

Civic Storytelling

*The Rise of Short Forms
and the Agency of Literature*

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The *Ars Topica*, Its Disappearance, and Its Afterlife

A surprising conjunction in the cosmos of arts and letters happened in March 2011 when the literary magazine *Cabinet* organized an event titled “Clipping, Copying, and Thinking.” The historian Ann M. Blair and the poet Kenneth Goldsmith were invited to talk about the ways writers have tended to organize pieces of notation for their work. In the first part of the event, Blair, one of the foremost scholars of early modern practices of commonplacing, note taking, and knowledge organization, and Goldsmith, an author widely known for his poetics of recycling and methods of “uncreative writing,” spoke separately about their recent books. Afterward, they were meant to weigh in on each other’s projects and discuss what they had in common. Yet only after the moderator’s strenuous attempts did they hesitantly begin to point out possible overlaps, remaining almost consciously blind to such affinities.¹

Two critical observations can be grasped from this mutual estrangement between the historical theoretician of bits of writing and the contemporary practitioner of written bits. The first is that sometime between 1400 and 2011, literature appropriated from the humanists and the empirical sciences the practice of composing writing in discrete — that is, self-contained and separable — forms. The other observation is that today, this appropriation of practices is largely forgotten, leaving a historian of science and a data-science-influenced

writer out of touch about the fact that their work is indebted to one and the same tradition. In retrospect, the fact that neither Blair nor Goldsmith seemed to condone what *Cabinet* had hoped to ignite at the event becomes even firmer proof of the deep relation of forms of writing between post-1750 literature and pre-1750 sciences.

To the event's audience, the synopsis of Blair's thought and Goldsmith's practice specifically suggested that there is indeed a lost lineage that could accommodate the transfer between the practices of knowledge collection and the art of writing literature. Taking the viewpoint of such an observer, this study will argue that the common ground on which both are concerned is the existence of the ancient *ars topica*, a process of thought that since Aristotle aimed to determine the function of language in discourse by lending separate pieces of language an agency beyond their own self-contained meaning. On the one hand, topoi were generally recognized in certain reoccurring motifs or formulations that acted as anchors in reception histories or could seat arguments in discourses. The *ars topica*, on the other hand — also called “topics” in English, *Topik* in German, and *topique* in French — was the lineage of reflections that arose from the use of topoi and began to extend its thought to other fixed forms of notation.² If topoi are understood not only as reoccurring motifs, but also in the broader sense as discrete forms of narrative writing, then the *ars topica* is a theoretical discussion that reflects the autonomous agency of these units and thus indicates at the same time, in a meta sense, how they have shaped the form of discourses as such.

Although the *ars topica* indeed still exists as an undercurrent of literary form, as this study argues, it has moved from a visible lineage of thought regarding knowledge organization since antiquity to an invisible backdrop affecting the fictional narrative realm of modernity and beyond. Such a switch means that the *ars topica* morphed from data technology to media subdiscourse, from the sciences to the arts, from a well-known activity located in quotidian work routines of the learned to a hidden condition of literary form for the moderns that melds together life and literature. While the *ars topica* that Blair

described conjured up and organized knowledge as well as thought, its disappearance allowed writers such as Goldsmith to conjure up, organize, and recompose literature and everyday narratives as autonomous stories. The main focus of this study will be the intersection of the two, where *ars topica* disappeared and literary prose form appeared: the afterlife of *ars topica* in the short narrative form.

This chapter traces the historical changes that resulted in the disappearance of the *ars topica* in the eighteenth century. While many studies discuss particular topoi, motifs, or commonplaces and where they appeared and became theorized across this period, no study so far has asked what function the *ars topica* played in the course of history and what happened to its capability once it was discarded. As the final part of this chapter will show, the resulting autonomous narratives are like topoi of the everyday intending to act against itself because the short form can distinguish one day from another by inserting itself, interrupting the sameness of life in the age of the quotidian.

Central to this development is the shift in the basis for *ars topica* from knowledge to narrative forms, plots, and structures, thriving in the relation between literature and life. A few literary scholars have hinted in this direction, though primarily in the context of continuities of particular topoi or their application. Ernst Robert Curtius's *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (1948) is the most extensive of these works, an impressive neohumanistic study of numerous topoi ranging across the Western European vernacular literatures and their rootedness in the Latin tradition. But Curtius was a collector, and his work is itself a symptom of the afterlife of *ars topica*, rather than an explanation of its own indebtedness to early twentieth-century topical thought.³ Rather than giving reasons for this return of topical practices in early twentieth-century humanities, as suggested by Aby Warburg's transhistorical pathos formulas in art history and Carl Jung's archetypes in psychoanalysis, Curtius saw his work as an emblematic defense of the common European project in a time of crisis.⁴ His elitist methods and his lack of definitions have drawn much criticism from literary scholars since they were written, prompting

the contemptuous use of the term “topical research” (*Toposforschung*) that marked how distanced from the actual literature his surveying method remained, contrary to the vivid potential of the *Topik*.⁵

Despite a modest comeback of the *ars topica* in linguistic, discursive, and communication studies since the 1960s, most prominently fueled by *The New Rhetoric* of Chaïm Perelman, its recognition as a motor of literature has been minimal.⁶ Even other studies more aware of the *ars topica* have trouble tracing its functions after its disappearance. Gerhart von Graevenitz has argued, for example, that mythology has been a topically organized discursive system from Vico’s eighteenth-century *New Science* to Claude Levi-Strauss’s twentieth-century studies on mythemes, all of which employ the gods as topical figures that can very flexibly be used to match the discursive inventory and explanatory needs of a particular time.⁷ The argument also has been made that the eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century novel consists of a “topical inventory” of its respective settings and therefore forms an immediate enmeshing of life and literature, which remotely affirms the closer analysis attempted here because the rise of the novel coincides with the disappearance of the *ars topica*.⁸ Both attempts at least treat the *ars topica* as the universal mode of collecting and sorting knowledge about the world, which it had become in the early seventeenth century, as Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann showed in his 1983 study *Topica Universalis*, which portrays the topical organization of Renaissance and early modern natural sciences.⁹

In the most interesting attempt so far to understand the ongoing implications of the historical *ars topica*, the medievalist Peter von Moos has moved the concept of topos far away from Curtius’s interest and understands a topos as a functional form when he traces how particular historical stories became exemplary for literary narration in the later Middle Ages, especially in their role as exempla.¹⁰ While von Moos focuses largely on his historical area of expertise, his actual argument prefigures a problem in modernity, namely, extending the *ars topica* to a “procedure [*Verfahren*] for the communicative overcoming of problems and aporias through opinion-based knowledge,” as

Walter Haug has summarized it.¹¹ In von Moos's study, history not only consists of *topoi*, but actually becomes an *ars topica* of narrativity because the late medieval authors used their topical thinking and writing practices to treat history as a second-degree language, applying for the first time the philosophical and purely dialectical principles of Aristotle's work *Topics* to the realm of narration. While this might imply that a straightforward analogy can be made between the topical rhetoric and the intertextual structure of texts, as Frauke Berndt has briefly outlined, von Moos's study points ahead to the more crucial historical alignment of *ars topica* between 1700 and 1900 that this chapter will develop as the groundwork for the case studies that follow it.¹²

First, however, an overview of the larger historical movement up to the disappearance of the *ars topica* in eighteenth century will help lay out the discursive functionality of the *ars topica* while it was still visible and will hence determine how its afterlife could possibly be located in literary narrative forms.¹³ It will become clear how the *ars topica*, through dealing with historical quotations and empirical notations, abolished itself, only to return in its afterlife as the *ars topica* of narrative forms, that is, as carrier of the unprecedented.

The Ars Topica: Method, Form, Storehouse

A general dictionary of English defines a topic as "a matter dealt with in a text, discourse, or conversation; a subject" and provides the following example: "*sleep deprivation became a frequent topic of conversation.*"¹⁴ The question, "What's the topic of conversation?" could thus be rephrased as "What is being said?" or "What is to be spoken of here?" Or more elaborately, "What do I need to know so that I can join the conversation?" A typical response, "Our topic right now is sleep deprivation" for example, confirms a key point: a topic is not a static or fixed thing but rather a momentary state in a dynamic and shifting process — the living conversation. Going back to the dictionary, which tells us that the word "topic" derives from the Greek *topos*, meaning "place" or "location," one could once more rephrase the question according to its Greek etymology with spatial metaphors.

“What’s the topic of conversation?” now becomes “Where do you stand?” “What’s your position?” “Which point are you getting at?” In this sense, a topic is a place on which a subject matter is in flux, unsettled — a structural spot that a discussion is running through and that therefore allows for the observation of the movement of words, thoughts, opinions, agreements, and so forth.

Pushing the definition this far somewhat contradicts the current, general meaning of “topic,” which is usually seen as the fixed and settled content of a book or a meeting, for example, as in “Our topic today will be the city’s emergency plans.” Given this apparent distance between the classical Greek and the latest notion behind the word, there is good reason for going back to the Greek metaphorical meaning of the concept of a topic. Aristotle, who is considered responsible for initially metaphorizing *topos* as a “point of discourse,” coupled physical location and subject matter in a semantic calculation.¹⁵ Under the same name, *Topics* (*ta topiká*), he wrote a treatise that provided instructions for positioning arguments at specific “locations” — here, the “topoi” of a conversation — and added his thoughts about the various effects that occupation of such discursive locations may have. This work later became one of the six parts of the *Organon*, Aristotle’s work dealing with logic and logical reasoning. More than the rather formalistic logic in the modern, post-Cartesian sense, the *Topics* were designed for daily use in the Greek polis, helping to locate probable arguments and identify falsely reasoned syllogisms. As is still concealed in the meaning of today’s concept of the topic, the topoi that Aristotle listed in his work are not subjects to be discussed, but rather places and locations from which an unfolding discourse can reasonably be questioned and furthered or through which it can be led and constrained.

“Topics,” or *ars topica*, is therefore not the name of a collection of topoi, but rather the name of the art, or the method, of reflecting about a conversation or any other kind of discourse best imagined in a spatial, maplike manner to influence it at its various waypoints. Using the *ars topica* in Aristotle’s sense therefore implies that one agrees

with two preconditions: that conversations run through such waypoints or locations and that each of these potential waypoints will relate to a knowable set of such waypoints or topoi. Thus, according to Aristotle's *Topics*, discussions and discourses are dynamic networks of units of speech paralleled by equal networks of thought. Aristotle's focus on "places" suggests not only that thinking of a discussion as a network in space helps in memorizing what to say at which position, a mnemotechnical side of the *ars topica* that continued throughout its history, but more importantly that the force of arguments rests in the singular notions and nodes of conversation.¹⁶ The *ars topica*, in other words, makes first of all a claim about all conversations, dialogues, and disputations as such, namely, that separate items of speech, if presented in the right sequence and form, can have a decisive influence on any discourse. Not only, then, does the existence of topoi hinge on the *ars topica*, but the function of the *ars topica* itself also determines the state of a topos, of topoi collections, and of topical material.

Looking at the relation of *ars topica* and topoi since Aristotle will therefore explain how what was known as *ars topica* became a strong method of thinking about discourses, especially in the way they function through formalized elements. As this chapter will show, the *ars topica* was a habit of thought that remained even after the *ars topica* was dismissed in the eighteenth century for exerting too much formalizing power on discourses and allowing too little subjectivism in discourses. Yet there, *ars topica* had an afterlife, a continuity of imagining dialogues, conversations, and discourses as functioning through formalized elements. Formalized short narrative genres would take up this discursive habit, allowing for the *ars topica* to develop its afterlife within literature beginning in the eighteenth century.

What to Say

A tradition developed from Aristotle's work *Topics* that aimed to understand discussions and conversations as networks whose discursive knots and points of deviation could be studied and followed by conceptualizing them as topoi. The topoi that Aristotle lists are

hence the most common forms of discursive reasoning and misreasoning: “Substitute more familiar with less familiar terms” (*Topics* 2.4); “Nothing which can be predicated of a thing must involve contrary predicates” (2.7); “What is desirable for its own sake is preferable” (3.1); “Does change of a term involve change of a genus?” (6.11); “Definition is of all things the most easy to destroy, the most difficult to confirm” (7.5). Aristotle’s focus lay not so much on providing any disputant with a ready-at-hand collection of subject matter, contrary to the very common idea today of what the purpose of an *ars topica* is, but in offering means to train them to identify the specific forms of informal, discursive reasoning and misreasoning in any discussion so they could follow it, enter it, and actively alter its course. To accommodate this demand, the *Topics* conceives of discussions as dynamic and requires flexibility from discussants before they can make the best use of the *topoi*. In other words, the goal of Aristotle’s treatise is to prepare readers to enter into and perform in the contingent dynamics of every new communicative situation by suggesting that it is necessary to train the ability to reduplicate in the mind the form of the dynamics of any discussion. Before one can partake in a discourse, one needs to be able to conceive of it as a network of points; only then can these be filled with the argumentative content or subject matter. The fundamentally new exercise performed by Aristotle’s *Topics* that allows the *ars topica* to grow into a method is that the network of *topoi* of an individual’s mind must be used to train them to understand any collective communication as a fluid network of *topoi*.¹⁷

Besides initiating a crucial lineage for the philosophy of discourses, the reception of Aristotle’s *Topics* — reaching, as followed below from Cicero’s and Quintilian’s legal applications to Vico’s and Baumgarten’s sensualist modifications — is proof of the flexibility of the Aristotelian method itself. For every purpose and within each intellectual atmosphere, the *ars topica* can suppose less or more dynamism for the respective discursive situations for which it tries to give instructions. For this reason, in his notes for the seminar

“Recherches sur la rhétorique” (1964–66) at the École Pratique des Hautes Études, Roland Barthes recalled the relevance of formalist rhetoric and dialectics for understanding mass-communication societies, and he more accurately observed how Aristotle’s *Topics* has been understood over its history.

Barthes differentiated three functions of the *ars topica*: “1. a method; 2. a grid of empty forms; 3. a storehouse of filled forms.”¹⁸ Besides pointing out the distinct function of the *ars topica* already present in Aristotle — before *ars topica* or *topos* became solidified technical terms in the history of ideas — Barthes’s interest in reactivating rhetorical and topical elements to understand mediatized societies also led him to identify the dynamism of relations among forms as the most important factor of discursivity. The *ars topica* especially, both in its dialectical and its rhetorical function, has remained over time a system of movable, variable forms that activate discourses and their participants. Aristotle’s *Topics*, claimed Barthes, was responsible for discovering answers to the fundamental question behind acts of speaking, conversation, and discourse itself, positing a systemic procedure for answering the question fundamental to all speech: “What to say?” (*Quoi dire?*)¹⁹

The *ars topica* addresses this lack of knowing what to speak about through a systematic procedure of running the subject matter one intends to deal with through a collection of *topoi* as Aristotle understood them. As Barthes explains, the *Topics* “was a collection of commonplaces of dialectic, i.e., of the syllogism based on probability,” that is, a mere list, before Aristotle turned it into a technique. At the beginning of the treatise, Aristotle defined his *Topics* as “a method . . . by which we shall be able to reason from generally accepted opinions about any problem set before us and shall ourselves, when sustaining an argument, avoid saying anything self-contradictory.”²⁰ In this conception as method, the *Topics* remained solely teleological, aimed at finding suitable arguments and counter-arguments helpful for dialectical reasoning. In his *Rhetoric*, Aristotle would later extend this method to the *heuresis* or *inventio* of oratory,

the first, preparatory part of giving a speech, strengthening the linguistic aspect over the logical one.

Less teleological is Barthes's second characterization of the *ars topica* as "a grid of empty forms," which is the version most resembling a systems theory of discourse, namely, a number of questions (a grid) over which any subject may be placed in order to discuss it. Barthes provides a canonical list of these questions taught since antiquity, also called "circumstances"—*quis, quid, ubi, quibus auxiliis, cur, quomodo, quando* (who, what, where, with what, why, how, when).²¹ He parallels this list with Bernard Lamy's seventeenth-century list of attributive features to be laid out from the subject at hand: genre, difference, definition, enumeration of parts, etymology, conjugations, comparison, repugnance, effects, and causes. To illustrate how the application of such a grid of topics is a tool to unfold a discourse on any subject, Barthes then sketches the following topical beginning of a discourse on literature:

Let us suppose that we must produce a discourse on literature: we "dry up" (with good reason), but fortunately we possess Lamy's Topics: we can then, at least, ask ourselves questions and try to answer them: to what "genre" will we attach literature? art? discourse? cultural production? If it is an "art," how does it differ from the other arts? How many parts are we to assign to it, and which ones? What does the etymology of the word suggest us? Its relation to morphological neighbors (*literary, literal, letters*, etc.)? With what does literature sustain a relation of repugnance? Money? Truth? etc.²²

Not necessarily truthful or methodological but discursive in their manner, these "attributive topics" are formal places containing no content through which a discourse on a subject can be led, eliciting insightful features of the respective material and allowing this discourse to be immediately comprehensible to anyone familiar with the topical grid. Barthes defines this second kind of *ars topica* as "a form which articulates contents and thereby produces fragments of meaning, intelligible units." Here, the *ars topica* helps ideas, thoughts, and subjects to unfold their full semantic potential, which is why

Barthes also named this second version of *ars topica* “the midwife of the *latent*.” It is concerned not with what is to be said here and now in a particular speech or disputation, but much more importantly and universally, this *ars topica* is a system concerned with the sayable as such, with the potentiality of the discursive human mind: What can possibly ever be said about this, be it now, tomorrow, or whenever? On the one hand, this second definition describes the most extensive version by far of the *ars topica*. Yet on the other hand, this version of the *ars topica* has left its teleological trajectory, which causes the whole rhetorical technique to become increasingly obsolete, especially if applied again and again to the same questions.

Following this historical trajectory that the *ars topica* took, Barthes therefore closes with a third definition of the *ars topica*: “a storehouse of filled forms.” This storehouse consists of solidified answers that were repeated in discourses and conversations, that is, of stereotypes, hearsay, or “commonplaces,” a term coined not in relation to the *ars topica* but for its use in rhetorical *elocutio* by Aristotle (*topoi kanoi*) and Cicero (*loci communes*).²³ Anybody partaking in discourses about the world, life, politics, or more particular subjects such as geographical places, people, and objects will sooner or later arrive at a set of common answers if the same “grid” of the *ars topica* is used over and over. As will be shown later in this chapter, this development from a discourse to a storehouse could most clearly be observed in humanistic collections of commentaries on mostly classical writers, for example in the *Adagia* collection of Erasmus. It would reach less elitist circulation with the rise of the printed commonplace books in vernacular languages after the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. At this point in its lineage, the success of Cartesianism’s radical disfavoring of existing knowledge completed the decline of the *ars topica* as a method of finding arguments through a grid.

Form through Content: The Topical Function

Barthes’s three versions of *ars topica*—from inventive method, to potentialist discourse, to fixed responses—very accurately

differentiate the major phases in the history of the *ars topica*. Its solidification into a storehouse practice in the third step shows why the *ars topica* became obsolete while discursivity and communication increased through printing techniques, vernacularization, and rising literacy. These developments were hostile to repeating received ideas and instead emphasized, first and foremost, finding and including novelties, quickly eliminating any stale answers from the topical storehouse. The true potential of the *ars topica* was thus fully developed solely in the second version in which, according to Barthes, the *ars topica* became “a network of forms” because it can create, as he writes, “a quasi-cybernetic process” from its formalistic depository.²⁴ This characterization of the potential of the *ars topica*, which is independent from any particular work, function, or time period, extracts the core function of the *ars topica*. Even after having solidified as a storehouse, the original dynamism of the topical system is still contained in commonplace topoi such as the *locus amoenus* (pleasance; “a beautiful, shaded natural site,” writes Curtius), which, as Barthes noted, can “be mobilized [and] transported” precisely because they appear to be “detachable pieces.”²⁵ The most important takeaway from Barthes’s synopsis is that topoi stemming from discourse systems continuously carry the discursive power they had within the system. While Barthes’s observations are among the few that point to the existence of topical discursive forces that continued after the decline of the *ars topica*, the true effects of what this study calls “the afterlife of *ars topica*” requires much more explanation.

A topos has its own agency because it has been charged with a discursive force by the topical system that formed and circulated it. As a node in a system of discourse, a topos is both content and form in a rare unity. Topoi tell or retell a story, at the same time bringing forth this story because of its formal impact, its topical embeddedness, one might say. While the instance of a well-known literary topos such as the *locus amoenus*, on which Curtius hinges a complete chapter of his 1948 study, tells internally of a beautiful landscape; it also signals externally that it is not new, only reappearing, that this “pleasant place” has

not only a fixed content but, more importantly, a structural function proven to be effective beyond itself. This external function stems from the tension between each synchronous contextualization, on the one hand, and the diachronic charge, on the other. The positioning of the topos in each work and in their reception compose its “topical embeddedness,” charge it with the systemic force of the *ars topica* and thus determine its autonomous agency.

This functional aspect of the *ars topica* will become more clear in the following part of this chapter, which traces crucial reception points of the *ars topica* from Aristotle to Baumgarten’s eighteenth century, where its history comes to an end, or rather, where it transforms into a motor of literary form. This “functional history” will bring forth the various aspects in which the *ars topica* theoretically pointed out and retained a specific discursive agency and autonomy for the topoi it organizes. After having presented this historical lineage of the effect of this “topical function” of small narratives, the third and final part of this introductory chapter looks ahead to where the afterlife of the *ars topica* can be found, including the work of writers and scholars who have made first attempts to work out in theory, mostly under a different name, what this afterlife looks like. It sums up the results of this initial survey of the *ars topica* to establish the basis for the accounts that follow, specific cases in which brief narrative forms behave topically.

The Eclipse of Formal Agency

Aristotle’s *Topics* can be viewed as an attempt to universalize previous dialectic traditions, most prominently that of Socrates. Whereas the Socratic dialogue always remains hierarchical (Socrates asks his partner a number of questions whose answers he partly rejects each time to allow furthering his inquiry) Aristotle’s project of the *Topics* tried to open up dialectics by providing a collection of argumentative schemata and the instruction for how to use them. Whereas for Socrates, dialectics and philosophy were necessarily connected, Aristotle separated the philosophical inquiry of truth from the dialectical process in

CHAPTER ONE: THE *ARS TOPICA*,
ITS DISAPPEARANCE, AND ITS AFTERLIFE

1. A recording of the conversation can be found at “Panel and Launch Event / Clipping, Copying, and Thinking, with Ann Blair and Kenneth Goldsmith,” *Cabinet Magazine*, March 18, 2011, http://www.cabinetmagazine.org/events/cp_launch.php.

2. Throughout this study “*ars topica*” will denominate the practice and the theory of dealing with topoi to avoid confusion with the other English term “topics,” which will be used exclusively for Aristotle’s work of the same name.

3. Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013); Ernst Robert Curtius, *Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter* (Bern: Francke, 1948). His work lacks a definition of what this continuity of semantic topoi such as the “*puer senex*” or “old boy” might suggest in terms of being a remainder of the *ars topica* or of other topoi, and it also falls short of discussing their effect on literary form.

4. For a discussion of Curtius’s approach to topoi, see Stefan Goldmann, “Zur Herkunft des Topos-Begriffs von Ernst Robert Curtius,” *Euphorion* 90 (1996), pp. 134–49; for Curtius’s general intent, see Hinrich C. Seeba, “Ernst Robert Curtius: Zur Kulturkritik eines Klassikers in der Wissenschaftsgeschichte,” *Monatshefte* 95.4 (2003), pp. 531–40.

5. *Toposforschung* is also the title of two different volumes that are part overviews of the discussion since Curtius, part critical commentary on the intentions and gains of Curtius’s project. Peter Jehn, ed., *Toposforschung. Eine Dokumentation* (Frankfurt am Main: Athenäum, 1972), and Max L. Baeumer, ed., *Toposforschung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1973).

6. Chaïm Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation*, trans. John Wilkinson and Purcell Weaver (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969). Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca include the use of loci as crucial part their rhetoric of argumentation while not emphasizing them explicitly. The first to do so explicitly, to my knowledge, perhaps the first time since Vico and Baumgarten, is Theodor Viehweg, who calls for an *ars topica* to be again a part of legal studies, citing Perelman as inspiration: Theodor Viehweg, *Topik und Jurisprudenz* (Munich: Beck, 1969). Exemplary for linguistics is the work of J. C. Anscombe, especially “Topique or not topique: Formes topiques intrinsèques et forms topiques extrinsèques,” *Journal of Pragmatics* 24.1–2 (1995), pp. 115–41. For the field of discursive studies see the approach of Ruth Amossy, who extends Perelman’s concept of topical argumentation beyond the use

for mere agreement, suggesting that an *ars topica* also addresses ways of thinking, seeing, and feeling: Ruth Amossy, *L'argumentation dans le discours* (Paris: Nathan, 2000), as well as Amossy, "Publikum und Topik," in *Die neue Rhetorik: Studien zu Chaïm Perelman*, ed. Josef Kopperschmidt (Munich: Fink, 2006), pp. 307–32. In communication studies, one work uses the classical *ars topica* as a theoretical concept, partly indebted to Curtius, to understand discursivity in educated societies to be generally topical: Lothar Bornscheuer, *Topik: Zur Struktur der gesellschaftlichen Einbildungskraft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1976). A more recent work is more specifically indebted to communication studies and intends to update the *ars topica* for current training in communicative situations: Sara Rubinelli, *Ars Topica: The Classical Technique of Constructing Arguments from Aristotle to Cicero* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2009). For a general overview across these areas, see Dieter Breuer and Helmut Schanze, eds., *Topik: Beiträge zur interdisziplinären Diskussion* (Munich: Fink, 1981), and *Topik und Rhetorik: Ein interdisziplinäres Symposium*, eds. Gert Ueding and Thomas Schirren (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2000). Both volumes leave an open, almost uncommented gap between the historical *ars topica* from antiquity to 1750 and its theoretical application after 1950, a systematic problem in the history of *ars topica* that this study tries to address.

7. Gerhart von Graevenitz, *Mythos: Zur Geschichte einer Denkgewohnheit* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1987); see especially the chapter "Die topische Überlieferung. Die Mythologie der Mythographen," pp. 45–119.

8. Uwe Hebekus, "Topik/Inventio," in *Einführung in die Literaturwissenschaft*, eds. Milos Pechlivanos, Stefan Rieger, Wolfgang Struck, and Michael Weitz (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1995), pp. 82–96.

9. Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann, *Topica Universalis: Eine Modellgeschichte humanistischer und barocker Wissenschaft* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1983).

10. Peter von Moos, *Geschichte als Topik: Das rhetorische Exemplum von der Antike zur Neuzeit und die historiae im "Policraticus" Johanns von Salisbury* (Hildesheim: Olms, 1988). See also Eugene Vance, *From Topic to Tale: Logic and Narrativity in the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987) for a similar medieval take on the problem between topoi and narratives.

11. Walter Haug, "Kritik der topischen Vernunft. Zugleich keine Leseanleitung zu *Geschichte als Topik* von Peter von Moos," *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur* 114.1 (1992), pp. 47–56.

12. Frauke Berndt, "Poetische Topik," in *Handbuch Literarische Rhetorik*, ed. Rüdiger Zymner (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), pp. 433–60.

13. The encyclopedia articles on the concept of *ars topica* are the most comprehensive and important secondary sources of the problem that provide the backdrop of the historical lineages behind this chapter. Most importantly and most recently, see Tim Wagner, s.v. "Topik," in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik*, ed. Gert Ueding (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2009). See also Stefan Goldmann, Christoph Kann, and Oliver Primavesi, s.v. "Topik; Topos," in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, eds. Joachim Ritter, Karlfried Gründer, Gottfried Gabriel, 12 vols. (Basel: Schwabe, 1998); Wilhelm Kühlmann and Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann, s.v. "Topik," in *Reallexikon der deutschen Literaturwissenschaft*, ed. Jan-Dirk Müller (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2003); Petter Hess, s.v. "Topos," in *ibid.*

14. *Oxford Dictionary of English*, s.v. "Topic," <https://www.lexico.com/definition/topic>.

15. Teaching students of rhetoric and dialectic to have ready-made arguments and pieces of discourse, however, is already present in earlier treatises by Isocrates, Gorgias, and others, as Cicero also notes. See Wagner, s.v. "Topik," in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik*. A synchronous history of metaphorization from location to subject matter can also be traced for "theme," which is derived from ancient Greek verb *tithenai*, "to put" but also meant "area in which something is put up." Like its relative "thesis," "theme," however, retained the connotation of the act of claiming or proposing something as "something that is claimed" and therefore has appeared similar to "topic" only since early modernity, not interfering with the history of *ars topica* or *topos*. See Bernhard Asmuth, s.v. "Thema," in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2009), vol. 9, pp. 528–41, and Albrecht Berger, s.v. "Theme," in *Brill's New Pauly*, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1574-9347_bnp_e1217380.

16. The theoretical lineage of the mnemotechnical function of *topoi* is very extensive, running parallel and underneath the history of the *ars topica* itself, however in a very multifaceted way that ranges from the training of the mind to variations on syntax, visual practices, and didacts and would thus require its own chapter. For an overview of the *topoi* of *memoria*, see the canonical studies by Francis Yates, *The Art of Memory* (London: Routledge, 1966) and Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). With special regard to the connection between *ars topica* and *ars memorativa*, see Christoph Kann, "Der Ort der Argumente: Eigentliche und uneigentliche Verwendung des mittelalterlichen *locus*-Begriffs," in *Raum und Raumvorstellungen im Mittelalter*, eds. Jan A. Aertsen and Andreas Speer (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1998), pp. 402–18.

17. The radical attempt to conceive of the whole of a discussion as a topical system

suggests that a network theory of discourses *avant la lettre* is the basis of Aristotle's *Topics*, a view that neither Michel Foucault, Niklas Luhmann, nor Friedrich Kittler have even hinted at in their work. Luhmann, for instance, evokes the question of *ars topica* only in the limited sense of "common place" and "storehouse" when assessing the print medium's effect on the storage of knowledge in the fifteenth century; Niklas Luhmann, *Theory of Society*, trans. Rhodes Barrett, 2 vols. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012); especially volume 1, chapter 9, "Symbolically Generalized Communication Media, 1: Function," pp. 190–99.

18. Roland Barthes, "The Old Rhetoric: An Aide-Mémoire" (1970), in *The Semiotic Challenge*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1988), p. 65.

19. Roland Barthes, "L'ancienne rhétorique: Aide-mémoire," *Communications* 16 (1970), p. 206.

20. Aristotle, *Topica*, ed. and trans. E. S. Forster. Loeb Classical Library 391 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960), 100a18, p. 273.

21. Today's remainders of this topical tradition are known, for example, as the "5 Ws," that is, the basic questions to be answered in every journalistic work.

22. Barthes, "The Old Rhetoric," pp. 66–67.

23. See the specific contexts for Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and Cicero's *De oratore* in Lucia Calboli Montefusco, s.v. "Topics," in *Brill's New Pauly*.

24. Barthes, "The Old Rhetoric," p. 66.

25. Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), §10.6, "The Pleasance," pp. 195–200.

26. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. Hugh Tredennick, Loeb Classical Library 271 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1933), 4.2.1004b, p. 157.

27. Here I do not follow Forster's translation of the *Topics*, but the more literal renderings by Robin Smith in Aristotle, *Topics, Books I and VII with Excerpts from Related Texts*, trans. and commentary Robin Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 101a30, p. 2; see also Smith's commentary on the sentence, pp. 51–52. In accordance with Smith's translation is Wagner and Rapp's German translation in Aristotle, *Topik*, trans. and commentary Tim Wagner and Christoph Rapp (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2004), p. 47.

28. See Aristotle, *Topics, Books I and VII*, p. 51.

29. Ibid., 101a30, p. 2. See also Wagner and Rapp in Aristotle's *Topik*, p. 47: "Für die Begegnungen (mit der Menge) aber, weil wir uns, nachdem wir die Meinungen der Leute gesichtet haben, mit ihnen nicht aufgrund fremder, sondern aufgrund ihrer eigenen Ansichten auseinandersetzen werden und dabei das zurechtrücken, was sie uns nicht