

Contemplating the Participatory Turn in Rhetorical Criticism

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Abstract

This essay concludes the special issue on the intersections between qualitative and rhetorical inquiry by responding to each of the essays. We highlight the productive tensions between rhetorical and qualitative inquiry, examine the benefits that qualitative inquiry brings to rhetorical fieldwork while also revealing how rhetorical inquiry can contribute to qualitative inquiry. We ultimately argue that rhetorical fieldwork is form of transdisciplinary research that resists replicating rhetorical and qualitative research by subsuming one approach under the other and instead creates a new form of hybrid research that adopts and adapts both research lineages.

Keywords

participatory critical rhetoric, rhetorical fieldwork, rhetorical field methods, qualitative inquiry, rhetorical inquiry, transdisciplinary, mixed methods

Marking and responding to the “participatory turn” in rhetorical criticism, the essays in this issue engage the synergies, tensions, and consequences that arise from intertwining rhetorical and qualitative approaches to research. From fleeting encounters to developed relationships with communities, the scholars in this special issue participate with(in) a broad range of rhetorical phenomena, engage in a diverse set of participatory research practices, and demonstrate a range of insights gained from *in situ* engagement with their topics of interest. This issue develops three pathways, each marking a possible point of productive engagement between rhetorical criticism and qualitative inquiry. First, in (re)introducing rhetorical fieldwork, the issue marks a landmark moment for rhetorical criticism, a time when a participatory approach to rhetorical criticism has become recognized as a valuable way to analyze embodied and emplaced rhetoric. Second, acknowledging this participatory turn necessitates some reflection on the points of overlap, tension, and mutual benefit that emerge when qualitative inquiry and rhetorical criticism look to one another for theories and critical approaches. In particular, the essays highlight how *in situ* rhetorical fieldwork not only falls within the *bricolage* of qualitative research, but also how it contributes valuable theoretical, methodological, and praxis-oriented insights to qualitative inquiry. Third, given the value of seeing exemplars of this sort of work, the selected articles offer a range of participatory approaches to critical/cultural studies that draw on a broad cross-section of qualitative and rhetorical theories and methodologies. By advancing these three pathways of conversation within this issue, the individual contributions, as well as the volume as a whole, provide a focal

point for additional efforts to more robustly theorize hybrid research approaches like rhetorical fieldwork.

We conclude this special issue by focusing on and jump-starting those efforts to further theorize the ways that qualitative and rhetorical inquiry can mutually inform and enhance one another, arguing for a transdisciplinary approach to critical/cultural scholarship propelled by the overarching goal of answering critical questions with the best tools available. We do so by synthesizing some of the theoretical and methodological resonances found in the essays that compose this issue. First, we return to five of the overlapping points of conversation between rhetorical criticism and qualitative inquiry that we identified in the introduction, discussing how the essays in this issue speak to these connections. Next, we contend that blending qualitative research practices with rhetorical approaches to scholarship can revitalize rhetorical praxis, especially in regard to the critical implications of rhetorical scholarship. Third, we identify some substantive contributions that attentiveness to the assumptions of rhetorical scholarship can offer to qualitative inquiry. Last, we advocate for a

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transdisciplinary research approach that leaves qualitative inquiry and rhetorical scholarship changed after they have been co-mingled in rhetorical fieldwork.

Conversations Between Rhetorical Criticism and Qualitative Inquiry

Returning to the overlaps and tensions we identified in the introduction provides a way to synthesize the individual and collective contributions of the essays toward illuminating the value of rhetorical fieldwork and other hybrid forms of critical/cultural scholarship. In the introduction, we articulated five points of connection between rhetorical criticism and qualitative inquiry: critical/cultural approaches, everyday encounters, performance, *bricoleur/bricolage*, and reflexivity in the role of the researcher. Marking how they emerge in and between the essays provides a set of tangible examples of efforts to operationalize these themes and in which to ground future conversations about these intersections.

Critical/Cultural Approaches

First, drawing together methodological and theoretical strands from both qualitative inquiry and rhetorical criticism is, in part, facilitated by the shared assumptions found in the critical turns taken by both approaches to research. Admittedly, not all forms of rhetorical fieldwork are critical/cultural, but the essays in this special issue to varying degrees draw from topoi produced by the critical/cultural interventions in both rhetorical studies and in qualitative research more broadly. Both share an avowed commitment to engaging in research in ways that foster social justice. For critical qualitative scholars, and especially critical ethnographers, qualitative inquiry ought to begin “with an ethical responsibility to address processes of unfairness or injustice within a particular *lived* domain” and with a recognition that “conditions for existence within a particular context are not as they *could* be for specific subjects” (Madison, 2011, p. 5; emphases in original). For rhetorical scholars, and especially critical rhetoricians, rhetorical criticism should be oriented toward an “emancipatory potential” that creates “possibilities for altering relations of power that currently constrain action” by examining “how discourse operates in a fragmented and destabilized social world” (McKerrow, 2016, p. 254). Moreover, both recognize that the forms of domination they aim to unpack and upend, as well as the strategies by which those aims might be realized, run the gambit from the mundane to the exceptional, from the textual to the material and embodied. Central to the aims of both approaches to research is recognizing the positionality of those affected by discourses and practices of domination, and of the researchers themselves (Madison, 2011; McKerrow, 1989; Thomas, 1993).

The essays in this volume illuminate how the problematics of critical approaches can be effectively addressed by bringing together practices and assumptions from both qualitative and rhetorical inquiry. Undergirding all of the essays is a strong commitment to using qualitative modes of inquiry, including focus groups, participant observation, and ethnographic interviews, to expand the range of rhetorical practices available for analysis thereby giving voice to communities occluded from more traditional research foci. This commitment sharpens the critical insights into the production, construction, and circulation of power that can be gleaned from *in situ* rhetorical performances. For example, by putting popular culture representations of the sex work industry in conversation with the lived experiences of sex workers, some of whom are depicted in those representations, Dunn interrogates the rhetoricity and performativity of authenticity, revealing the constructedness of claims to “authentic” lived experience and the importance of those constructions to the women who work at the Moonlight Bunny Ranch. Through this analysis, she complicates broader questions about the “crisis of representation” by engaging with the different layers of (co)production and consumption of popular texts that attempt to convey the reality of lived experiences. In another type of engagement with power/resistance, Light examines how certain acts of memorialization are enabled and constrained through the rhetorical construction and material enactments of the “security conscious consumer subjectivity” forged in the experience of visiting the National 9/11 Memorial in New York City. Through interpellation as surveilling *flâneurs*, visitors to the memorial site engage in a post-9/11 security apparatus that expresses democratic freedom through social surveillance. Likewise, in the context of post-9/11 airport security, McHendry draws from performance theory to engage in an affective examination of how the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) and passengers co-create a form of security theater that powerfully subjects the body *out* of resistance—often in service of convenience or for the sake of performing security—and intersects with differently positioned bodies in a range of productive and problematic ways. Each of these essays explores how lived experience both influences and is influenced by textual representations, as well as how those texts and performances structure ways of knowing about those phenomena informing how broader audiences understand them.

While all three of these essays work toward enacting the shared emancipatory agenda of critical rhetorical and critical qualitative scholarship, McKinnon and her colleagues remind participatory researchers that engagement with lived, *in situ* rhetorical practices is not without risks, as well as heightened levels of ethical responsibility. By turning a critical lens toward their own research practices, they embrace forms of positionality and reflexivity that are often given minimal attention in rhetorical scholarship, but that

are centrally important to critical/cultural scholarship undertaken with communities of participants that are often more vulnerable than the researcher and who remain so after the researcher departs.

Everyday Encounters

Alongside these critical turns, both critical qualitative inquiry and critical rhetorical scholarship share an effort to develop meaningful theoretical tools and methodological practices for engaging with everyday life, culture, and communication practices. Stemming from the insights of de Certeau (1984), de Certeau, Giard, and Mayol (1998), Bourdieu (1972/1977), Lefebvre (2014) and others, scholars have embraced the notion that the innumerable practices engaged in by local communities on an everyday basis both expose the operations of power/resistance within cultural contexts and reveal nascent possibilities for emancipatory practice.

In critical rhetorical scholarship, these efforts have been guided by the theorization of “vernacular discourses”—including local newspapers, film, cultural artifacts, as well as everyday conversations—that reveal rhetorical practices that seldom gain recognition in broader public spheres, but that sustain local, often marginalized, rhetorical communities (Hauser, 1999; Ono & Sloop, 1995). Qualitative scholars, especially those informed by performance studies, have similarly embraced the everyday, recognizing that the mundane actions and interactions of everyday life are the moments when local, marginalized communities reveal that they are “thinking, theorizing, [and] culture-processing human beings” (Johnson, 2003, p. 10). The essays in this volume take up this focus in several ways. Reminiscent of the work of Fiske (2010), as well as Watts and Orbe’s (2002) rhetorical scholarship focused on consumer interactions with popular media, Dunn engages the everyday along two lines: first, from the perspective of workers at the Moonlight Bunny Ranch that make sense of their lived experiences in relation to popular culture representations, and, second, by reflexively examining the everyday practices adopted by audiences who vicariously participate in the Moonlight Bunny Ranch via the television show, *Cathouse*. Similarly, both Light and McHendry engage everyday fields of rhetorical activity—that is, public memorial spaces and airport security—to illuminate how those fields enact forms of disciplinary power, as well as how everyday encounters with those spaces reveal moments when participants and researchers evade their surveillance or resist efforts to discipline the participation of public bodies in those spaces. McKinnon and her co-authors take a different and reflexive approach to the everyday by highlighting the significant, power-laden, and everyday ethical encounters that make up rhetorical fieldwork.

Performance

Both qualitative inquiry and critical rhetorical scholarship increasingly seek to enliven their critical insights with attention to performance and the performative dimensions of the cultural contexts with which they engage. Owing to Conquergood’s (1992) defense of a focus on performance as a tool for understanding communication phenomena across a broad range of contexts, scholars of many backgrounds have embraced the epistemological and critical potential offered by adopting a performance-based lens for their scholarship. In rhetorical studies, scholars have embraced the rhetoricity of cultural performances as an object of study (Fenske, 2007; Pezzullo, 2001, 2003), the performative role of the critic in both producing the discourses they examine (McGee, 1990; McKerrow, 1989) and influencing the critical texts they construct (Bowman, 2000; Ewalt, Ohl, & Pfister, 2013; Hartnett, 1999). Within qualitative inquiry, Denzin (2003), Madison (2006), Pollock (1998), and Conquergood (2002) examine modes of engaging in performance ethnography, using performance as a heuristic, a process, and a product of research. In both domains, this has manifested itself in a recognition of embodiment and reflexivity on the part of the researcher (including taking account of how the researcher’s presence influences the practices they observe), in the ways that researchers make sense of the practices they observe, and in the ways that researchers conceptualize the forms and purpose of the scholarship their *in situ* fieldwork produces.

Through the synthesis of qualitative and rhetorical approaches, Dunn, Light, and McHendry highlight the influence of performance and performativity on their own participatory scholarship. For Dunn, the performance of sexuality is complicated as it is constructed by the real-life enactments of workers of the Moonlight Bunny Ranch, reconstructed as a different performance by the producers of reality television that aims to capture those embodied performances of sexuality, and performatively reconstructed once more through the viewing practices of audiences that may or may not be able to ground those reconstructions in the material reality experienced by the sex workers themselves. Both Light and McHendry draw on performance scholarship to make sense of the ways bodies are disciplined as they move through public spaces, as well as how spaces for performed modes of resistance and disruption are invented by participants in the field. Moreover, these three essays challenge the textocentrism Conquergood (1992) criticized in favor of concentrating on live(d) rhetorical performances. Consequently, these essays make salient the embodied and emplaced nature of rhetoric (Middleton, Hess, Endres, & Senda-Cook, 2015).

Through his use of performative writing, McHendry experiments with the interpretation and meaning-making aspects of rhetorical criticism. His writing presents a dual

analysis that at once reveals the processes and performances involved in writing rhetorical scholarship, creating opportunities for methodological conversations about *how* the critic is performatively implicated into her or his own scholarship, and how larger contextual discourses of identity surface in fieldwork. In a different sort of performative writing that enacts a conversation and draws from personal reactions, feelings, and experiences, McKinnon et al. encourage further reflection about the ethics of rhetorical scholarship. By attending to issues of trust, subject position, responsibility, and conflict, their essay allows a space to reconsider some of the foundations of rhetorical inquiry, as well as pointing to common topoi from qualitative research that can form points of dialogue with rhetoric scholars. Together, these essays highlight how attention to the performative dimensions of rhetoric and the rhetorical dimensions of performance can illuminate the myriad ways that critics are meaningfully implicated in and by the field, display how the processes of fieldwork are marked by contingency, and highlight how larger discourses of power manifest in the act of writing.

Bricoleur/Bricolage

The essays in this issue stem from analyses of fragments brought together to form a whole interpretation. In this way, the authors are *bricoleurs*, making arguments based on the *bricolages* they have produced. In doing so, they enact the commitments of critical rhetorical scholarship that guide the critic to construct a text suitable for criticism (McGee, 1990) that is motivated less by methodological rigidity and more by the exigency that attracts the critic's attention. Similarly, by allowing their *in situ* field experiences to inform their analysis, the essays demonstrate the commitment of qualitative inquiry, and especially ethnography, to remain open to the "deeply personal experience" of doing fieldwork that involves dialoguing with others and trusting "intuition, senses, and emotions" as elements "powerfully woven into and inseparable from the process" of gaining critical insights into the lived experiences of the communities one studies (Madison, 2011, p. 9). For example, Dunn draws together fragments of discursive and embodied meaning making to produce an understanding of the constructions of sexuality and the identity of sex workers at Moonlight Bunny Ranch. Her analysis is guided by putting into dialogue the experiences and stories of the women who work at the Ranch, the depictions of the Ranch on *Cathouse*, and the interpretations voiced by her own and other audiences' viewing of the show. Similarly, Light and McHendry utilize movement (Fenske, 2007), embodied performance, and witnessing to identify discursive and material configurations of meaning and power present in the public memorialization of the 9/11 attacks, as well as the security apparatus that was born of the cultural trauma activated by

those events. Finally, by surveying a range of research experiences, McKinnon et al. are able to bring together a set of ethical thematics—responsibility, truth, power, relationships, and representation—that emerge for researchers traversing the boundaries between qualitative and rhetorical modes of inquiry.

Reflexivity and the Role of the Researcher

Finally, participatory approaches demand reflexivity at all of the stages of a project's development. While reflexivity is a longstanding concern in qualitative inquiry, it is relatively new to rhetorical inquiry and has been introduced in large part because of those rhetorical critics who have turned to fieldwork to augment traditional methods of rhetorical criticism. Conceiving of the researcher as part of the process of critiquing rhetoric encourages critics to consider the role that their bodies and perspectives play during key moments of rhetorical inquiry. Although the presence of the critic is not unique to participatory approaches, it is made more apparent in rhetorical fieldwork because of the direct engagement critics can have with participants at the point of rhetorical invention (Middleton et al., 2015). Rhetorical scholars necessarily approach their projects from a particular subject position. Acknowledging that position as part of the critical process not only adds information about the interpretation of rhetoric, but it also develops richness in the account that might not be present if critics write themselves out of the scenes they experience. While the practice of reflexivity may make critics more vulnerable—revealing what they would rather keep hidden—it also creates room to examine an undertheorized area of rhetoric: affect. Insofar as people are affective beings, acknowledging rhetorical critics as participants enmeshed in affective networks makes it possible to attend to formerly disregarded moments of persuasion and identification that could have serious consequences for critics, audiences, and other participants alike. Encouraging all rhetorical critics to consider their "*situatedness*," Morris (2014) challenges rhetorical critics to develop rhetorical reflexivity as part and parcel of their critical activities (p. 105, emphasis in original).

The scholars who contributed to this volume engage in this practice to varying degrees. Together, they highlight the ways in which a rhetorical reflexivity (Middleton et al., 2015; Morris, 2014) can scrutinize the personal *and* disciplinary commitments that are present in research. For example, Dunn's reflection on cultural studies and rhetorical inquiry in relation to her own previously conducted analyses pushes her critical approach to simultaneously address production, representation, and audience. Her essay challenges both her own conclusions regarding *Cathouse* as well as longstanding disciplinary assumptions about cultural studies. Taking a different approach, Light employs her own experiences and photographs as the grounds for

making claims about the surveilling *flâneur*. In doing so, she identifies a moving methodology that creates a space for reflexively negotiating the spatial vectors of rhetorical criticism in the field. Next, McHendry, through his unique writing style, approaches rhetorical reflexivity as a process and provides an example of how to take up reflexivity in the act of writing, emphasizing the choices latent in all interpretation and argumentation. Last, making reflexivity the central focus of their essay, McKinnon et al. delve deeply into their experiences, decisions, dilemmas, and lingering questions from their rhetorical fieldwork. With open reflection at the heart of their essay, McKinnon et al. reveal and examine aspects of the critical process usually left concealed. Together these essays demonstrate how rhetorical reflexivity can impact the many stages of rhetorical fieldwork: conception, design, investigation, analysis, and presentation. Looking to these essays, critics can get a sense of the variety of ways they can incorporate reflexivity in their own work and the possible contributions that doing so can make to rhetorical theory, methodology, and praxis.

Critical/cultural approaches, the everyday, performance, *bricolage*, and reflexivity stand as five significant points of productive intersection between rhetorical and qualitative inquiry that are enacted through rhetorical fieldwork. The essays in this volume raise questions about, challenge, reinforce, and otherwise work within this intersection. In the next two sections, we will highlight the bi-directionality of influence between rhetorical and qualitative inquiry, starting with a discussion of what qualitative inquiry has brought to rhetorical studies.

Qualitative Inquiry and the Revitalization of Rhetorical Praxis

As acknowledged in the introduction of this special issue, a number of scholars have recognized the potential for qualitative inquiry to enhance rhetorical research (McKinnon, Asen, Chavez, & Howard, 2016; Middleton et al., 2015). First, as has been argued elsewhere (Hess, 2011; Middleton et al., 2015; Middleton, Senda-Cook, & Endres, 2011; Pezzullo, 2003), the turn toward qualitative inquiry by rhetorical scholars has opened up rhetoric to a broader range of rhetorical activity, practices, and phenomena than possible by relying on the theoretical concepts and methodologies available in the domain of rhetorical theory and criticism alone. Sustaining Conquergood's (1992) claim that rhetoricians have "much to gain from ethnography, particularly understanding the cultural constructedness of key concepts such as 'reason,' 'the rational,' 'the logical,' 'argument,' 'evidence,' and so forth," rhetorical scholars have made use of the methodological practices and theoretical assumptions of qualitative inquiry to rethink many of rhetorical inquiry's common topoi (p. 81). For example, critics of social movements have benefited from ethnographic and qualitative approaches to account for

how space/place (Endres & Senda-Cook, 2011), performances (Fenske, 2007; Pezzullo, 2001, 2003), and vernacular discourses (Hess, 2011; Middleton, 2014a, 2014b) that fail to achieve textualization nuance the field's understanding of activism and social movement(s) by complicating, challenging, and sustaining rhetorical theories of political agitation. Likewise, through ethnographic engagement in a variety of contexts, ranging from rallies to school board meetings, rhetoricians have come to understand better how arguments succeed and fail within the actually-lived spaces of democratic deliberation (Asen, 2015; Herbig & Hess, 2012).

In this issue, the contributors highlight the ways in which the internalization of some of the methodological commitments of qualitative inquiry provide a better lens into the rhetorical practices, argumentative fields, and discursive terrain of social phenomena ranging from airport security to performances of sexuality to collective trauma. In each case, these studies and others in the discipline highlight that *in situ* engagement with rhetorical phenomena helps rhetoricians make sense of things made with words in ways different from what close textual analysis (Leff, 1990) can accomplish. For example, by weaving together traditional qualitative approaches, including interviewing and informal focus groups, Dunn identifies how qualitative approaches can strengthen the insights available to rhetorical critics by triangulating disparate texts. Similarly, McHendry highlights the ability for qualitative approaches to help supplement and generate texts for rhetorical analysis that enable scholars to analyze the rhetorical underpinnings of everyday practices that are sustained through a combination of texts and performances. Through weaving together his experiences with airport (in)security, he illuminates the rhetorical discourses that circulate among broader publics in ways that sustain or call into question those security practices. In each instance, the authors expand the range of rhetorical productivity that informs their analysis. But, more than merely adding discursive, material, and/or embodied forms of evidence, their research demonstrates how the synthesis of these forms of meaning making produces more complex and insightful findings than those available by examining any single form of rhetorical action unto itself.

Second, an engagement with qualitative inquiry provides rhetoricians an opportunity to meaningfully re-connect their scholarship with the material realities of the phenomena with which they interact. For example, Light takes up the perspective of the "citizen tourist" to experience the everydayness of memorialization. McHendry puts special emphasis on the material forces placed upon the body as experienced in the context of airport security. Even the examination of "duties to the dead" offered by one of McKinnon's co-authors, Johnson, reflexively implicates the experiences of the critic alongside those who have passed on. By expanding texts to include lived phenomena, as well as to understand how communities interact with texts, rhetorical fieldworkers are empowered to

sharpen the consequence of their criticism. If Ott (2004) is right in his criticism that rhetorical critics have become predictable insofar as they consistently interrogate texts of all stripes only to find them “not progressive enough” (p. 195), then a turn to qualitative modes of inquiry enables rhetoricians to move beyond the text as such and to rediscover that “texts are worldly . . . [and] even when they appear to deny it, they are nevertheless a part of the social world, human life, and of course the historical moments in which they are located and interpreted” (Said, 1983, p. 5). More importantly, integrating techniques of qualitative inquiry within rhetorical criticism foments a form of critical consciousness that enables critics to take account of “the realities [of power and authority] that make texts possible . . . [and that] deliver them to their readers” (Said, 1983, p. 5). By enabling critics to experience these realities alongside the audiences of traditional rhetorical texts, the inclusion of qualitative inquiry into the interrogation of rhetorical phenomena assists rhetoricians in accomplishing this aim.

Finally, in this special issue, McKinnon et al. argue that by turning to participatory modes of rhetorical theory and criticism, rhetoricians are positioned to better account for the ethical demands created by their scholarly endeavors. For example, by reconnecting rhetorical practices, and especially texts, to the social worlds that create and experience them, rhetorical scholarship informed by qualitative inquiry is no longer able to assume that texts are “produced, but by no one and at no time” (Said, 1983, p. 4). Eliminating this fiction, Said (1983) argues, opens the way to a critical consciousness that aims to “arrive at some acute sense of what political, social, and human values are entailed in the reading, production, and transmission” of rhetorical practice, as well as to identify how critics can contribute to criticism that “thinks of itself as life-enhancing” and committed to the “social goals” of “non-coercive knowledge produced in the interests of human freedom” (p. 29). By adapting research practices from qualitative inquiry and placing oneself within the immediate political contexts—including security theater, national public memory, anti-border militarization, or prostitution—experienced by the rhetorical communities one seeks to understand, participatory modes of rhetorical criticism empower critics to trade politics-deferred for imminent political participation in ways that re-position rhetoric as a practical undertaking aimed at improving the possibilities for rhetorical action available to the communities toward which it directs its focus (McHendry, Middleton, Endres, Senda-Cook, & O’Byrne, 2014).

(Sub)Disciplinary Synergies: Rhetoric’s Promise for Qualitative Inquiry

As participatory approaches to rhetorical criticism develop along an ever-intersecting plane with qualitative inquiry—at once learning from and contributing to this well-established

approach to research—it is important to make explicit what rhetorical criticism can bring to qualitative inquiry. We refer to rhetoric in two senses: first, as a *specific form of discourse* that is meant to influence and persuade audience(s) within particular contexts, and, second, to *the academic discipline* of rhetoric. While qualitative inquiry has recognized the importance of rhetoric as a discursive tool to enhance qualitative research, especially with regard to the process of disseminating research products or evaluating the persuasive strategies employed within a culture (Philipsen, 1992; Van Maanen, 2011), the collective scholarly conversation in the discipline of rhetoric can also be of value to qualitative inquiry. The field of rhetorical studies offers a set of theoretical resources that focus on the ways in which material/symbolic discourses enable and constrain how people make sense of their worlds. Specifically, rhetorical heuristics focus on rhetoric as a form of civic publicity, develop a vocabulary to analyze discourse *per se*, offer different ways of interpreting communication practices, emphasize opportunities to make moral judgments about communication, and articulate the consequences for the identities of participants, audiences, rhetors, and researchers.

First, rhetoric as a field of study is inextricably linked to the civic and modes of publicity. This traditional focus of rhetoric on public citizenship offers a valuable heuristic for understanding how cultural activity is fundamentally political. In other words, viewing cultural activity from a rhetorical lens, from the theories of rhetoric as an art of public civic engagement, allows qualitative scholars a different vantage point. As Madison (2014) argues, “Rhetoric politicizes performance though contested assumptions, discursive power, and critical publicity” (p. 111). In some cases, this connection to civic engagement is explicit, such as Asen’s interviews of state legislators regarding faculty power in the state of Wisconsin, as discussed in McKinnon et al.’s essay. Here, Asen articulates the act of interviewing into a larger rhetorical conception of civic judgment and political parity. In Light’s essay, the relationship between national memorializing and civic duties is put on display as she articulates how participants/audiences of the 9/11 memorial are enlisted as participants in security practices. Likewise, McHendry examines how travelers in airports are similarly situated within security practices and both overtly and indirectly fashioned as defenders of and/or threats to the body politic. In other cases, the connection requires additional teasing out, such as in Dunn’s remarks about the social status of sex work. In her case, the interrogation of the sociopolitical assumptions undergirding both prostitution and the political economy of television reveals the intertextual relationship between them. The nature of “representation” occurs both in the reading of how television practices portray sex workers and in the regulatory frameworks of the State that oversee sex work. Reading prostitution and sex work in this way, Dunn’s analysis has civic implications for those who work

as legal prostitutes, like in Nevada, and those who do not, and especially for those who consume media regarding sex work. In this sense, rhetoric provides a theoretical framing for connecting social and cultural activities into larger political and representational systems.

Second, a rhetorical heuristic offers a discreet critical framework for systematically interrogating cultural practices in order to identify underlying logics manifested through embodied actions, metaphors, narratives, subject positions, opportunities for agency, and other rhetorical devices. These devices afford different perspectives on strategic action and everyday social life. Qualitative scholars interested in the ways that persuasion or advocacy circulate throughout communities can benefit from foundational assumptions and theories of rhetoric as strategic action. McKinnon's co-authors, Chavez and Asen, recall projects that attend to the many ways that vernacular and official discourses engage in strategic and tactical argumentation. Adopting such a rhetorical lens might reveal logics at work that would otherwise go unnoticed or unexplained in qualitative work. Similarly, Dunn's essay reveals conflicts between feminist assumptions, media representations, and participants' understandings of themselves as (sex) workers. A rhetorical heuristic highlights the strategic choices that everyday people make to build communities and coalitions, articulate their identities, gain power, or undermine others. By placing these concerns within a rhetorical framework, qualitative research is able to not only explain how these meaning-making practices unfold, but also interpret, assess, and offer critical evaluations of their strategic value.

Third, a rhetorical heuristic offers additional perspectives and tropes that researchers can draw from as they develop theories in/of the field and analyze the data collected in those contexts. Viewing the world through a rhetorical lens highlights discourses that function as forms of power, thereby enabling, constraining, and implicating how humans not only make sense of, but also make change in, their world(s). Rhetorical theories aimed at uncovering the development of cultural practices, for example, accomplish this by enabling insightful analysis and nuanced understanding of discourses that are developed within rhetorical communities. McHendry's article provides an example of the processes by which the TSA exerts power through its performance and how travelers engage in their own performances that support the (sometimes fictitious) portrayal of safety. Just as rhetoricians are beginning to see manifestations of these theories in rhetorical places, embodied practices, collective actions, and participants' descriptions of these phenomena, qualitative scholars could benefit from having an awareness of these theories as a way to explain the communication practices they uncover in their research.

Fourth, rhetorical critics often consider their scholarship and theory as "heuristic and moral" (Brummett, 1984), especially when implicated in real-world decision-making

settings. This function of rhetoric has a profoundly pedagogical power, both in the sense of the classroom and in an everyday rhetorical sensibility of the critic and populace alike, whereby rhetorical theory is instructive for people making moral choices. Put another way, rhetorical scholarship should *be* in the world, make *judgments* upon the consequences of discourse, and *have an impact* on those around us. Certainly, many qualitative scholars, critical and participatory action researchers, in particular, believe that their work has important consequences; yet, a rhetorical focus expands the scope of influence beyond one case into larger social and political contexts. Critical rhetorical work exists at the intersection of micro- and macro-contexts, looking to the relationship between larger social discourses and their immediate situated performances. Rhetoric attends to historical circumstance and future possibilities, accenting the *kairotic* moment of the present within which speakers offer discursive directions informed by intersubjective perspectives of reality (Hess, 2011). For example, Chavez's work in the McKinnon et al. essay calls forth the politics of border issues in linguistic, temporal, and spatial/regional terms, which all feature in her analysis of the relational dynamics of fieldwork. In Light's essay, she reads the immediate horizontal and vertical vectors of the National 9/11 Memorial alongside larger discourses of terrorism, national security, and tourism, which inform her notion of social surveillance. Informed by a multitude of discursive intersections, these ways of reading offer judgments that cut across text and context, producing nuanced judgments about political life for readers and those with whom we interact in the field.

Fifth, articulating one's identity has implications not only for the self but also for researchers and the choices of representation they make. Emerging from the crisis of representation, Denzin and Lincoln (2011) argue, "The interpretive bricoleur understands that research is an interactive process shaped by one's personal history, biography, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity and those of the people in the setting" (p. 5). Rhetorical theory and method offer some useful resources for understanding that these elements of identity (personal history, race, etc.) are rhetorical performances. Bringing rhetorical theory to bear on qualitative inquiry allows for thinking of reflexivity as a rhetorical process, alongside thinking of representation as a rhetorical process. This means that critics are embracing a rhetorical reflexivity that invites "boundary crossing into performance/history" (Morris, 2014, p. 105), enabling connections between present performances of identity in the field and the historical forces that produce identity. Dunn struggles to reconcile the representations of the women on Bunny Ranch with her observations and interviews, and eventually turns to an intertextual approach to make sense of the narratives of sex work as cultural, historical, communal, and individual. Additionally, McKinnon et al. provide several instances of troublesome

representation. They discuss how researchers represent themselves both during fieldwork and in essays, how researchers represent the people they study both in writing and in public presentations, how researchers have responsibilities when accessing and depicting sensitive information, and how they protect participants' identities through pseudonyms even when the participants themselves might advocate for the use of their real names.

In all of these ways, rhetorical scholarship is positioned to both add to and sharpen the insights available to qualitative scholars. The contributions that rhetorical criticism has for scholars who do fieldwork do not end with the analytic theories researchers can apply after data collection. Rather, they offer potential benefits for scholars at every stage of the research process. In some instances, like reflexivity, rhetorical scholarship does not so much make a new contribution to the work done by qualitative scholars as it offers another facet to the discussion of how such concerns are accounted for in contemporary critical/cultural studies. On the other hand, rhetoric also holds out the possibility of activating new considerations among qualitative scholars, such as materiality, emplacement, or the strategic dimensions of discursive practices. However, as discussed in the next section, the impetus toward rhetorical fieldwork should not be cast in terms of which tradition holds a position of dominance, but rather how, by creating open pathways for dialogue and valuing hybrid research approaches, scholars from both domains are positioned to produce more energized and critically insightful forms of research.

Conclusion: Engaging Transdisciplinarity

The essays in this special issue not only display a range of possibilities for *in situ* rhetorical fieldwork, but also illuminate some of the productive possibilities that these approaches offer to qualitative and rhetorical scholars alike. Even as we detail the potentials of these approaches, we recognize that they are not suitable for every project. Our purpose is not to change both rhetorical criticism and qualitative inquiry entirely. Rather, our aim is to theorize the foundations of contemporary practices of rhetorical fieldwork, to offer some examples of that scholarship, and to unpack the consequences this turn in rhetorical criticism has for not only rhetoric but also qualitative scholarship. In other words, our aim is not to displace either (critical) qualitative scholarship nor to minimize the unique insights produced by (critical) rhetorical fieldwork. Rather, our purpose is to suggest that this moment of methodological and theoretical foment in rhetorical studies has broader implications for how we think about the relationships between approaches to research and the possibilities of collaboration between (sub)disciplines. We conclude by thinking through this possibility in terms of transdisciplinarity and the potential it holds for scholars working at the intersections of qualitative and rhetorical scholarship.

In the now canonical meditation on the productive engagements possible between rhetoric, ethnography, and performance, Conquergood (1992) encourages communication scholars to consider the important insights that researchers stand to gain by facilitating border crossings between commonly-recognized divisions in the communication discipline. The contributors to this volume take up Conquergood's challenge, enacting creative border crossings between rhetorical and qualitative inquiry, as well as identifying further possibilities to make good on the potential foretold by his challenge to communication scholars. In particular, we argue that the blending of qualitative and rhetorical inquiry through rhetorical fieldwork, as the essays in this special issue do, offers a transdisciplinary approach that does not simply apply one to the other, but blends the two research approaches into a new critical praxis. This new approach has the potential to revitalize rhetorical scholarship by providing new perspectives on the process, production, and reception of discourse. Likewise, it creates the opportunity to further hone the findings of qualitative scholars by regrounding their research into the practical and strategic uses of meaning-making activities that are invented, modified, and challenged by the communities they research.

Taken together, the contributions to this issue point toward the value of transdisciplinary research as a way to both enliven critical/cultural scholarship and to create dialogue around important social, political, and cultural exigencies whose significance transcends and traverses the methodological expertise of scholars within any particular discipline. For example, Sprain, Endres, and Petersen (2010) note that transdisciplinary research is a problem-oriented approach that draws from relevant tools that will help address a social problem. Like *bricolage*, transdisciplinary research can be likened to a quilt that makes up a whole through seemingly disparate parts. We choose to think about the cross-pollination of methodological practices present in the contributions to this volume as "transdisciplinary," rather than "interdisciplinary," deliberately. As Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) note, the distinction between the two approaches to integrating theoretical or methodological commitments of disciplines and sub-disciplines is significant. In the case of the latter, interdisciplinarity "appl[ies] the theoretical categories and methods of different [sub]disciplines to the same issue or problem in a way which leaves them [i.e., the theoretical categories, methods, and their (sub)disciplinary homes] untouched" (p. 112). In the case of the former, transdisciplinarity demands that sub-disciplines internalize the theoretical commitments and methodological practices of other scholarly traditions in ways that do not simply subsume and reproduce those practices and commitments. Guided by the problem that propels one's research, transdisciplinarity blurs the boundaries between (sub)disciplines, putting those boundaries at risk in ways that allows scholars to develop the

most complementary set of approaches for interrogating the problem of interest.

Said differently, we do not locate the value of the contributions to this volume, as well as the groundswell of scholars blending rhetorical and other (often qualitative) methodologies, in terms of the degree to which those scholars most effectively and faithfully reproduce the practices of their colleagues. Rather, we argue that rhetorical fieldwork provides an exemplar of problem-driven scholarship that invents critical and epistemological approaches that are best suited to examine particular social, political, and cultural phenomena. For example, rhetoricians who advance these approaches are not doing ethnography as such, and it would be unfair to praise or criticize scholarship in that tradition for its failure to do so. Rather, they are demonstrating the value of transdisciplinarity by offering examples of how rhetorical scholars can take up ethnographic practices, regrounded in the traditions of rhetorical theory and criticism, to illuminate the exigencies on which such research is focused more fully than either a purely qualitative or a purely rhetorical approach could offer. In doing so, these efforts point toward promising possibilities in both domains of critical/cultural studies. These are possibilities that we believe are highlighted by the contributions to this issue and that we hope proliferate through the conversations this volume provokes.

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