Expertise has never been more ubiquitous than in the present moment of information superabundance, nor has it ever raised more complicated questions: What does it mean to have expertise? What kinds of experiences, and interpretations thereof, qualify as expertise? How is it made, and by whom? What are the effects of defining social and political relations via this value-laden term? Marcus Boon, author of *In Praise of Copying*, suggests that humans are conditioned to repeat and imitate. Through *mimesis*, or cultural copying, we learn how to be creative on our own. What troubles Boon is the contemporary moment of ambivalence; digital technologies allow easy reproduction, but reproduction itself is often associated with inauthenticity or even a vague sense of guilt. Boon reflects on his students’ plagiarism conundrum:

They are encouraged to learn through the act of repeating information, quoting, appending citations, in the traditional academic way; but with access to the Internet, to computers that can copy, replicate, and multiply text at extraordinary speed, they are also exhorted not to imitate too much, not to plagiarize, and to always acknowledge sources. They are ordered not to copy—but they are equally aware that they will be punished if they do not imitate the teacher enough!

Boon’s students are like many of us, in that they are expected to absorb information and learn by repeating but are penalized if they go too far. The prospect of expertise pins them between the norms of repetition and the impetus to be original, in both cases in the interest of acquiring and producing knowledge. Pairing formal knowledge with creativity, then, Boon uses the example of improvisational jazz. He understands this art form as striving for a fully “depropriated” event, a
moment that cannot be identically restaged. Boon describes “the erosion of the line that separates performer and audience, accompanied by a destabilizing of notions of profession and expertise that produces a new (but hardly unknown) type of collective; and the challenge of a ‘being-with’ based on a dynamic, imminent sense of relationship to what’s going on.” Improvisational musicians, much like Boon’s students, repeat and innovate, encountering each other through interdependent productivity. And as I highlight, copy, and paste quotes from an electronic version of Boon’s book, hoping to gather insights and learn, his argument reverberates.

If asked to define expert, most people characterize a person who has extensive knowledge and competence. This definition is not inaccurate so much as it is incomplete and potentially misleading. Expertise, as I have argued elsewhere, is the function of persuasion. It is contingent on the rhetorical situation, with its exigencies, participants, and constraints. For this reason, expertise depends on continuously ongoing rhetorical invention. On a global scale, the invention of expertise has accelerated exponentially in the last three decades, enrolling many of us in the coordinated and contested production of stuff, a term that I take quite seriously and later define in detail. Connected by microelectronic technologies and infrastructures, we produce digital materials and imprints, inventing ourselves as we engage with one another. Thus, while pundits on television may be experts in whatever subject they are asked to comment on, they are not the only ones who constitute their lived experiences as an information resource to define themselves relationally. Many if not most of us do so. An understanding of expertise as the rhetorical invention of everyday hermeneutics recognizes that “expertise” may be used as a critical lens even when no one in the room has used “the word.” Expertise, in short, is knowledge living its rhetorical life. What, then, is the character of this life in the present moment? What are its outcomes?

This book provides a rhetorical analysis of what it means to know things and to make things in the digital commons, which for my purposes is an active aggregate of three components: humans, networks, and cultural resources. Later in the introduction I explain each of these components, having first introduced the natural and cultural commons for historical and theoretical reference. First, however, I want to drop anchor by noting that the codependence of knowing and making has long been a subject of interest to rhetorical theorists. For the fifth-century Sophist Protagoras, for example, the homo mensura thesis asserts that humans are the measure of all things, and even more fundamentally, that all things that humans recognize as measurable (or, indeed, knowable) are invented in the moment of recognition. In this moment, the thing to which the experiencer attributes the experience is made, as is knowledge of it. Similarly, for the Enlightenment thinker Giambattista Vico, the verum factum principle establishes that what is true is invented rather than, as the Cartesians would have it, discovered. The invention
itself, according to Vico, produces knowledge that might be called “true.” Thus, when we have “knowledge,” we have the substance of our own rhetorical productivity. With a leap from eighteenth-century Naples into the United States of the late 1970s, when the epistemic functions of rhetoric became the center of disciplinary attention, we find a conversation about the productive discourses of knowing that still continues. We recognize, too, looking back at the many years between Vico and Robert L. Scott, that compared to classical and premodern studies of rhetoric, modern theories are in general less emphatic about the connection between knowing and making, or epistemology and invention—that is, until the discourses of scientific inquiry again become an object of rhetorical analysis.

To wit, rhetoricians have long been intrigued by the symbolic activities through which experience becomes knowledge, knowledge gets authenticated as true, and true knowledge bestows authority in a way that might be labeled “expertise.”

As I begin this book with the great theorists of rhetorical epistemology, I am compelled to offer a slightly different point of view as well, one that also informs my thinking. Protagoras and Vico, however potent their theories of productive knowledge, must be read as partial rather than sufficient. As anthropologists and ethnographers know, there are numerous examples from around the world of how knowledge and experiences are created, literally woven into cultural artifacts. They are made into tangible knowledge through creative activity. When a tapestry or a basket tells the story of a people’s struggles and triumphs, this, too, is an iteration of the verum factum and homo mensura theses. Those who weave them have expertise, not only in the procedures of making crafts but also in the subject of their collective history. They make the truth as far as their communities are concerned. I would hardly be the first to call them the people’s historians. Attending to their productivity, their epistemic methods, and their cultural function is imperative for contextualizing networked expertise. With these creators in mind, it becomes possible to ask questions about how, where, and by whom expertise is generated, not far away and long ago but here and now, in the technological paradigm that Manuel Castells calls “informationalism.” And it becomes possible to look not only to baskets but also virtual artifacts. My point—which is simply to set the contours for the introduction—is that in the contemporary moment, analyzing the productivity of expertise requires a willingness to consider capacious not only the scientific and professional but also the amateur and quotidian. I also examine how common(s)-ality is an outcome of networked living and the artifacts that this living generates.

The purpose of this book is to offer the concept of the gifting logos to account for how expertise in the digital commons integrates three rhetorical practices: knowing, making, and gifting. What follows are three case studies: first, a study of the infrastructural commons, specifically the Creative Commons suite of licenses; second, the archival commons, specifically the Internet Archive and the Wayback
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Machine; and third, the “Pirate Party,” which rose to prominence in Sweden in 2006, and which I refer to as the popular commons. Through these case studies I demonstrate that expertise functions as, and indeed is, a gifting logos, and that the gifting logos makes three rhetorical practices inextricable:

- the invention of cultural materials such as text, music, film, photography, software, and computer code;
- the imbuing or encoding of the materials with the creator’s lived experience, interpretations, and knowledge; and
- the constitution and dissemination of the materials as gifts.

These rhetorical processes are arranged sequentially in analog theories of cultural production. For example, someone with extensive knowledge of penguin habitats might make a film about it, then give that film to the Public Broadcasting System. A person with knowledge of computer science might write a program and then give it away in the spirit of open source ethics. From a slightly different angle, we might imagine someone with firsthand knowledge of chronic illness who composes music about the experience, and then, again, gives the music away. What I am proposing with the concept of the gifting logos is to conceive of the three rhetorical processes as one practice. The making, the knowing, and the giving are all constructed by participants in the digital commons as a complex activity, specifically one that is identifiable as expertise, or, more awkwardly, “expertising.”

Digitally networked expertising is different from the sequential models previously mentioned. In those models, expertise is a finished product that is transmitted through channels that keep it intact. The product moves from an expert to laypersons, consumers, clients, or audiences. Continuous productivity is not in focus in these conventional models, nor is the infrastructure that facilitates productivity or the common life of which productivity is a feature. Traditional analog models of expertise are constrained in their ability to understand individual agents in terms of multiple functions, experiences, and investments. They see expertise as distinguishable from ordinary life and everyday habits, and they tend to define expertise almost exclusively as a market commodity aligned with purchasing power. From this point of view, expertise operates through formal binaries: having and not having, being and not being, selling and buying. By contrast, digital expertising places the meaningful aspect of expertise on various knowing activities in the participle form, which is to say as continuous. Rhetorical activities of knowing and making are inseparable from one another, and even though their products may be bought and sold (as in the analog case), they may alternatively be constituted through the logos of gifting. My intention is to illuminate how these activities work rhetorically and what their outcomes are. Put simply, my contention is that there are things about expertise in a digital context that we cannot recognize without considering knowing-making-gifting as integrated, including
and especially in the networked life of an emerging commons. The famous gifting theorist Lewis Hyde argues that analyses of scientific collaboration must recognize “the emergence of community through the circulation of knowledge as gift.” My ambition is to extend the idea of “knowledge as gift” to include not only the scientific community but also the multitude of active participants in the digital commons. What is at stake in this book is the question of what we might learn about the digital commons if we consider expertise as the production and circulation of gifts.

The gifting logos as a pairing links two terms that are notoriously difficult to define. In chapter 1 I survey the theorists of gifting that inform the analyses to follow, noting how differently they invest the term with various ideals. The other term, logos, likewise requires an introduction that identifies major influences by name. For my purposes, the most fitting approach to logos is pre-Socratic. It predates and in my assessment exceeds the Aristotelian understanding of logos that prevails in rhetorical scholarship: dialectical engagements, technical discourse, and particular modes of persuasion. And unlike the Platonic understanding of logos, which appears less in argumentation textbooks than in theology, a pre-Socratic approach does not look for a transcendent truth beyond the particular iterations that necessarily betray its value. Personified in the Socratic method and dramatized in dialogues that end with the triumph of philosophy over rhetoric, Plato’s logos is the truth that few seek and even fewer find. With a pre-Socratic approach, attending to both practices and principles, I am afforded an integrative approach wherein logos carries multiple meanings at the same time without one of them usurping another.

Among the pre-Socratics who took on the concept of logos, Heraclitus is especially compelling. In his fragmentary accounts, logos begins as an existential principle ordering the natural world, including the elements’ relation to one another. Dominating these relations is a self-sustaining energy source, constantly “kindling itself by regular measures and going out by regular measures.” By extension, Heraclitus’s logos principle orders the sociocultural world as a function of humans’ fundamental, natural orientation. Here, logos is something like the immaterial material we humans move around in, experiencing its texture variously as constraining and enabling. The word system is not quite right; neither is culture, paradigm, or framework. But somewhere among these words is the meaning of logos as a condition. Within this conditional Logos (with a capital “L”), we engage one other wielding logoi (with a lowercase “l”) instrumentally. These individuated engagements, arguments, and claims, reflecting logos as a nominal version of legein (to say, speak, or tell), are “languaged” in singular episodes. As Martin Heidegger explains in a beautiful essay on Heraclitus’s logos fragment, legein originally meant to lay things in patterns, to “place one thing beside another.” The particular logoi are intelligible, meaningful, and valuable in the
context of the Logos. To express meaning, then, is to gather things such that they reference one another, laying and being together. Logos, Heidegger writes, is “the Laying that gathers.” At the point when individuated engagements revert to the conditional Logos principle, they congeal as an account, or theory; they synthesize as sense making. In sum, I turn to Heraclitus so that I can use logos to mean (1) a sociocultural condition or context, (2) the principles that order it, (3) particular rhetorical actions within it, and (4) the theories generated by actors in that context about their rhetorical action. Moreover, a Heraclitean logos allows for an analysis that assumes principles but does not require praxis to be rational and an analysis that assumes the continuous indeterminacy of a network in flux.

As the book’s central concept, the gifting logos is both a principle of operation within the digital commons and the hermeneutic with which I study this principle’s instantiations. It is a language and structure that coordinates the activities of digital commoners. As such, it is variously implicit and explicit in the artifacts of those activities. And digital commoners may be more or less critical in their orientation toward the rhetorical processes in which they are engaged. By comparison, in my use of the gifting logos as a hermeneutic, my ambition is to analyze the productivity, artifacts, and life-forms of the digital commons. As a rhetorical critic, I am attuned to the assumptions that certain language practices make evident, including, for example, the idea that expertise is captured in digital materials and generatively distributable in a network infrastructure that connects people and experiences.

As is evident throughout chapter 1, my analysis of the digital commons as an active and productive aggregate is informed by the extensive interdisciplinary literatures dedicated to the natural and cultural commons. My intention is to offer the reader a rich and historically grounded perspective on life in the commons, especially the centrality of expertise and authority. It is to highlight the connectedness and situatedness of cultural invention and proprietary powers. My intention is not to participate in the idealism that characterizes much scholarship surrounding the natural and cultural commons. On this point, I take a different approach. My interest in the commons is primarily conceptual. I make a methodological recommendation to a specific group of scholars, suggesting that those who study digital rhetoric would be well served by the concept and theory of the commons. I do not advocate for a commons of a cultural or ecological kind or argue that the commons were, or would be, a more ethical or democratic arrangement of people and resources than other regimes.

In chapter 1, following the sections on the natural and cultural commons, I detail the components of the digital commons, specifically working with Paolo Virno’s idea of the multitude and Manuel Castells’s and Yochai Benkler’s theories of networks. After the section on the digital commons, I introduce prominent theories of the gift. This section begins with Friedrich Nietzsche, Marcel Mauss,
and Martin Heidegger, moving on to Lewis Hyde and Jacques Derrida. Focusing then on studies of gifting within rhetorical studies, I review the works of Michael J. Hyde and Mari Lee Mifsud. I direct attention to the rhetoric of gifting, indeed to the potential of the gift for rhetorical scholarship. The subsequent section on the gifting logos foreshadows the final chapter, specifically the five characteristics and functions of the gifting logos itself that the conclusion explicates.

Chapter 2 situates the gifting logos in the discourses of the Creative Commons, a nonprofit organization primarily associated with a suite of licenses that make cultural content accessible beyond the constraints of copyright. The chapter begins with a historical survey of copyright, highlighting especially significant moments, including the English Stationers’ Company royal charter from 1557, the Statue of Anne in 1710, the copyright clause of the US Constitution, the Copyright Extension Act of 1998, and the emergence of the Free Software Foundation and the open access movement. This section is intended to contextualize how the Creative Commons articulates, reinforces, and/or subverts certain long-contested assumptions of copyright, authorship, and the common good. The analysis, then, focuses on primary texts, including the 2015 Creative Commons memorandum “State of the Commons,” a series of success stories titled The Power of Open, documents from the organization’s website, and a set of academic articles and popular books by Creative Commons founder Lawrence Lessig. Examining these texts, I analyze how the Creative Commons defines and constitutes expertise via the gifting logos. The question of the chapter is: How is the interplay of knowledge and experience that happens in the making of cultural artifacts like texts and music accounted for by those who participate in the digital commons, specifically through the Creative Commons infrastructure? Explicating the gifting logos’s rhetorical functions, I focus on creative individuation, timing, networked accretions of value, the ideal of abundance (or copia), reproduction, and gifting intent.

Chapter 3 turns to the gifting logos as archival, exploring how the digital commons invents and curates its history. How, I ask, is the past made known and given to the digital commons? I analyze discourses by and about the Internet Archive (IA), a massive storehouse of digitized collections of literature, music, photography, and film, and its most famous initiative, the Wayback Machine, a retrieval technology for past versions of hundreds of billions of web pages. As in chapter 2 I begin with a contextualizing section that surveys archival theories and practices. From a rhetorician’s point of view, I introduce specific aspects of “the archive,” including the historical connection between institutions of curated knowledge and public authority. Orienting archival theory in relation to expertise, I examine both processes and contents of archiving and archival research. To transition from brick-and-mortar archiving to digital archiving, I bring along a cluster of topics, including the public-private dialectic and the paradox of bureaucracy and mystery. In the analysis of the IA and the Wayback Machine, I trace several
themes of archiving as an inventive practice of knowing, connecting them to the discourses of gifting that circulate through the IA and that identify founder Brewster Kahle as a heroic benefactor. I demonstrate how the inventions of the gifting logos emerge in the context of data loss and how this urgency rhetorically deploys the familiar ideal of archival preservation, in which productive knowledge forecloses the limits and gradual disappearance of the commons.

Chapter 4 examines the gifting logos’s political implications for the digital commons. It extends the preceding two chapters’ analyses of expertise by explaining how a loosely affiliated group sought recognition and authority by making itself and the moment of its emergence known to potential supporters, giving them a policy agenda. In other words, the chapter approaches the gifting logos as the gift of a political construct for the common good. It focuses specifically on the campaign discourses of the Swedish Pirate Party, an organization that in 2006 grew out of an internationally known file-sharing community called The Pirate Bay. The first half of the chapter contextualizes and situates the Pirate Party with reference to the theoretical and historical motifs of populism. In so doing, the chapter introduces both what I call “digital populism” and the parliamentary climate of Sweden at a time when confidence in traditional parties had waned. Against this foil, I ask: With what rhetorical strategies does the Pirate Party articulate itself, its politics, and its prescription for a prosperous polity? What is the character of the political construct that the Pirate Party gives to the commons? I analyze the Pirate Party’s enactment and use of populist rhetoric, in particular antagonism toward the state and corporate institutions, an articulation of “the people” and its inherent potential, and a model of political representation and access. Throughout the chapter I demonstrate how the open access ideals that sustained the Pirate Party, which have garnered international support since the 1990s, were especially resonant in Sweden, where networked access is rhetorically associative with a legal and cultural custom known as Allemansrätten, the right of commons access. I suggest that by linking access to digitized cultural content with access to natural resources and territories, the Pirate Party made a compelling case for its concept of good governance.

In the aggregate of the digital commons, rhetorical influence, knowledge, and invention concur. In order to theorize this concurrence, my intent is to closely examine how productive expertising functions. I direct attention to a networked multitude of cultural inventions in a space managed by its inhabitants. I also demonstrate how, especially for scholars of networked and digital rhetoric, the commons might serve as a useful complement to rhetorical theory’s more familiar concepts, such as “public” and “audience.” And though this book is addressed primarily to scholars of digital rhetoric, my hope is that others will find it valuable as well. For scholars of epistemic rhetoric, my hope is that the book will indicate new venues for studying the inventive aspects of expertise and its mediation of
lived experiences. I believe the concept of the commons, informed by interdisciplinary literatures, will help to transcend the insularity of projects devoted to peer production, exchanges between specialists and laypersons, knowledge communities, and so on. For scholars of rhetoric and public address generally, I hope that the book will offer a resourceful perspective on human networks, situatedness, and the constitutive functions of material and continuous circulation, indeed on the very notion of address. From chapter 4 especially, I hope that the political implications of digital culture and networks emerge, along with insights about representation, access, and advocacy. Finally, I hope that my engagement with both logos and the gift will offer readers a theoretical and critical resource to energize invention.