

## **#Hashtag: Autoclassification in Hypertext and Speech**

“...nonstop categorization is every bit as indispensable to our survival in the world as is the nonstop beating of our hearts. Without the ceaseless pulsating heartbeat of our 'categorization engine', we would understand nothing around us, could not reason in any form whatever, could not communicate with anyone else...” --Douglas Hofstadter

The pervasive impulse to categorize manifests itself compellingly in Twitter's hashtagging. In this paper I present the hashtagging phenomenon as a novel and explicit version of what I call autoclassification: the classification of one's own communicative output.

Before hashtagging, we could link to social and cultural communities by way of signals such as our dress, taste in music, and eating habits. Now we can perform this linking (pun intended) textually and digitally, signaling both how we order and classify our thoughts, and how we would like others to do so.

This explicit form of autoclassification has permeated popular culture to the extent that we have incorporated hashtagging into everyday speech. A recent video featuring Jimmy Fallon and Justin Timberlake speaking almost entirely in hashtags spoofs how ubiquitous this crossover has become. The spoken hashtags are devoid of their original function of linking to online archives, but it is this aspect that foregrounds their cultural weight: even unclickable, they serve as signifiers and classifiers.

Indispensable to cognition and perception, categorization now manifests itself as explicit autoclassification in the form of hashtagging. My paper explores the rise of this overt signifying system and its various formulations in popular culture.