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Rhetorical Critic(ism)'s Body: Affect and Fieldwork on a Plane of Immanence

George F. McHendry Jr.^a, Michael K. Middleton^b, Danielle Endres^b,
Samantha Senda-Cook^a & Megan O'Byrne^b

^a Department of Communication Studies, Creighton University

^b Department of Communication, University of Utah

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Rhetorical Critic(ism)'s Body: Affect and Fieldwork on a Plane of Immanence

George F. McHendry, Jr., Michael K. Middleton,
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Megan O'Byrne

Rhetorical interventions, witnessed from Tahrir Square to Zuccotti Park, demonstrate the potential of local political collectivities and grassroots communities to rhetorically craft broadly shared oppositional identities, commonly held ideologies, and communally constructed symbolic resources. Likewise, they confront rhetorical theorists with a proliferation of everyday, ephemeral, and mundane rhetorical actions that demand a rethinking of what constitutes the object of rhetorical criticism. In this article, we join efforts to theorize the shift from focusing on traditional rhetorical artifacts to attending to rhetorical exchanges encountered by in situ rhetoricians. We expand on contemporary efforts to theorize this shift by focusing on immanent participation as a critical practice through which critics embed their bodies in a web of interpersonal relationships, affective claims on the critic, potential vulnerabilities, and political choices. We augment our theoretical arguments with vignettes from our own fieldwork to illuminate these tensions. And, we consider the implications of immanent participation for rhetorical field research.

But minor histories should not be mistaken for trivial ones. (Stoler, 2010, p. 7)

Political upheavals, witnessed from Tahrir Square to Zuccotti Park, demonstrate the import and potential of local political collectivities and grassroots communities.

George F. McHendry, Jr., Department of Communication Studies, Creighton University. Michael K. Middleton, Department of Communication, University of Utah. Danielle Endres, Department of Communication, University of Utah. Samantha Senda-Cook, Department of Communication Studies, Creighton University. Megan O'Byrne, Department of Communication, University of Utah. Correspondence to: Michael K. Middleton, Department of Communication, University of Utah, 255 South Central Campus Drive, 2400 LNCO, Salt Lake City, UT 84112. E-mail: m.middleton@utah.edu

Such groups exert rhetorical force through their production of broadly shared oppositional identities, commonly held ideologies, and communally constructed symbolic resources. These means of rhetorical agency (Greene, 2004) exhort other communities and institutionalized powers to action. They reveal the power of vernacular rhetorical action to influence social collectivities, large and small (Ono & Sloop, 1995). These politically charged moments confound rhetorical theorists seeking to explain and illuminate what gives everyday, ephemeral, and mundane rhetorical action such force. Driven by these rhetorical phenomena and rhetorical theory's ideological and critical turns (McKerrow, 1989; Wander, 1983; Wander & Jenkins, 1972), rhetoricians have sought to rethink rhetoric as an object of study, especially with regard to the social locations from which rhetoric emerges. This rethinking of what constitutes the object of rhetorical criticism has been paralleled by the work of rhetorical theorists attempting to outline approaches for the study of vernacular, material, and "live" rhetorics (see, for example, Blair, 1999, 2001; Blair, Jeppeson, & Pucci, 1991; Dickinson, 1997, 2002, 2006; Dickinson, Ott, & Aoki, 2005, 2006; Endres, Sprain, & Peterson, 2007, 2009; Hasian & Wood, 2010; Hess, 2011; Katriel, 1987, 1993; McCormick, 2003; Medhurst, 2001; Middleton, Senda-Cook, & Endres, 2011; Ono & Sloop, 1995; Pezzullo, 2001, 2003, 2007; Senda-Cook, 2012; Simonson 2010; Stromer-Galley & Schiappa, 2006; Taylor, 1998; Wilkins & Wolf, 2011; Zagacki & Gallagher, 2009). We hope to further theorize this shift from traditional rhetorical artifacts to rhetorical exchanges encountered by in situ rhetoricians in real time. Current in situ rhetorical approaches (Hess, 2011; Middleton et al., 2011) examine how critics engage the relationships between researcher, research participants, the field, and advocacy. We expand on these approaches by focusing specifically on immanent participation in rhetorical field research as a central dimension of critical practice for those working in the spaces of everyday rhetorical action.

By immanent participation, we mean a rhetorical critic's commitment to social action while doing field research. The concept of immanent participation offers a way to understand how in situ rhetorical approaches embed critics and their bodies in a web of interpersonal relationships, affective claims on the critic, potential vulnerabilities, and political choices. In situ rhetorical critics are faced with choices that cut to the core of one's political and intellectual commitments. Interrogating the space between entering and exiting the field—presence in the field—can reveal immanent moments that implicate the choices made by critics and where the "'seeds of becoming' capable of transforming oppressive power relations" may be found, interrogated and cultivated by critics and co-participants alike (Smith, 1997, pp. xlii–xliii). Immanent participation focuses on the affective dimensions of in situ research, insisting that in situ rhetorical critics analyze how people (including researchers and their co-participants in research) build affective bonds and collective subjectivities.

Our article examines the challenges faced by in situ rhetorical critics, particularly during their time in the field. Our primary agenda is to hail critics to interrogate the political entanglements that ensnare the researcher in the field with the same careful attention given to the rhetorical artifacts such work produces. We develop our argument in three sections. First, we situate our study within literature on participatory

approaches to rhetorical criticism, accounting for dimensions of affect that animate in situ “rhetorical practices” and make ethical claims on critics (Senda-Cook, 2012). Following this, we examine three planes where critical tensions may unfold—immanence, vulnerability, and affect. We intersperse our theoretical arguments with vignettes from our own fieldwork that illustrate the situations wherein critics confront these tensions. Last, we consider the implications of immanent participation for rhetorical field research.

Performing Rhetorical Fieldwork

As a radical break with many practices in the discipline of rhetorical criticism, a growing number of rhetorical critics capitalize on in situ rhetorical approaches. These efforts provoke difficult conversations about the implications of adopting ethnographic field methods in rhetorical criticism and push forward the development of rhetorical theory. Critics engaged in participatory rhetorical research seek to embed themselves within vernacular communities as a way to study “live rhetorics” (Middleton et al., 2011) or to “engage in direct participation, . . . invention and advocacy” (Hess, 2011, p. 129). Middleton et al. and Hess offer an intellectual mapping of the abundant efforts to engage in this embedded rhetorical research. Both perspectives explore the implications of time spent in the field with the messiness such participation entails, including making choices about how to manage relationships and commitments. Middleton et al. take a step toward synthesizing several ad hoc approaches to rhetorical field research and begin the work of organizing a methodology for future efforts. They outline a two-part process that guides the work of critics embarking on in situ rhetorical research. This effort includes the following: first, careful selection of “rhetorical sites based on critical commitments that contribute to emancipatory practice characteristic of most critical rhetorical research;” and second, a critical focus on “rhetorical experiences [that] can be ‘brought back from the field’ and utilized to shape future rhetorical action” (Middleton et al., 2011, p. 390). In sum, doing rhetorical field methods involves using one’s critical commitments to guide entry into sites of rhetorical action and then returning from the field having recovered or produced texts suitable for criticism (McGee, 1990). In this way, rhetorical field methods expand the range of texts that are brought within the scope of critical analysis by rhetorical scholars.

A more radical opportunity opened by a move into the field is the (re)new(ed) possibilities for practice (both critical and practical) and for engagement with and alongside everyday practitioners encountered in the spaces of rhetorical action. Occupying, even momentarily, the space of live rhetorical action creates the space for students of rhetoric to make good on the impulse of critical rhetorical studies to envision themselves as rhetoricians; that is, as potential actors in emancipatory practice, not simply critics of interventions already performed. Performing this emancipatory practice is more difficult than it seems. Charland (1991) contends that critical rhetoricians rarely reach, activate, or assist in social agitation or change (p. 71–72). Nonetheless, we believe that in situ critical rhetoric, when informed by an ethic of

immanent participation, overcomes Charland's critique. Emphasizing participatory rhetorical research's affective dimensions can enable critics to make practical contributions by identifying and cultivating forms of immanent participation that include the embodied actions, not just observations, of the critic in the field.

Hess's (2011) "[e]mbodied advocacy, as performed and witnessed under ethnographic conditions" begins to map the path toward this sort of immanent participation by obligating "critical rhetoricians . . . to not only maintain a critical attitude toward discourse but also to connect research practices with activism" (p. 129). By performing political discourse along with the community one researches, the space for affective engagement is cultivated. But, Hess limits his investigation to how such engagement enables better understanding of member meanings and produces a research product that advocates for the community. Our focus on immanent participation calls for a critical practice that includes, but moves beyond what Hess describes as speaking as an advocate to consider the formation of relationships and affective bonds with the community in which one participates and the extratextual insights such relationships offer, the moments in which the critic can engage in immanent participation.

To explore this, we turn to three intersecting planes on which fieldwork unfolds: immanence, affect, and vulnerability. We draw the concept of a plane from the work of Deleuze defined in Stagoll (2010) as "a surface upon which all events occur, where events are understood as chance, productive interactions between forces of all kinds" (pp. 204–205). As such, when we talk about the plane of immanence, for example, it is a conceptual space where productive relationships among the forces in play at a specific site of research can be identified.

The Plane of Immanence (On the Becoming-Rhetor)

Our desire to emphasize the affective field entered by in situ critics is derived from our recognition of the messy articulations of bodies and rhetorics intertwined in everyday rhetorical spaces. Immanent participation encourages a willingness to be affected in a serious way by the local and singular struggles of grassroots rhetorical communities. By asking, *to what degree does the rhetorician in the field open themselves to being affected by their research*, our interest is in the micropolitical, minor-rhetorics that upset flows of power. Our hope is to begin to theorize how those moments of being affected can begin to be presented in and to shape our critical analyses.

Between the critical commitments in situ rhetorical critics bring to the field and the "live rhetorics" they *select* to take out of the field lays a space of immanent text-construction that the critic participates in and can be understood only in relation to the critic's position in a web of affective relations. Rhetorical critics often fail to address this space between in their written products. As such, we see a residual discomfort with how affect is conceptualized and how the affective claims produced through participation with a rhetorical community shape the epistemological and critical dimensions of one's work; a discomfort that stems from the difficulty of (re)constructing or representing profound affective moments as prose after the fact, especially when disciplinary expectations often render such moments secondary at best and invisible at worst

(Ono & Sloop, 1995, p. 19–20). This is not to say that rhetorical criticism is totally void of critical and reflexive writing—it is abundant in practice. There is ample evidence that scholars have made great strides in articulating the material challenges faced during *in situ* studies and often adopt reflexive tones about their encounters in the field (Dickinson et al., 2005, 2006; Fenske, 2007; Hess, 2011; Pezzulo, 2003, 2007; Zagacki & Gallagher, 2009). We do, however, see a difference between moments of critical reflection such as those we already see in critical rhetorical research and moments of critical action in the field. We argue that rhetorical action (immanence) is made possible in and through the affective bonds forged in the field and ought to equally shape our epistemological practice and our research reports. For example, attending a protest where a researcher is called to speak, march, listen, organize, and plan are all activities that contain rhetorical phenomena. In this moment, the critic encounters the ethical obligation to engage an immediate audience as opposed to a future scholarly audience to come. Those practices, and the affective relations that come from doing them, are at the core of immanent *in situ* rhetorical criticism. We contend that these encounters affect the insights available to rhetorical scholars and their audiences, and that their inclusion fosters a more robust approach to *in situ* rhetorical criticism.

We argue that immanence and transcendence provide critical concepts for sensitizing *in situ* critics to the active politics of the sites they (temporarily) inhabit that is consistent with rhetoric's critical turn. According to Williams (2010), immanence positions the critic "in terms of relations 'in'" a community, whereas transcendence understands a critic (and their work) in relation "to" a community (p. 126). This means that a philosophy of immanence is one that is concerned with the immediate social relations in which a critic is enmeshed. Immanence is attuned to the fomenting rhetorical potential circulating in the everyday life of grassroots collectivities recognizable only from one's position *in* such a community.

Alternatively, transcendence disciplines critics with the hope that some benevolent state machine will produce the change for which a community is agitating (Foucault, 1995, pp. 135–139). Transcendent criticism conceptualizes change that happens slowly and rarely reverses the fortunes of actual bodies encountered by researchers. For example, racism still exists in violent and unimaginable forms in the United States in part because of our reliance on a transcendent belief in a postracial future (Jackson, 2008, p. 20). Hope for a transcendent future free of racism—epitomized in the common "ERACISM" bumper sticker—ensures that race has become a taboo subject making pernicious forms of racism harder to problematize. A logic of transcendence suggests that there is a *true* path toward which to aspire that requires accepting unequal power relations for the time being. By contrast, Susan B. Anthony's ballot, cast but not counted, and her subsequent arrest was a moment of immanent action—a body doing the politics it desired. We are interested in thinking about how *in situ* critics can engage in immanent action and can *do*, or at least help hasten the doing of, the rhetorical practice they counsel in their research.

Enabling critics to parse rhetorical interventions into moments of "(immanent) rhetorical action" and "(transcendent) rhetorical action-deferred" begins to trace a pathway toward this critical sensibility. *Action* emphasizes both rhetorical/material

action and presence. Pezzullo (2007) adopts Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca's concept of *presence* to explain the importance of feeling present in the field while studying toxic tours (p. 180). Pezzullo suggests that field researchers should embrace reflexivity that "would involve putting our cameras and notebooks down—at times—in order to appreciate more fully our significance as 'outsiders' [on a toxic tour] *feeling present* within a specific time and how we might be implicated in what we are witnessing" (2007, pp. 30–31). This moment of putting down one's data collection tools to feel present in the moment is a form of action on the plane of immanence. In these moments, it is possible for a critic to engage in immanent acts of *doing* rhetoric, not just observing or analyzing rhetoric. Doing rhetoric means that the critic is engaged in rhetorical action in the field that has the potential to affect change in the moment as opposed to observing rhetoric for future potential to affect change through action-deferred. For example, a critic at a protest is not only observing that event but is, through his or her embodied participation, part of the message of the protest and is making choices about how to be part of the protest. Critics who *do* rhetoric on a plane of immanence in the field not only engage political commitments in the moment but also open a space for understanding rhetoric at the level of its practice in the community they are researching and inhabiting.

Privileging immanent rhetorical action challenges dominant critical frames in rhetorical study that emphasize "rhetorical action-deferred." Following critical rhetoric's emancipatory impulse, when rhetorical critics commit to suggesting solutions to inequities in power relationships as a function of their scholarship, they at times miss opportunities to get involved in those very power relations that shape the rhetorical fields they occupy. Critical rhetoricians can do critical rhetoric on a plane of immanence by choosing action instead of action-deferred. Like Hess (2011), critics can choose to work to better effectuate the goals of the activists and local rhetoricians who invite rhetoricians into the fields of study they explore. For example, a critic working in airports can refuse to comply with routine security procedures to explore the affective boundaries of the extended state security apparatus and in doing so can multiply the locations where rhetorical criticism can occur. Here to, the critic again engages in rhetoric with an immediate audience and can engage again later with the scholarly audience to come. Such endeavors take seriously critical rhetoric's desire to make the critic a rhetor. They entertain the possibility of a becoming-rhetor that makes immanent action possible in the field before a critic returns to her or his office to craft an essay. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) argue that removing the obligation to a deferred future and acting in the material present allows for the possibility of undoing the social boundaries that surround our body/ies. Embracing immanent rhetorical action refuses to limit the consequence of one's critical commitments in the field to only bringing back rhetorical traces that can help us direct "future action"; it asks what can be done in the immanent moments of (co)participation in the field and demands that such moments (and the choices they entail) equally influence our critical findings (McKerrow, 1989, p. 92).

Taking immanence seriously requires interrogating the current boundaries that shape where the action of rhetorical criticism ought to occur. Rhetorical critics

involved in fieldwork occupy spaces of rhetorical ferment where the opportunities for immanent action can and do challenge how critics conceive of the boundaries of rhetoric and the work of scholarship. We aim to blur the line between text/rhetorical artifact and the rhetor/rhetorical critic, whether they be participating in a protest, inhabiting the communities they study, or working in the environments that produce the rhetorical phenomena they study. In all of these instances, the rhetor becomes a partial source of the rhetoric they study. For example, in participating, marching, organizing, and speaking at and in a protest event, a critic is a coproducer of rhetorical phenomena. More than that, their critical work immediately addresses the audiences that their critical commitments concern. This is the more radical possibility opened by a move by rhetoricians into the field. That is, field-based rhetorical scholarship not only expands the boundaries of what constitute “texts suitable for criticism,” it also opens an opportunity to radically reconfigure what counts as evidence of rhetorical influence or force in a community, as well as the means by which rhetoricians encounter, learn and relate to such rhetorical actions.

By expanding the conversation about opportunities for immanent participation by rhetorical critics, our aim is to drive existent interventions (and innovations) in rhetorical field research further forward. Glimpses of immanent action are present in the practices of in situ rhetorical criticism. To cite a few examples, Pezzullo (2007) edges towards (immanent) action and affective solidarity with participants and leaders on a toxic tour, by noting the overwhelming power of the encounter and its potential for radical politics (p. 119). The reflexive voice and engagement Pezzullo takes up gestures toward the kind of immanent practice we are asking rhetorical critics to consider in the field and to make central to their critical practice. Similarly, Dickinson et al. (2005, 2006) provide disruptive readings of the Buffalo Bill Museum and the Plains Indian Museum allowing issues of scholarly identity to be activated in their critical undertakings. Their voice contains a deeply reflexive tone that enacts their political commitments in their rhetorical critiques. Disruptive readings are not new, but their interventions offer evocative ways to (re)consider the manicured spaces of museums. Lastly, Blair (2001) insists that space/place-based critics must contend with *being there*—the need to occupy a space to understand its rhetoric.

Each of these examples offers “seeds of becoming” for immanent rhetorical practices (Smith, 1997, pp. xlii–xliii). However, they do not yet materialize the immanent rhetorical practices we call for in this article. Though reflexive in tone, they are still cast in the mode of transcendent, action-deferred. They rely on critique to reshape the material politics of the spaces being studied and offer scant exploration of actions taken (or to be taken) to disrupt the relations of power they critique. This is certainly a mode of conducting in situ rhetorical criticism and one that provides an important supplement to more traditional, text-based criticism. But, we believe it should not signal the full scope of opportunities made possible by participation with and in active rhetorical communities.

These provocative rhetorical innovations can be further sharpened in their critical consequence through more direct attention to immanent action as part of the promise of rhetorical criticism following the critical turn. Critics need not be confined to gathering texts that will illuminate and provide the basis to offer better counsel to

future rhetoricians (McKerrow, 1989), nor must rhetoricians be left with issuing moral judgment as the endpoint of their critical endeavors (Cloud, Macek, & Aune, 2006). Guided by a focus on immanence/transcendence and the related action/action-deferred dyad, critical rhetoricians can seek out ways to be immanent in the field and, likewise, to make that immanence meaningful to the insights shared with scholarly audiences. This endeavor is about critical practice as much as it is about the writing of scholarship. In the sections that follow, we start a conversation that tries to struggle with how and with what consequence immanence and immanent action can inform rhetorical scholarship. We pose theoretical questions and refer to our own fieldwork to begin developing the conversation. In doing so, we aim not to expose a lack in contemporary rhetorical scholarship, but rather to locate ways that current critical practice can be supplemented by a more overt focus on the opportunities yet to be pursued fully by rhetoricians in the field.

Below we provide excerpts from our own field notes that illustrate the theoretical challenges of doing immanent, vulnerable, and affective in situ rhetorical criticism. These vignettes offer instances where the opportunity for immanent participation and action is present in the field. While these moments do not fully realize the immanent criticism we are theorizing—the fieldwork occurred before this theoretical schema was in place—they allow us to illustrate the action/action-deferred dyad in our own research. We offer them as “seeds of becoming” to illustrate moments of intense ethical struggle in the field where critics are implored to take immanent action, often with mixed results (Smith, 1997, pp. xlii–xliii). They illustrate, like the work of the critics we have noted above, a growing interest in the affective domain of fieldwork in rhetorical criticism. Last, we have organized these vignettes around the central theoretical contentions of this article to illustrate the various difficulties of pursuing this type of work in the field.

Immanent Rhetorical Criticism: Action and Research

Immanent participation works toward a kind of presence that makes it impossible to separate research from political commitments. As rhetoricians begin to grapple with the intersection of participation, politics, and the practices of rhetoric they encounter in the field, the efforts of ethnography to struggle with similar questions point toward potentially useful ways forward. Madison (2005) contends that “ethical responsibility” forms the guiding principle for embedded researchers engaged in ethnography oriented toward political ends (p. 5). Ethical responsibility requires both an effort to “resist domestication” and to contribute “to emancipatory knowledge and discourses of social justice” (Madison, 2005, p. 5). The second of these requirements has long animated critical rhetorical efforts as scholars have sought to shape future efforts at social justice by learning from effective, and sometimes ineffective, rhetorical efforts. However, the requirement to resist domestication demands a recognition that, once in the field, the opportunities for critical practice can no longer be quarantined to just the post facto written criticism. Once in the field, bodies are on the line and critical practice is enacted both in moments of co-participation, as well as in the moments

when pen is put to paper (Ono & Sloop, 1992). And, importantly, critics must confront the fact that nonparticipation is also an ethical and political choice. One coauthor describes this tension emerging when one begins to build strong relationships with the community being researched:

My experiences in, and relationship with, homeless communities make claims on me as a political actor. This tension between careful research practice and political commitment to a community with which I built identification created countless instances where action became the only sensible thing that I could do as someone who increasingly identified with the communities with whom I interacted. For example, while my aim was to attend protest actions held by homeless individuals and analyze how they re-claimed access to public space, I often found myself compelled to participate more fully in their efforts. This included opportunities to make protest signs and protest with homeless activists, transport camping gear, and provide transportation when I could. These actions became the ways of interacting with and experiencing the realities of the homeless struggle about which I sought to learn. Building these relationships and affective bonds challenged the sense I made of their rhetorical actions. Participating, even so minimally, in their struggle clarified the stakes and infused their unyielding campaign of rhetorical influence with a new depth of meaning. Sharing in their efforts to maintain their advocacy alongside the constant challenge of securing life necessities, like a place to sleep, placed in relief their struggle for a “place to be” and revealed to me how their ways of “making do” were as critical to their rhetorical efforts as the organized actions they directed. Likewise, it made apparent that to be honest about my desire to contribute to the emancipatory goals of the community required more than, and even, perhaps, rendered less important, any artful criticism that I could craft. (Middelton, personal communication, November 7, 2010)

Yet, taking immanent action is not meant to be a yes or no commitment to a cause. As Kenneth Burke (1970, p. 312) would remind us, “it’s more complicated than that.” These affective bonds are not without their costs: In situ research also can force us to abandon other existing or possible relationships, such as those with people and collectives with oppositional relationships to the community in which a critic engages. Such tradeoffs can cut to the core of not only the critic’s commitments and identity but to the types of insights the critic’s research can offer. The affective claims made by time in the field inevitably shade the critic’s analytic insights, ability to fully apprehend research problems, and capacity to engage with contrasting communities that could offer alternative perspectives.

Rhetorical field methods are most challenging because they demand that researchers make decisions, often with incomplete information, about how to align oneself in relation to the political contexts they encounter that are rife with conflict, difference, and changing allegiances. This challenge requires that researchers be willing to be vulnerable and that they dispense with hypotheses and hunches about how and from where data might be collected. Vulnerability to affective relationships, a willingness to participate in immanent action with communities, and an openness to letting those possibilities guide our research provide a means of resisting domestication and participating in embodied advocacy integral to in situ rhetorical criticism (Hess, 2011; Middleton et al., 2011).

The Vulnerable Body as/of Rhetoric

In situ rhetorical research performed on a plane of immanence makes material demands on critics' bodies (DeLuca, 1999; Patterson & Corning, 1997; Selzer & Crowley, 1999), illuminating an intersecting plane of vulnerability. Participatory rhetorical research places critics' bodies, as well as their theories, in the cultural milieu on which research is focused. Following Deleuze, an exploration of the questions posed by the rhetorical critic's body helps to identify how bodies produce connections and extensions that can illuminate in situ research. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) contend that "a body (corps) is not reducible to an organism, any more than esprit de corps is reducible to the soul of an organism" (p. 366). Social forces that discipline and organize bodies inscribe them into fields of intelligibility. Deleuze (2001) insists that "we do not know what the body can do" (p. 17). As such, it is necessary to talk in a much more complex way about what the rhetorician is and what the body in the field means for understanding potential rhetorical action. Middleton et al. (2011) take heed of the way bodies are implicated by in situ research and make a strong case that much more is required to account for "being touched by" the bodies one encounters in the field (Conquergood, 2002, p. 149). Accordingly, Middleton et al. (2011) observe, "The shift to in situ analysis that is occurring among critical rhetoricians demands more consistent attention to [questions of the import of the critic's body], and not simply as a sequestered discussion of self-reflexivity in our method discussions or introductions" (p. 395). Without this attention to the body, criticism can simply (re)produce a belief that affectivity has a place in research but that the products of the mind are the primary modes by which rhetorical criticism is done (p. 395).

To be clear, our argument is not that rhetoricians in the field have not been sensitive to questions of self-reflexivity. As we suggest above, many scholars have productively taken up reflexivity as an added dimension of concern for in situ rhetorical scholarship. Rather, our argument is that the critic's body and identity ought to be prioritized, made central and recognized as a critical, not a supplementary, part of the insight offered by embedded rhetorical research. We contend that bodies in the field have profound experiences that exceed critical commitments brought to the field and texts taken from the field. To embrace vulnerability as one enters the field is to make our bodies open to the inscriptions and lashings encountered when we are sensitive to the immanent flows of desire present in the field. It is a sensitivity that enacts a kind of performative *kinesis* that uses our skills as a rhetorician to engage in the rhetorical processes we study. It can reveal immanent opportunities to advocate vocally for a politics of difference that can make changes in the field. Instead of waiting to take action after exiting the field, these opportunities to take action emerge as in-the-moment embodied choices in the field. This makes our bodies vulnerable and is, as Stuart Hall might phrase it, a politics without guarantees. Far from the critic affirmatively, but still coldly, directing action for some future date and time, immanent participation implores that critics can no longer separate ourselves from the phenomena they study.

Becoming-Vulnerable in the Field

Centering the body and embracing vulnerability can change the perspective of the researcher as he or she explores the affective dimensions of the field; it obligates the rhetorician to opening the commitments one brings to the field to the potential for profound change. We argue that such vulnerability is what enables embedded rhetorical research the possibility of uniquely profound insights and, thus, is required even if the situations critics place themselves in put their own bodies, or security, at risk. One of our coauthors encountered this moment of vulnerability in her fieldwork focused on environmental activism. Her reflections help illuminate our argument about vulnerability as means for gaining critical insight and closing the distance between the critical political/rhetorical efforts we examine and our experiences in the field:

When the sentencing came in, Tim DeChristopher received two years in jail. Shocked, many of the demonstrators shouted in anger and tears flowed freely; the crowd was in a state of disbelief. Almost immediately, a core group of those most involved with the non-violent environmental activism collective I was participating in began zip-tying themselves together and to the handrails blocking the entrances/exits of the federal courthouse. It became apparent that the people walking around all day with phone numbers on their arms really intended to use them from jail. More and more people joined in on the blockade as speakers exalted DeChristopher's actions and called for acts of civil disobedience from the audience. Eventually, it became clear to the organizers and the protesters alike that the police were not going to arrest anyone for barricading the courthouse. DeChristopher himself noted that his own sentencing would not end acts of civil disobedience because of his many followers willing to put themselves on the line. Arresting the protesters at that point would have just proven DeChristopher right. At that point the demonstrators decided to increase the stakes. They began removing themselves from the courthouse, linking themselves into a human chain, and moving into the street.

I had spent the day with the demonstrators taking field notes, audio recording, and observing the actions of the group. When the group moved into the street there was a decision to make—I could stand aside and continue taking notes or join the group. I decided to join the zip-tied demonstrators in the street. After effectively blocking car, bus, and light-rail traffic for the bulk of the five o'clock rush hour, I was arrested along with 25 other demonstrators. While waiting for transport to the county jail for processing, a police officer approached me to talk to me about my recording device, which he had seen stowed in my satchel. He informed me that when I arrived at the jail the batteries in the device would be confiscated. He suggested, if battery removal would compromise any audio data, that I should turn off the device and save the data before entering the jail. In the end, all of my notes, digital and handwritten were returned to my possession after being released from jail. This enactment of militant politics not only gave me insight into the experiences of the protestors I was researching. It brought into focus both the rhetorical force of their embodied actions and their communal experience of consuming and producing their oppositional rhetoric. In that moment, the choice to risk the loss of my data opened a plane of insights contained in participating in a shared vulnerability with the community I was researching. (O'Byrne, personal communication, September 19, 2011)

It is important to note that we do not only configure a vulnerability to immanent action (as opposed to action-deferred) as a willingness to engage in forms of civil

disobedience in support of a cause. Our argument is not that all critical rhetoricians should get arrested in order to support their cause or that doing so accords some sort of critical authority. There is a full spectrum of engagement in immanent action. But, we do contend that it exceeds simply clearing space for self-reflexivity in our criticism after the fact. In addition to the examples above, immanent militancy can include taking time away from writing and research to write a letter, make a phone call, or engage in some other seemingly mundane action aimed at inciting, encouraging, or moving toward change that is consistent with the community one researches. Even though the stakes of activism are not always so highly leveraged, vulnerability demonstrates openness to communities of research that exceed the limits of academia. We are suggesting that regardless of the answer, researchers must grapple with the limits of their commitments and ask if they are willing to engage in immanent action. Even if one is unwilling to cross such lines, the exploration of the limits of one's commitment is partly illustrative of how vulnerability informs encounters with rhetorical action in the field. And the impulse to share risks and vulnerability with the communities we research points toward an important practical question: What is it about rhetorical communities that do or do not compel audiences (including critics) to stand in solidarity and share these risks?

The Plane of Affect (Material and Immaterial Texts)

In situ rhetorical criticism brings back from the field mundane texts, field notes, and other tracings of the rhetorical activity of local communities. Such rhetorical materials support the thrust of critical rhetoric developed by Ono and Sloop (1995) that concerns itself with those rhetorical communities often written out of history. Yet, in addition to recording these fleeting rhetorical exercises, rhetoricians should also more finely tune their critical efforts to account for immanent, affective rhetorical activity embedded in immaterial rhetorics. Immaterial rhetorics are the everyday interactions that lay the foundation for a rhetorical community capable of producing the later documented texts that often gain the critical attention of rhetorical scholars. In other words, not only should critics be interested in the rhetoric of the social movement leaders, they should also be interested in the conversations, arguments, and dialogues they have had with their networks of allies. In situ research's added value comes both from interacting with oppositional rhetorical communities as they unfold and from having access to in-group conversations and interpersonal exchanges where the building blocks of oppositional rhetorics, what Burke (1989) identified as the "common sensations, concepts, images, ideas, attitudes that make . . . [collectives] consubstantial," emerge prior to their public mobilizations (p. 181). These practices that precede the production of traditional forms of rhetorical action (i.e., speeches or image events), we argue, are most significant to understanding rhetorical action that shapes everyday, vernacular, and oppositional rhetorical communities.

Such a focus requires rethinking what rhetoricians mean by rhetorical texts. In the same way that critical theorists like Hardt and Negri (2004) have suggested that it is important to analyze questions of labor and exploitation in regard both to their material

and immaterial dimensions, so too could rhetoricians benefit from bearing such distinctions in mind when examining rhetorical action. We believe that rhetoricians concerned with the affective dimensions of rhetoric and the potential of locating possibilities for intervention could benefit from mapping a similar schema onto their thinking about what constitutes rhetorical action. On the one hand, traditional rhetoricians, and to some extent those who subscribe to Middleton et al.'s (2011) approach to rhetorical field methods, embrace *material* rhetorics. In other words, such approaches take as their object texts that are or can be rarefied, captured, pinned down, archived, recorded, or in some way "brought back" from the field and subjected to the careful scrutiny of the scholar in her or his office. They are texts produced in an official or unofficial capacity by rhetorical communities and that can be exchanged with colleagues and others to test interpretive claims. Such texts participate in the economy of influence and naming that shape rhetorical practice as it is traditionally conceived.

However, the proliferation of rhetorical communities and the fragmentation of culture that marks the turn to a critical rhetorical sensibility announced by McGee (1990) and McKerrow (1989) suggest the need to consider the production of immaterial, affective rhetorics. Such texts do not function in the same ways that material texts function. They do not necessarily exert influence, leave traces or function to constitute an (oppositional) identity in the way that rhetorical critics traditionally think of such processes. Rather, immaterial rhetorics are the rhetorical practices of which those later material rhetorical texts are expressions. Immaterial rhetoric is not the naming of a marginalized community, for example, the *Peuple Qubecois*, but rather it is the imminent moments of interaction where trust is built, the willingness to be affected is sought, and the possibility of a collective will (of opposition) is recognized but yet to be named. These are the rhetorics that inundate the experience of the rhetorician and the individuals who form communities in the field.

If immaterial labor is focused on the production of subjectivities and the formation of social networks that produce economic value, then immaterial rhetoric asks rhetoricians to focus on the production of rhetorical subjects and the formation of networks of communities of shared rhetorical commitments that culminate in acts that are constitutive, resistant, and influential. As a critical concept, immaterial rhetoric provokes rhetoricians to account for how the traces they brought back from the field came to exist, what (immaterial rhetorical) actions brought the rhetorical community into existence, and in what ways does one's participation in the field intersect with those mundane experiences that precede the formation of material rhetorics. Once recognized as social action with rhetorical merit, such a perspective generates a range of critical questions that challenge the commitments of in situ rhetorical critics.

Affective Rhetorical Field Methods

One of the key ways to open up the affective dimensions of participatory rhetorical research is to critically reflect on and evaluate means of relationship building with other participants in the field. Our contention is that such relationships not only merit analysis during the process of critique, but they are fragments of the rhetoric

present in the field. Such relationships, even when they seem trivial, can be integral for the insights that can be yielded by rhetorical field methods.

Opening affective relationships in the field is often inevitable in any sort of in situ field research, especially when one adheres to the notion of being a participant observer as opposed to simply an observer. What is more interesting in terms of the rhetorical critic in the field is to examine the implications of those relationships on the critic's experience. In one sense, being open to affective relationships in the field can allow for feelings of belonging that can encourage the researcher that they are in the right place. On the other hand, the clear danger with opening deeply affective relationships in the field is that there is a very real potential that opening one's body to people and affects normally disciplined out of critical acts can leave a critic deeply changed by what he or she has seen and done. An openness to being affected can also change your research itself, it can lead to a more complex and nuanced picture of whatever the phenomenon under study is. Not only is there potential for a research question or project to change based on what happens in the field, embedded rhetorical analysis can confirm or challenge one's political commitments as a result of time in the field. Indeed, as one of our coauthors discovered, time in the field can often complicate the ideological frameworks that inevitably guide our research:

I came into the broad field of research on nuclear controversies with very strong ideological beliefs about nuclear technologies. I was opposed to all nuclear technologies. Yet, through my time in the field, I have become convinced of the value and necessity of certain technologies. Part of this comes from the exposure I have had to varying opinions, and part comes from challenging the activists with whom I interacted. For example, despite making initial connections with a local activist group opposed to low-level nuclear waste, I have come to believe that low-level nuclear waste, while still important in terms of ensuring that current practices protect human/animal/ecological health, is not as problematic as I once thought. And, I did not see the corporation that they were vilifying as quite as evil as they were portraying them. My position on these issues became tricky in terms of negotiating the relationships I have developed in the field, not only with this activist group in particular but also with other anti-nuclear activists. The point here is that the researcher needs to be open not only to the experience in the field changing the nature of the project but also to the experience of changes in the political commitments that brought her to the field in the first place. This ability to shift both research and ones politics illustrates the importance of being open to the power of the affective dimensions of fieldwork to change you (Endres, personal communication, December 6, 2012).

Each of these narratives shared in this article provides small and fleeting examples of rhetorical exchanges that had immediate and lingering affective and material force on the researcher's body. Critically, they trace important changes in perspective and position wrought by the affective dimension of fieldwork. When we focus too much on notes, events, and properly recording texts, we miss the ability to see how our in situ experiences have moved us in ways unimagined when we entered the field. And, in ways we may not fully recall in the weeks, months, and years after we have left the field.

Conclusion

As Middleton et al. (2011) note, the participatory turn in rhetorical criticism warrants additional critical discussion of the implications of the move to the field. In this article, we offer a transection of extant approaches to participatory research along three interrelated planes—immanence, vulnerability, and affect—that call for further thinking about the rhetorician as an actor with relationships and political commitments in the field, in between the critical impulse that brought the researcher to the field and the texts that he or she brings back from the field. Our argument is not that such interrogations are not under way in the work of rhetoricians who have already taken to the field. Rather, we argue that embedded in extant field-based rhetorical studies are the “seeds of becoming” for new critical rhetorical epistemologies (Smith, 1997, pp. xlii–xliii). Through a discussion of the planes of immanence, vulnerability, and affect interspersed with vignettes from our own experiences in the field, our aim in this article was to highlight those potential opportunities, to grapple with the challenges they entail, and to begin to envision ways to maximize the value they add to the endeavors of rhetorical critics and critical rhetoricians who concern themselves with everyday, mundane, “live” rhetorical practices.

In particular, these critical foci point toward potent insights available to critics who take on the tasks of exploring the complicated dynamics that inform “rhetorical practices.” Senda-Cook (2012, p. 131–132) identifies rhetorical practices as those rhetorical actions that are marked by “fluidity, productive capacity, ordinariness, and ability to combine materiality and discourse in processes.” Because such rhetorical actions shift with time, are shaped by their enactments and are constructed through their use by collective communities, they change as they intersect with different (individual and collective) bodies. When one becomes embedded in a rhetorical community, such practices make claims on one’s body. Not only do bodies engage in practices, they also show the results of those engaged practices. In this way, the body is both a medium for communicating with practices as well as evidence of those engaged practices. Critics would do well to focus their critical lens on the possibility for immanent participation and rhetorical action in the field, what it reveals, and how it shapes the phenomenological experience of in situ rhetorical criticism.

Recognizing that taking immanent rhetorical action in the field “produce[s] ideologies, identities, and speech communities,” participates in “situational knowledge,” and “naturalizes” such rhetorical actions (Senda-Cook, 2012, pp. 131–132) raises a multitude of questions for critics. We reason that rhetorical practices act on bodies through affective demands and through immanent participation in a community. In producing communities, practices create “a deeply felt system of beliefs and values” (Wilkins & Wolf, 2011, pp. 7–23). Because practices are immanent, rhetoricians must also consider how their approaches can be immanent and, to some degree, “felt.” Incorporating affect into participatory rhetorical research offers the chance to feel the systems that participants feel when making choices in situ.

However, beyond the implications for in situ rhetorical criticism, our arguments in this article have potential implications beyond participatory rhetorical research

toward the conduct of critical rhetoric in general. First, the practice of immanent rhetorical action does not have to happen in the conduct of field research. While we have focused on opportunities for immanent action that occur in and because of relationships in the field, we can also imagine that critical rhetoricians engaged in analysis of more conventional texts might put their research at risk in favor of taking immediate action. For example, a critical rhetorician committed to examining Occupy Wall Street might limit their data set to media coverage of the event, but that does not foreclose the opportunity to engage in immanent action through showing up for marches. Second, while we have emphasized how the in situ rhetorician can account for the social bonds and relationships that energize rhetorical productivity in the local communities in which embedded researchers participate, critical rhetoricians not in the field might apply the same perspectives to their reading of historical texts. For instance, to produce rhetorical histories that engage more than just the contextual history of the rhetors and rhetorics examined, critics might include in the discourses they draw together an account of the social networks, interpersonal relationships, and community identifications that preceded the moment or trace of rhetorical action they examine. We believe that these and other yet unarticulated examples that we hope will be spurred from our article offer a glimpse of the productive value the planes of immanence, vulnerability, and affect have for continuing to advance participatory, critical rhetorical research.

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