin the discussion of how materials contribute to the constitution of the human through physicality and meaning-making, I discuss the main themes in posthuman studies, focusing on the two categories: the posthuman as a disintegration of the classical human subject through technology and the idea that we have always been posthuman, a process that can be understood through analyzing how we have always constituted ourselves as human. These two approaches differ in their orientation to the concept of human: the former being future-oriented and the latter being an approach that focuses on the human as a contingency throughout history. I begin with the concept of posthumanism as the discrete original human extended corporeally through a posteriori technological and information-based augmentation, or technological and future-oriented posthumanism, using the work of posthuman scholars N. Katherine Hayles (1999, 1997) and Donna Haraway (1991). Next, I discuss Cary Wolfe’s (2010) posthumanism, focusing on his theories of animality and the conceptualization of the human. Then, I discuss the work of two architectural theorists working at the intersection of posthumanism and architecture/design studies, Beatriz Colomina and Mark Wigley (2016), to introduce the idea of a posthumanist position where we have always been
posthuman, or the contingency of the human is a necessary part of the human. To expand the concept of the posthuman and its related concepts of post-anthropocentrism and new materialism, I discuss the theories of speculative realism, object-oriented ontology, actor-network theory, Judith Butler’s work on social ethics of the subject, and David Gunkel’s machine ethics. I expand the discussion to those working outside of the field of posthumanism to emphasize one of the central tenets of posthumanism, post-anthropocentrism, that connects Sloterdijk’s work to this field. Although the theorists in the latter part of the first chapter are not explicitly working in posthumanism, their theoretical contributions provided an intellectual framework for this dissertation and continue the idea that the contingent nature of the human is not new. This section provides a way to understand post-anthropocentrism as a disruption to the idea of the integrated human as ever existing. I end this chapter with an overview of how posthumanism has been used in communication literature. Although some communication scholars have addressed posthuman and its attendant themes, such as post-anthropocentrism and materiality, there is a noticeable lack of work that connects posthumanisms, post-anthropocentrism, materiality, and rhetoric. In this dissertation, I seek to connect the various tenets of posthumanisms with rhetoric, while laying the groundwork for a connection to the theory of Sloterdijk. The work discussed in this chapter established the general outline of a posthuman and post-anthropocentric position that is complementary to the posthumanist work of Sloterdijk and the ontological rhetoric of Hyde and Smith. Sloterdijk is a posthumanist who contends that “we have always been posthuman,” or that we are always in the process of domesticating ourselves as human.
The posthumanisms and related theories in this chapter approach the human as a historical rupture that should be overcome or abandoned, a long-standing myth perpetuated by dominant cultural and social forces, or a question that should always be posed. While varied in their approaches and conceptualizations of the human, a common thread is questioning what makes a human. I argue that a posthumanism in the context of communication studies should focus on the conceptualization of the human, an appreciation for post-anthropocentrism that is not anti-humanist, and special attention to the effects that these conceptualizations of the human have on our understanding of what it means to be human and who is included/excluded from this category.

A salient absence from the posthumanist literature and theory is work on the role of architecture and design as a technology that contributes to the constitution of the human throughout history. I argue that architecture and design are constructed to communicate humanness.

After laying the groundwork for a greater exploration of posthumanisms in the communication field through an exploration of major themes of posthumanism, and the related fields of post-anthropocentrism and the subject status of humans and their environments in Chapter 2, I introduce the work of the German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk and his theories on humanism and posthumanism in Chapter 3. I show that his work has received very little attention, especially in communication studies. Through his *Spheres* trilogy (*Bubbles, Globes, and Foams*) (Sloterdijk, 1998, 1999b, 2004, 2011, 2014b, 2016) and “Rules for the Human Zoo” (Sloterdijk, 2009a), I argue that his work on humanism should be considered a posthumanism that ultimately has connections to
Hyde and Smith’s ontological rhetoric. I discuss Sloterdijk’s relevance to contemporary communication studies and the current conversation about what constitutes a human.

I demonstrate that Sloterdijk combines multiple aspects of posthumanism and post-anthropocentrism. His theory of dyadic ontology laid the groundwork to better understand our continual searching for this relationship with other things in the world, non-human, non-animal, and our built environment. Those things, human and non-human, objects and environments, are what we use to communicate our humanness. I argue that Sloterdijk’s work on humanism should be understood as a kind of posthuman theory. Sloterdijk’s posthumanism is a theory that analyzes historically situated technologies and the life trajectory of the human, from “nobject” to object to human. This trajectory helps to conceptualize the always becoming human as a permanent contingency. Sloterdijk’s form of posthuman is distinct from the other theorists discussed in this chapter through his concept of the originary dyadic ontology. It provides a foundation for the human to always be in the process of becoming. I argue that the communicative aspect of Sloterdijk’s work can be understood by looking at the forgotten and overlooked spaces he explores in the Spheres trilogy (Sloterdijk, 1998, 1999b, 2004, 2011, 2014b, 2016) and in “Rules for the Human Zoo” (Sloterdijk, 2009a). These overlooked spaces—the space connecting the fetus and the placenta, or the walls of the modern apartment complex—are largely ignored in communication theory. Such spaces are the intermediaries and mediums that allow the human being to become, and to move from the ontic to the ontological, from the danger of the outside to the immunized shelter of the interior of spheres. I argue that these spaces are not universally translatable with the same meaning to all inhabitants at any given historical moment. We are born into our
spatial environments and learn to create meaning and communicate that meaning based on the rhetorical artifacts that we have access to and the meaning that is imbued with each artifact. Through Sloterdijk, I argue that the history of humanity is an attempt to reconnect with the originary mode of dyadic ontology. Architecture and design are technologies that hominize and domesticate. This process of becoming human, stepping into the safety of the domesticated, is a process of inhabiting, creating meaning from, and communicating with our lived spaces.

To support my larger argument—that architecture and design are rhetorical and contribute to the constitution of being human—I focus on Sloterdijk’s posthumanism as one that contends “we have always been posthuman,” or that we are always in the process of domesticating ourselves as human through the meaning of space and spatial relations. In this chapter, I argue that Sloterdijk provides the necessary background for the position that contemporary rhetorical theory, especially Hyde and Smith’s ontological rhetoric, helps us understand how we are born into structures, both linguistic and physical, that are imbued with meaning.

In Chapter 4, I turn my attention to contemporary rhetorical theory, beginning with the post-World War II shift from classical rhetoric and focusing on the role of the social construction of knowledge, to the expansion of rhetoric to non-traditional discourse (social movements), epistemic rhetoric, philosophy and rhetoric, postmodern rhetoric, and material rhetoric. My focus in this conceptualization of contemporary rhetoric is to show the expansion of what could be considered rhetorical and what was an accepted object of rhetorical analysis, laying the groundwork for the argument that architecture, design, and space are rhetorical. After addressing the expansion of the field in theory and
analysis, I discuss the ontological rhetoric of Hyde and Smith (1979), and the material rhetoric of Carol Blair (1999) and Barbara Dickson (1999). These aspects of contemporary rhetorical theory provided the groundwork for how posthumanism, Sloterdijk, and architecture are situated within a contemporary rhetorical landscape. Hyde and Smith’s ontological rhetoric provided a transition from the fore-structures used for interpretation, meaning-making, and the making known of meaning as linguistic to fore-structures as material. We are born into our built environments and use that space and material to make sense of the world around us, including being human. We are constituted by the world around us. Sloterdijk’s spherology theory, a theory of spatiality and materials, places the human in an always becoming process through its engagement with the spaces it inhabits. Material rhetorical theory places the object in a central position for meaning-making, working in a complementary way with Sloterdijk’s spherology and theory of spatiality and domestication. Materials, space, and environment are rhetorical, and by creating meaning and the ability to make meaning, they are constitutive of humans, albeit different types—the domesticated and the undomesticated, the human and the non-human or dehumanized.

I argue that when rhetoric is viewed as meaning-making, the fore-structures (both physical structures and linguistic) and rhetorical artifacts—including our constructed physical environment—become the very things we use to understand and communicate our being in the world. This chapter connects the work of Sloterdijk, who emphasizes being as a being-there with other objects in the physical world, to the role the physical world plays in the rhetorical constitution of understanding being human and the separation of the human from animality. I argue that meaning and our ontological
grounding can be connected to our constructed spaces through ontological and material rhetorical theory. In this chapter, I argue that through Hyde and Smith, we can find a stronger connection between rhetoric, fore-structures for meaning-making, material rhetoric, and the onto-anthropology of Sloterdijk. By shifting toward the material and non-linguistic, the relationship between rhetoric and ontology moves beyond language to our built environments.

Using the ontological rhetoric of Hyde and Smith and the material rhetorical theory of Blair and Dickson, I analyzed hostile urban design and architecture. The hostile urban architecture and design analysis supports my argument that architecture and design are rhetorical and contribute to the constitution of being human. As discussed in Chapter 2, posthumanism is a network of related theoretical concepts that argues for the continued contingency of the concept of human. I argue that Sloterdijk is a posthumanist who claims that we have always been posthuman, or that we are always in the process of domesticating ourselves as human. In Chapter 4, I argue that contemporary rhetorical theory, especially Hyde and Smith’s ontological rhetoric, helps us to understand how we are born into structures, both linguistic and physical, that have been imbued with meaning. I argue that contemporary rhetorical theory, posthumanism, and Sloterdijk’s theory of domestication and dyadic ontology can help us understand how we interpret and use the meaning we are given from our interactions with architecture and design. Moving beyond a rhetorical analysis that looks for meaning imbued in materials about what does and does not constitute a human, I argue that architecture, design, and our built environments contribute to our becoming human, as well.
Through an analysis of anti-homeless spikes, anti-homeless park benches, and anti-drug use blue lights, I argue that these specific examples of architecture and design are designed to separate the human from the non-human, or the human from the animal, through their physicality and the meaning that they are imbued with and communicate. Using the visual rhetorical method of Sonja Foss (1986, 1992, 1994) and the material rhetoric analysis method of Carol Blair (1999), I argue that a combination of these approaches allowed for an analysis that highlighted the physicality and the meaning-making qualities of these objects in their environments. This approach allows for an analysis of the perceptual qualities of material objects, situated and embedded in locations that are part of a larger system of meaning. Starting with the larger category of hostile urban architecture and design, I argue that there are two types: implicit and explicit. I define implicit hostile urban design and architecture as materials and design practices that are intended to go unnoticed by their unintended audiences. They are designed to communicate meaning to the intended audience by reducing the affordances offered by the object. Explicit hostile urban design and architecture are materials and designs that are readily accessible and visible to all people, but with a different meaning for each audience based on their rhetorical fore-structures. I argue that explicit hostile urban architecture and design are read as hostile by all audiences, but what this type of environmental object means to each audience depends on their fore-structures. I analyze barbed wire and concertina wire—or razor wire—as examples of explicit hostile architecture and design. To better contextualize both forms of hostile urban architecture and design, I discuss each example in the context of anti-homeless policy, public sentiment, and discourse surrounding the use of razor wire as security fencing from
incarcerated individuals and former President Trump. By placing the analysis of the objects and materials in the larger system of meaning constituted by discourse and policy, I contend that the meaning of hostile urban design and architecture as materials is embedded within fore-structures that are supported through a variety of communicative channels and engagements.

My analysis of hostile urban architecture and design exemplifies Sloterdijk’s theory of domestication and his theory of the always contingent nature of the human through the specific design strategies of these contemporary domestication technologies. These objects are rhetorical in that they make meaning, carry meaning through audience-specific fore-structures, and are materials that domesticate and dehumanize audiences.

Hostile urban design and architecture are examples of the overlooked spaces and mundane materials that Sloterdijk discusses in his theories of domestication and sphereology. These objects exemplify a separation from our originary dyad and a primordial search for connection to a being that recognizes itself as human, and simultaneously places others outside of that fold. It is humanizing and dehumanizing through the meaning-making of those who are domesticated and those outside of the domesticated. The anti-homeless spikes and blue lights are materials used to domesticate and dehumanize others. These objects are rhetorical in the sense that they create meaning for us, and we use them to create meaning of who is domesticated and who is not domesticated in a larger system of meaning.

In the realm of posthumanism, Sloterdijk views the human as a long-standing contingency, and the rhetorical materials of hostile urban design and architecture provide meaning that brings some into the fold of domestication while others are excluded. The
anthropotechnologies of hostile urban architecture and design analyzed in this
dissertation are new in the history of domestication, hominization, and meaning-making.
They are historically situated, yet speak to the larger history of anthropotechnologies and
the contingency of being human. Through my analysis, I demonstrate that these objects
support the idea that “we have always been posthuman” by functioning at the primordial
level of constituting the human. These objects and materials provide meaning for two
sides of the fence (domesticated and animality). Hostile urban architecture and design
domesticate, situated in a larger system of meaning, and create and express meaning. You
are either welcome “here” in the realm of the domesticated, or you are dehumanized
through the physicality of the environment and the larger message, directed at some, that
you are not welcome here. I will now discuss the implications that this dissertation has
for communication and rhetorical studies.

**Implications for Communication and Rhetorical Studies**

This dissertation has multiple implications for communication and rhetorical
studies. First, I bring the theory of Peter Sloterdijk into communication and rhetorical
studies to highlight his connection to meaning-making. Sloterdijk’s concept of
domestication, auto-domestication, anthropotechnologies, and hominization can be
understood as communication because we are always becoming human through the
meaning we make from our surroundings. By placing Sloterdijk’s theory in the context of
meaning-making, I argue that we are born into and create meaning based on our available
means of interpreting the world around us. Our spaces provide, in part, a means of
interpreting the world, and we are born into meaning that we communicate with. Another
aspect of Sloterdijk’s work that contributes to communication and rhetorical studies is his
use of space as communicative, especially the small spaces that he explores in the
*Spheres* trilogy (Sloterdijk, 1998, 1999b, 2004, 2011, 2014b, 2016) and in “Rules for the
Human Zoo” (Sloterdijk, 2009a). The banality of everyday design is a significant factor
in how we relate to others, ourselves, and the objects around us. Through an analysis of
barbed wire, urban design, and blue lights in public restrooms, Sloterdijk’s theory
provides the theoretical groundwork to take seriously the largely overlooked spaces in a
communication theory context. These spaces are the mediums that allow human beings to
become, to move the object to the ontological, from the animal to the human. By
bringing Sloterdijk into communication and rhetorical studies, we can analyze our spatial
environments and learn how they create meaning and can be used to communicate that
meaning in a hominizing, domesticating, and dehumanizing way. Sloterdijk’s
posthumanist theory places communication as a major factor in the constitution of the
human, a communication through and with our spaces, small and large. Communication
and rhetorical scholars can analyze new and old technologies that provide the emergent
and long-standing forms of hominization, domestication, and auto-domestication.

Another implication of this dissertation is highlighting the importance of
Sloterdijk in the context of material rhetorical studies, emphasizing the power of objects
in our understanding of fore-structures. By combining Hyde and Smith’s ontological
rhetoric with material rhetoric and Sloterdijk’s theories, communication and rhetorical
scholars can continue to analyze the myriad objects in our environment that not only
communicate meaning, but also create the primordial meaning of what it means to be
human. The implications of a materialist hominizing rhetorical approach in the context of
posthuman studies moves us into the area of communication ethics. If we are to take
seriously that the objects and materials in our environment create the fore-structures that allow us to interpret the world, and that those fore-structures are constitutive of who we are, we can talk about the ethics of our material environment. By exploring the violence of fences, wires, spikes, and concrete benches that demarcate boundaries of the protected and the protected against, the human and the dehumanized, communication and rhetorical scholars can work toward a better understanding of how the physical world communicates humanness and dehumanization. These analyses can lead to public scholarship and other academic fields meant to address public problems.

Methodologically, this dissertation contributes to the field of communication and rhetoric by combining the visual rhetorical method of Foss (1982, 1986, 1992, 1994, 2005) with the material rhetoric method of Carol Blair (Blair, 1999; Blair et al., 1991). By combining these two methods, rhetorical scholars can analyze the perceptual, mainly visual, elements of materials that are meant to be overlooked, not seen, and blend in as a part of the environment. Hostile urban architecture and design are different than the artifacts that a visual rhetorical method is often used to analyze, such as advertising, film, photography, art, and other images and visuals that are purposefully designed to be looked at. Hostile urban architecture and design are materials and objects that are designed to be overlooked by some, and only read by those who are excluded and dehumanized. By analyzing materials as visual, rhetorical scholars can bring to light the overlooked and forgotten spaces that we see but rarely conceptualize as meaning-making within our field of vision. I will now discuss some of the future directions that this dissertation affords.
**Future Directions**

Using the ethics of our material environments as a starting point, I argue for the material rhetorical analysis of our built environments to better understand their dehumanizing effects. A place to start is the communication ethics approach that “learning and understanding different standpoints is a pragmatic communication ethics act” (Arnett et al., 2009, p. 62). Further exploration of the voices and experiences of those who interact with hostile urban architecture and design in terms of being excluded, dehumanized, and deterred can provide an entry-point to better understand the ethics of the overlooked spaces of our shared environments. Through interviews with the unhoused, as well as those currently and previously incarcerated, communication and rhetorical scholars can analyze the messages of those impacted by the existence of these materials and objects. By listening to these voices and experiences, communication scholars can use the ontological theory of Hyde and Smith, as well as the hominization and domestication theory of Sloterdijk, in conjunction with a material rhetorical analysis of our shared environments.

Another future direction for the arguments in this dissertation is the communicative element of hostile urban architecture and design in civic and community engagements. As argued in this dissertation, materials in our environment that are not typically categorized as hostile urban architecture and design, such as barbed wire, can be analyzed and understood as dehumanizing. This expanded categorizing of public design elements and materials could include urban planning in public spaces, including university campuses, that are problematic and deterring for people with disabilities. Theoretical and community work could be conducted to analyze the dehumanizing
effects of broken sidewalks, elevators that lack braille signs, and limited access to
drinking fountains. Similar approaches could be used to engage with communities for the
betterment of underserved and discriminated against populations, such as the unhoused,
by conducting communicative and rhetorical analyses to be published as public
scholarship for community wellness advocacy. This type of communication and
rhetorical analysis of public space, in conjunction with the domestication theories of
Sloterdijk and the ontological rhetorical theory of Hyde and Smith, could provide
additional support for a more humane approach to the overlooked and forgotten spaces of
our shared environments, spaces that have the power to communicate whether or not you
are welcome, and whether or not you are considered a human by the environment that
you are embedded within. Communication and rhetorical scholars can find new ways to
listen to, analyze, and provide arguments for a more ethical approach to the materials and
objects we use to make meaning out of our shared existence.
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A portion of the “old front line” in the reconquered region, showing barbed wire entanglements to be reconstructed by the A.R.C. A small slice of hell. Front line for three years, now to be rebuilt by American Red Cross [Photograph]. (1917–1920). Library of Congress. https://www.loc.gov/resource/anrc.06730/


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