

(Participatory) Critical Rhetoric: Critiqued and Reconsidered

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Date submitted: 2017–12–22

¹ We thank Raymie McKerrow and Art Herbig for their patience and assistance on this article. Additionally, we would also like to thank the two anonymous reviewers who insightfully encouraged us to engage this project with a reflexive spirit.

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The turn toward field-based and participatory approaches in rhetoric extended and challenged McKerrow's earliest formulation of critical rhetoric. Reflecting on recent decolonial, antiracist, feminist, and queer critiques of critical rhetoric—and participatory critical rhetoric by extension—we look to the ways that a participatory orientation invites the rhetorical critic to enter into conversation with new perspectives and epistemologies. We contend that this incommensurability of critical rhetoric with many of these critical provocations produces a set of tensions that can sensitize critics to the complex topographies of power that underlie our scholarship, the assumptions we bring to it, and the ends toward which we direct it. A participatory orientation can bring field critics in conversation with those who suffer under colonial logics, thereby challenging the roots and biases found within rhetorical scholarship. Finally, in the spirit of reflexivity, we step back from this conversation to yield space for additional voices in the conversation about participatory approaches to rhetoric.

Keywords: participatory critical rhetoric, decolonial, field rhetoric, critical rhetoric

Qualitative, ethnographic, and other participatory forms of inquiry have informed rhetoric for at least two decades, yet only in about the past 10 years have participatory methodologies been more fully employed and articulated. In 2011, we published articles (Hess, 2011; Middleton, Senda-Cook, & Endres; 2011) that took up "critical rhetoric" by synthesizing past scholarship with the goal of theorizing field-based approaches in rhetoric. Four years later, we published *Participatory Critical Rhetoric* to serve as a direct extension of the critical lineage begun by Raymie McKerrow, Philip Wander, and Michael Calvin McGee (Middleton, Hess, Endres, & Senda-Cook, 2015). It augmented McKerrow's (1989) formative essay, "Critical Rhetoric: Theory and Praxis," with a participatory sensibility that is enacted through fieldwork or other approaches that locate the critic within places of invention or in direct contact with advocates and audiences. For example, we argued,

Intimate engagement with the rhetorical communities that inform one's scholarly efforts through fieldwork is the link to both the critical praxis to which participatory critical rhetoric commits itself, as well as the intersectional rhetorical interactions and practices that it seeks to privilege as an object of analysis. (Middleton et al., 2015, p. xix)

Participatory, in this sense, means that critics seek to interrogate the processual character of rhetoric by inquiring about it directly through various levels of engagement, ranging from in situ observation, to focus groups with participants, to full-throated advocacy alongside rhetorical communities. To guide the approach, we outlined four primary elements: an immanent political stance, an embodied critic, the emplaced character of rhetoric, and the inclusion of multiple participant perspectives into the process of making critical judgments. In engaging with critical rhetoric, participatory critical rhetoric takes seriously McKerrow's (1989) reconfiguration of rhetoric from public address into "discourse that addresses publics" (p. 101) and is animated by a desire to engage those publics as they articulate their positions within larger social and political relations of power.

Because participatory critical rhetoric builds directly on critical rhetoric, it is subject to some of the same long-standing criticisms of critical rhetoric. In particular, decolonial rhetorical theories emphasize the problematic reliance on Euro-centric Continental philosophers and perpetuation of Whiteness as the foundation

of critical rhetoric. Although aspects offered by participatory approaches respond to some of those critiques, it does not address all of them. For example, by participating directly within rhetorical situations, the possibility of centering marginalized voices increases significantly. Yet, we still ground our approaches in many of the epistemological and critical traditions that have been challenged by critiques of critical rhetoric. In this article, we grapple with decolonial and other critiques of critical rhetoric and participatory critical rhetoric, consider the theoretical underpinnings that guide them, and invite more voices to this conversation to help rhetoric develop a robust set of field approaches to rhetorical criticism. We do so not to simply answer and then ignore such critiques; rather, we hope to begin a conversation about the potential of participatory rhetoricians to engage in reflexive consideration of epistemic privilege during direct engagements with localized rhetorical communities. To begin, we discuss critical rhetoric and its influence on participatory critical rhetoric. Then, we delve into the critiques of critical rhetoric and participatory critical rhetoric, by extension. Finally, we close by articulating the implications of this line of thought and inviting more scholarship in this area.

From Critical Rhetoric to Participatory Critical Rhetoric

Critical rhetoric, as a performative praxis, engages social relations to disrupt them. At its core, McKerrow (1989) argues that “the critic must attend to the ‘microphysics of power’ in order to understand what *sustains* social practices” (p. 98, emphasis in original). Commenting on the “deep structures” of power that are “carried forward through a particularizing discursive formation” (p. 99), critical rhetoricians aim to expose power’s ideological underpinnings. Participatory critical rhetoric, by extension, directly engages the embodied and emplaced encounters in which expressions of the microphysics of power occur, finding moments when power is created, sustained, and challenged. McKerrow offers eight central principles that inform the larger work of critical rhetoric. Although all eight arguably inform the critical project outlined in *Participatory Critical Rhetoric*, we briefly examine three of the principles—one, two, and eight—that most directly inform participatory critical rhetoric and that can potentially transform rhetorical theorizing. As we outline the ways that participatory critical rhetoric draws from McKerrow and McGee’s original theorizing, we recognize that we are admittedly replicating the error exposed by decolonial critics: We are repeating those same citations and epistemological positions that undergird much of the critical rhetorical enterprise. We do not do so unreflexively; rather, we hope to demonstrate how these original formulations, when reconsidered through the decolonial critique and put in conversation with a participatory orientation, can open up invitational spaces for rethinking rhetorical theory.

In principle one, McKerrow argues that “Ideologiekritik is in fact not a method, but a practice” (p. 102). Stemming from McGee’s earlier arguments regarding ideological critique, McKerrow opens this section by calling out the shortcomings of method, indicating (via Kenneth Burke) that “creative insights are constrained by the systematicity of method” (p. 102). Citing Foucault and others, McKerrow argues that formalized “methods” often produce results that are limited to what the method seeks to find. In other words, a formalized method can result in a “trained incapacity” (Burke, 1984) to see things not prescribed by the method, such as adherence to a strict Burkeian pentadic analysis that could lead to finding the pentad but missing out on other, perhaps more interesting, rhetorical elements in a set of texts. By contrast, McKerrow offers critical rhetoric as an orientation, which

is the least restrictive stage from which the critical act might be launched; it maximizes the possibilities of what will "count" as evidence for critical judgment, and allows for creativity in the assessment of the "effects of truth" upon social practices. (McKerrow, 1989, p. 102)

Participatory critical rhetoric directly extends this critical orientation through the infusion of qualitative approaches to reflect on and analyze rhetoric. A critic can still use multiple methods, such as textual analysis, ethnographic fieldwork, and interviewing, as tools in an open-ended critical inquiry without enacting a formalized method that limits critical insight, surprise, and unexpected findings. The "creativity" in assessment now includes the possibility of interviews, observational practices, oral histories, and many other approaches that not only provide access to diverse perspectives on rhetoric, but also create opportunities to include immediate evaluations of the effects of rhetoric and include perspectives that might otherwise remain hidden or marginalized. Thus, accenting critical rhetoric with a participatory orientation invites creative approaches to what is necessary, fitting, and appropriate for those discursive communities with which the critic works. At times, it may entail putting the critic in vulnerable positions well outside his or her epistemic experiences, which may open up possibilities for internalizing new perspectives.

As McKerrow originally argues, "understanding and evaluation are one" (p. 102) within critical practice, and participatory critical rhetoric underscores the processual character of immanent political action and the immediacy of its effects. Drawing from participatory methodologies not only opens up the possibility of directly encountering rhetorical processes, but also augments critique by informing it with the perspectives and voices from marginalized communities. In forming critical conclusions about rhetoric, critics take into consideration the positions and positionalities of the communities they serve, thereby opening up the possibility for thinking rhetoric anew. This is especially the case in vernacular or outlaw discourses that carry incommensurable logics that are guided by complex readings of public culture and power (Sloop & Ono, 1997). Moreover, participatory critical rhetoric engages the critique of critical work conducted about communities marginalized along the axis of race, gender, sexuality, and ability by demanding that the critic engages with those communities.

Next, in principle two, McKerrow contends, "The discourse of power is material" (p. 102). Here, McKerrow draws from Althusser and McGee to argue that power has material effects on people and that oppression is wrapped up in the social relations of ideology. To respond to that, McKerrow identifies the praxis of critical rhetoric "both as object of study and as style," emphasizing that "the social relations in which people participate are perceived as 'real' to them, even though they exist only as fictions in a rhetorically constituted universe of discourse" (p. 103). His transformative goal is aimed at overcoming the conditions of oppression as outlined through the critique of domination and reflected on through the critique of freedom. Critics, McKerrow believes, need to attend to the very real conditions of oppression. As he indicates later, although these social relations are discursively formed, critics should "deal in concrete terms" within the "real" (p. 103) situations that influence and are influenced by discursive expressions of power.

Similarly and by extension, participatory critical rhetoric attends to the material and discursive conditions of power by placing the critic within the social conditions described by McKerrow. Although his original arguments did not perhaps envision fieldwork and the direct engagement within the social relations

of power, they speak to how the critic should engage with the conditions of domination and freedom as experienced by people. As we offer through the vignettes in *Participatory Critical Rhetoric*—such as working with advocates for homeless populations, active drug users, or the environment—critics employing this orientation engage directly with emplaced rhetorical situations through the act of “*bearing witness* and participating in building, circulating, and advocating for a political community or a rhetorical practice” (Middleton et al., 2015, p. 51, emphasis in original; see also Pezzullo, 2007, on witnessing). The performative and participatory elements of participatory critical rhetoric call forth a critic who is emplaced within the material and discursive conditions of participants. For example, Chávez (2011) has taken up participatory approaches to studying queer and migrant rights organizations. In that work, Chávez witnesses how both queer and migrant peoples share histories of harassment by law enforcement and state legislatures.² There are multiple perspectives from which “participatory” engagement may occur; they need not fit within a singular set of parameters for what constitutes the methods we outline.

Last, in principle eight, McKerrow argues that “Criticism is a *performance*” (p. 108, emphasis in original). Although the complex nature of performance and performance studies was not taken up by McKerrow, this early connection provided opportunities for bridging the social elements of performance studies with the overarching political aims of rhetoric (e.g., Fenske & Goltz, 2014; Pezzullo 2001, 2003) as well as opening the door for more critical and ethnographic understandings of performance and rhetoric (Conquergood, 1992; Madison, 2012). McKerrow (1989) continues, reflecting on Wander’s (1983) possible desire to take to the streets as “practicing revolutionaries” (McKerrow, 1989, p. 108), believing that being a specific intellectual removes such an impulse for rhetorical critics. This argument is perhaps where participatory critical rhetoric enacts its strongest extension of McKerrow’s original work. Participatory critical rhetoric not only encourages critics to take to the streets as Wander desired; it also asks critics to bear witness to the constrictions of power relations as they occur, from everyday experiences to the social dramas performed with vernacular communities (Ono & Sloop, 1995; Sloop & Ono, 1997).

Moreover, critics may join in on the advocacy practices of community organizations, should the opportunity arise. Such participation can guide the critical project in ways that provide experiences that are difficult to otherwise ascertain, including how rhetorical practices and strategies are invented, improvised, and abandoned within the spaces where they are performed. However, such engagement requires a delicate balancing act between institutional and community needs, and some believe the antagonism between the academy and activism is irresolvable (Welsh, 2012). Yet, others argue that field-based rhetorical criticism is uniquely positioned to comprehend and respond to inequalities and to recognize the decolonial impulse offered by Wanzer (2012), as we outline later in this article. For example, Phaedra Pezzullo and Catalina de Onís (2018) detail the ways that rhetorical field methods can not only listen to people, but also amplify normally unheard voices and offer a chance to exercise an ethic of care in addressing environmental crises.

² Although this work draws on a richly textured tradition that lies outside the boundaries implicated by either critical rhetoric or participatory critical rhetoric, Chávez’s example is still instructive because it demonstrates the power of going into the field. Using it as an example here does not imply that the work can be subsumed under an umbrella that remains ensconced within a White orientation, but not to cite it and other works that are not grounded in critical rhetoric but still adopt a critical sensibility and engagement with the field would be a mistake.

The relationship between active community members and organizations can be generative and mutually beneficial if done with care.

Taken together, the extensions of McKerrow's (1989) first, second, and eighth principles lead to a reenvisioning of the critical rhetoric project as taking part in the material/discursive, embodied, and emplaced conditions of domination and freedom. Moreover, a participatory approach can emphasize how the critiques of domination and freedom can be understood as mutually informing one another in particular cases. For example, in Hess's (2011) work with advocates for drug users and Senda-Cook's (2012) work on recreation, each highlights a nondominant subculture with the privileges necessary to enjoy sometimes expensive recreation. Hess (2011) emphasizes how DanceSafe, an organization he studied, was positioned to simultaneously critique domination by drawing attention to poor approaches to treating mental health and critique freedom by emphasizing how recreational drug use (especially ecstasy) is a classist activity. Similarly, the classist critique is often leveled against environmentalists and outdoor recreation, in particular, demonstrating the critique of freedom in Senda-Cook's (2012) work. But her work also reveals a critique of domination that at times makes salient the problems of dominant attitudes toward the environment in the United States. Participation, in this context, means that critics can bear witness to the complexities and (occasional) contradictions embedded within the discourses they study. Looking beyond the original critiques of domination and freedom, participatory critical rhetoric also provides insight into on-the-ground approaches and the immediacy of rhetorical interactions; it draws from what Pezzullo (2016) has described as an "attunement to interdependence, cultural differences, and embodied epistemologies" (p. 181), which illuminate the microtransactions of power in ways that may have been difficult to ascertain in the original critical rhetoric essay. We see this potential as putting participatory critical rhetoric in conversation with many of the critiques of critical rhetoric's epistemic foundations, to which we now turn our attention. In doing so, we are not arguing that everyone inclined toward fieldwork ought to use participatory critical rhetoric. Indeed, many approaches under the umbrella of rhetorical fieldwork rely on different theories, assumptions, and critical traditions (see for example, McKinnon, Asen, Chávez, & Howard, 2016; Rai & Druschke, 2018; Senda-Cook, Hess, Middleton, & Endres, 2018). Our attempt is to think through how a participatory critical rhetoric approach might begin to engage in productive conversation with these critiques.

Critiques of Critical Rhetoric: De-Centering Epistemic and Political Privilege

Through our efforts to theorize a participatory approach to critical rhetoric, we argue that critics who engage in such field-based scholarship are positioned to begin to push critical rhetoric forward on several fronts: Venturing into the field brings into the frame of criticism many rhetorical practices usually marginalized by a focus limited to textual rhetorical practice; engaging with vernacular or otherwise marginalized rhetorical communities often exposes logics of resistance that challenge the critical perspectives that a critic might bring to the field; and participating with rhetorical communities frequently makes claims on critics to traverse the boundary between outside observer and embedded activist/co-conspirator with those communities that enlighten and illuminate our research. However, these forays into the field are not without significant critical risk, with which we continue to grapple and whose ethical consequences warrant careful consideration. Most plainly put, the turn toward the field can contribute significantly to the revealing of new and sharpening of old critical insights; at the same time, critics run the risk of subsuming the innovative rhetorical practices discovered in the field and derived from the embodied

knowledges of marginalized and subordinated communities within the frame of existing critical perspectives, rather than encountering those practices and provocations as problematizations of those same critical logics and building from in situ epistemological logics and theory in the critical act.

In this section, we detail how these critical challenges might be navigated by considering efforts by rhetoricians to rethink the underpinnings of a critical rhetoric as such and to conceptualize how they provide productive provocations for participatory critical rhetoric. Our argument is not that these critiques or the scholars making them are doing participatory critical rhetoric. Rather, our argument is that by engaging these theoretical efforts as challenges to the enterprise of critical rhetoric, they expose a tension present in the practice of participatory critical rhetoric that asks its practitioners to engage in critical introspection and self-reflexivity (Morris, 2010). This means asking not simply how such practices discovered in the field can be illuminated by a critical rhetorical approach, but also how those practices challenge the enterprise of critical rhetoric and, by extension, participatory critical rhetoric. We contend that the value of exploring this tension is to provoke new critical questions and to problematize the assumptions of critical rhetoric, participatory or otherwise, and the conclusions that are driven by those assumptions. We view attempts to resolve it—either by subsuming it within critical rhetoric or displacing critical rhetoric in favor of these approaches—to be problematic because such efforts would close conversations.

The range of perspectives from which these critiques emerge is far more expansive than can be fully accounted for within the confines of one essay, the aim of which is to consider their contribution to productively challenging (participatory) critical rhetoric. Emerging from feminist, queer, postcolonial, decolonial, antiracist, and other perspectives on and critiques of critical rhetoric, each comes with a unique set of epistemological commitments that fundamentally alter how one might approach the enterprise of critical rhetorical theory and criticism, as well as the discipline of communication as a whole (e.g., Baugh-Harris & Wanzer-Serrano, 2018; Chakravartty, Kuo, Grubbs, & McIlwain, 2018; Chávez, 2015; Flores, 2016). As such, we aim here to highlight two challenges posed toward critical rhetoric; these challenges offer representative examples of the sort of questions being provoked by these critiques and their consequences for ongoing efforts to refine critical rhetoric's role in the broader effort to theorize rhetorical theory and criticism, and for what they can contribute to our own interest in the participatory articulations of critical rhetorical scholarship.

As we suggested earlier in the article, one critical provocation that creates a productive critical tension for those with an interest in critical rhetoric emerges from efforts to theorize rhetoric through the lens of decoloniality. While a broad range of scholars have taken up this perspective, its critical aim is summarized by Wanzer (2012), who contends that the critical rhetorical enterprise that grows from the theorizing of McGee (1990) and McKerrow (1989) "unreflexively reproduces a dominating narrative of Western/American centrality" and challenges critical rhetoricians to "better address epistemic coloniality" (pp. 647–648). Doing so, Wanzer contends, positions practitioners of critical rhetoric to "deal more productively with situated public discourses as they circulate in the world" and to "enact more robustly its antisystemic functions/aims" (p. 648).

As a corrective to a critical rhetorical approach prone toward "reproducing the dominant logics and theoretical rhetorics that exacerbate exclusion," Wanzer (2012) challenges rhetoricians to embrace forms

of “epistemic disobedience” that “better situate(s) knowledge in its geographic and embodied specificity and resists attempts to universalize any particular episteme” (p. 653). Practically, Wanzer contends that such an approach requires that “rhetoricians . . . begin *hearing* those voices excluded from our theorizing and the discourse communities we study, *internalizing* their thought, and *seeking* ways to delink from modern/coloniality” (p. 654, emphasis in original). For the practitioner of critical rhetoric, and especially participatory critical rhetoric, Wanzer offers a productive provocation. On the one hand, participatory critical rhetoric, we contend, is well positioned to foster these critical acts of listening to and internalizing the perspectives of the communities with whom we conduct our research. On the other hand, Wanzer’s critique challenges participatory critical rhetoricians to emphasize ethical participation that suspends the impulse to organize the sense-making, knowledge production, and forms of survival/resistance of the communities with which we interact within the theoretical frames borrowed from McKerrow and McGee. That is to say, Wanzer’s critique contends that the theoretical “insights” of critical rhetoric (e.g., fragmentation, material discourses of power) have long been the lived realities of many of the marginalized communities brought to the fore by a participatory practice.

The central challenge for the practitioners of a critical approach, then, is not to situate such rhetorical practices as simply another “proof” in the effort to theorize critical rhetoric, but rather as an epistemology grounded in the community and, more important, a challenge born from the lived realities of colonization, understood as a material, discursive, and epistemic reality. In doing so, Wanzer’s critique, taken up in various ways by numerous rhetorical scholars, creates an unresolvable tension for (participatory) critical rhetoricians that we argue is more productive when engaged with as a tension rather than an argument to be subsumed into an overarching theory of critical rhetoric. It demands of critical rhetoricians, participatory or otherwise, that we engage the rhetorical practices we encounter as substantive, consequential, lived theories of rhetoric that ought to be viewed as challenges to our critical perspectives rather than as practices that illustrate or illuminate the critical perspectives that we bring to the field.

However, if Wanzer’s critique challenges us to continually ask how we do critical rhetoric and how we might radicalize those efforts in ways that both hear and amplify the voices of communities marginalized by both material forms of power and epistemic acts of exclusion, then other critiques challenge critical rhetoricians to reconsider the ends toward which their emancipatory, critical practice is directed. One of the strongest articulations of this critique can be identified in Chávez’s (2015) essay “Beyond Inclusion: Rethinking Rhetoric’s Historical Narrative,” which seeks to both expose and challenge the normative history of (critical) rhetorical practice aimed at including (capturing?) a broader range of rhetorical practices (and, by extension, rhetors) within its critical frame. Such a practice, she argues, “implicitly and explicitly privilege(s) citizens’ rhetorical practices and the rhetorical practices of citizenship” while it “preclude(s) the lives, experience, and practices of numerous collectives and individuals who have always engaged in practices that are justifiably called rhetorical and political” (pp. 164–165). In other words, the impulse toward inclusion and belonging via citizenship, Chávez contends, should not be embraced unproblematically, for “all inclusionary logics . . . reinforce . . . existing structures and tend to obscure those structures’ flaws . . . in a way that makes posing alternatives to it or offering critiques of it much harder” (p. 166).

For the practitioner of critical rhetoric generally, and participatory critical rhetoric specifically, this critique evokes a critical tension that generates a number of important questions that should be taken into

the field. It challenges those of us who choose to gain insights from what are often marginalized communities to consider how those communities might be both more productively and more ethically engaged as parallel to, and incommensurable with, rather than a supplement (aligned with and seeking inclusion within) to, the political communities we inhabit and represent. It suggests that the assumptions that shape our thinking as rhetoricians and from which we might benefit depending on the identities and forms of privilege we bring with us when we enter the field ought to be subjected to self-reflection and that we ought to find ways to challenge those normative assumptions in light of the practices we encounter in the field. And, as Chávez notes, it ought to “challenge the manner in which . . . [critics] characterize . . . that which has been excluded” (p. 170). That is, rather than engaging excluded communities with an interest in how and what they can contribute to normative political systems (of inclusion), we might be better served by asking how they function as immanently valuable because of their difference and not as proofs of the expansive (recolonizing?) forms of inclusion that rhetoric can enable.

Taken together, these critiques and the scores of others stemming from feminist, queer, postcolonial, decolonial, antiracist, and other challenges to critical rhetoric provoke a number of questions for its practitioners, and especially those who choose to enter into the field and engage with rhetorical practices whose contours are often shaped by histories of exclusion motivated by colonial histories, gendered inequities, and racialized forms of power. To suggest that critical rhetoric, if done just right, can answer, resolve, or subsume them is intellectually dishonest. But, at the same time, we contend that this incommensurability of critical rhetoric with many of these critical provocations produces a set of tensions that can sensitize critics to the complex topographies of power that underlie our scholarship, the assumptions we bring to it, and the ends toward which we direct it. It challenges critical rhetorical practitioners, participatory or otherwise, to “expand the horizon of interlocutors” and “*to listen to what has been silenced*” (Wanzer, 2012, p. 653, emphasis in original) while also resisting the urge to limit what can be heard to that which is intelligible within, or contributes to, the normative critical frameworks that we cannot not carry into the field. In the section that follows, we further elaborate how these provocations create a productive uneasiness in our own efforts to ethically theorize and practice participatory critical rhetoric, as well as how it implicates our understanding of critical rhetoric more broadly.

Implications

Our own involvement with participatory critical rhetoric is a product of our own personal and subjective experiences with rhetoric and its theorizing. Our respective training, life experiences, and identities—through graduate school, fieldwork, and continued professional development—most certainly have impacted the ways in which we theorized rhetoric, including our use of McKerrow’s critical rhetoric and other so-called canonical works (Baugh-Harris & Wanzer-Serrano, 2018). We cannot deny their influence and do not claim the mantle of decolonial approaches, as we have outlined in the previous section. Our original efforts (Hess, 2011; Middleton et al., 2011, 2015) did not explicitly account for the decolonial theorizing that we have engaged with in this article. Yet, we conclude this article with some thoughts about how such critiques and the tensions they produce generatively challenge our own theorizing about participatory critical rhetoric. Critiques advanced by Chávez, Wanzer, and others challenge us to revisit our initial theorizing in order to radicalize it further so as to expand and remake rhetorical theory and praxis. Finally, in the spirit of reflexivity, we hope to step back from this conversation in the future, thus yielding

space for additional voices in the conversation about participatory approaches to rhetoric and how they may push the field to further reflect on its colonial roots and biases. We will maintain our commitments to participating in rhetorical processes, keeping these tensions in mind and being reflexively open to the voices of those who suffer under colonial logics, but invite new perspectives into the spaces of theorizing the method and methodology of rhetoric in light of these critiques.

Looking back to Wanzer's (2012) radicalization of McGee, he argues that "we must delink from modern/coloniality and enact a kind of epistemic disobedience" (p. 652). So doing would ask rhetoric scholars to "better situate knowledge in its geographic and embodied specificity and resist attempts to universalize any particular episteme" (p. 653). In this spirit, we hope to reflect on our own positionalities as they inform our work and to look toward avenues for recognizing visions of rhetorical invention and rooting them in the epistemologies and theories that emerge in the field. Certainly, we are unable to divorce our own training and the development of participatory critical rhetoric from its roots in critical rhetoric and its epistemological biases; yet, as we have crafted participatory critical rhetoric, we envision the orientation as inviting new perspectives that challenge our roots and biases. Reflecting on the fragmentation thesis, Wanzer (2012) argues that McGee's (and McKerrow's by extension) contentions about fragmentation relied on the "modern/colonial assertion of homogeneity" (p. 647). He continues, arguing

that rhetoricians would be better off if we could (1) commit to and find ways of practicing epistemic disobedience toward modern/colonial logics, (2) channel such disobedience into an altered ethics of critique, and (3) resist ghettoizing decoloniality into the barrios of communication studies. (p. 652)

Calling for an embrace of "embodied speech and listening" (p. 653), Wanzer contends that critics must "give the gift of the self" (p. 654) to communities that suffer under colonial and oppressive logics. As offered by D. Soyini Madison (2012), this follows critical and performance ethnographic approaches that attend to the ways that social performances follow a trajectory "from quotidian ordinariness to reflective experience and ultimately to creative expression" (p. 168). Through its orientation toward immanent politics and gaining of multiperspectival judgment through rhetorical reflexivity, participatory critical rhetoric also places critics in a position to appreciate the machinations of power as they are exerted on vernacular or marginalized individuals. By bearing witness to these testimonies as informed by their perspectives, this approach is inherently and iteratively informed by those who are directly affected by exertions of colonial logics. Moreover, the embrace of perspectives that are subject to power opens up the possibility of approaching rhetoric in ways that challenge rhetorical traditions and theory. We contend that this opens the possibility of putting decolonial perspectives in conversation with critics who would otherwise remain wedded to their Western origins. Certainly, this also means that participatory critics take up projects that address colonial logics and legacies, which we cannot direct or control except within our own interactions with graduate students or other scholars interested in the approach. However, even critics who engage in local communities without such an aim may come into contact with perspectives that challenge prevailing logics of power.

A participatory orientation invites consideration of perspectives that have not been historically included in rhetoric. Looking to those who have embraced such a perspective, we are able to see points of rupture in the epistemic privilege often reinforced by critical rhetoric. For example, in her fieldwork in Guáhan

(Guam), Tiara Na'puti (2016) takes up the analytic "Both/Neither" to engage "indigenous political identity and [grapple] with spaces always already marked by the settler-state and colonialist politics" (p. 57). This analytic—formed out of a decolonial response to American colonialism—illustrates how fieldwork can be jointly informed by the perspectives of the critic and of participants. Na'puti does not draw from participatory critical rhetoric; instead, she offers an appreciation of fieldwork that engages in the reflexive and purposeful consideration of indigenous perspectives. However, we see her work as a productive challenge and point of departure for thinking about how participatory critical rhetoric as an approach can center historically marginalized perspectives. In our theorizing of multiperspectival judgment, we considered the ways that a participatory orientation challenges the traditional (centered) rhetorical critic. Instead, we advocated for critics to take into consideration the myriad ways that vernacular voices also make critical judgments about larger rhetorical processes and their own existences within systems of power and exclusion. Consequently, participatory critical rhetoric asks critics to consider epistemic positions that may not have previously found a home within the history of rhetoric and how those positions challenge, critique, and reshape the boundaries of that (often White and often male) history. The in situ character of the approach asks critics for sustained and reflexive engagement within power structures and with those most directly affected by power. In this sense, critics are put into epistemological conversation with perspectives that, following Wanzer (2012), can potentially radicalize our commitments to rhetoric and open up the possibility of epistemic disobedience.

Moreover, Wanzer (2012) calls for critics to "give the gift of the self" (p. 654). Participatory critical rhetoric's engagement with the immanent politics of advocacy—including the planning, execution, and evaluation of the invention of discourse—asks critics to commit to communities that suffer under oppressive discourses. In giving the gift of self, participatory critics refocus attention on invention as a process that includes internal rhetorics of planning and external rhetorics of action. Internal rhetorics, which include enclaved discourses of regrouping and sharing of personal experiences (Fraser, 1990; Squires, 2002), often invite critics to hear the voices of those who are traditionally excluded from public view, or to hear the stories of oppression that are not typically heard aloud in external rhetorics of protest and public action (Chávez, 2011; Chevrette & Hess, 2019). When invited to witness internal rhetorics, critics learn firsthand of the consequences of colonial logics, the ways that individuals creatively resist their influence, and how one's own subject position as a critic is privileged and embedded within systems of power.

As Senda-Cook, Middleton, and Endres (2016) put it, "Fieldwork gives critics more access to the immediate material experience of situated rhetorical invention, audiences, and evaluation than do traditional rhetorical criticism approaches that draw primarily on textual representations, reconstructed context, and imagined audiences" (p. 38). This access to immediate experiences allows critics to theorize about systemic issues of colonial power and representation, enabling them "to be reflexive about the place from which [they] speak" and to resist "reproducing the dominant logics and theoretical rhetorics that exacerbate exclusion" of traditionally marginalized ways of knowing and doing rhetoric (Wanzer, 2012, p. 653). Not every critic will be reflexive about reproducing colonial logics, but we hold that with thoughtful, attentive, and ethical self-reflexivity, the direct access that rhetorical fieldwork allows can resist the reproduction of dominant logics. We call on those who take up participatory critical rhetoric to strive for this. Because of this orientation, participation within community organizations and advocacy groups can underscore invention as a more dynamic process that includes changes in message strategy, internal disagreements, and behind-the-scenes narration of personal struggles. Chávez (2011) spent time with queer and migrant activists at meetings, in

social gatherings, and through interviews to gain an insider's perspective on how the organizations share resonant concerns and creatively respond to oppressive discourses. Similarly, de Onís (2016) worked with Puerto Rican climate justice advocates by attending public hearings, grassroots meetings, and weeklong camps. By witnessing these activities, she offers her experiences of copresence in the field, including working on the day-to-day interactions between community members and advocates and tensions felt in multilingual expressions. Again, these two examples do not necessarily share the exact lineage of critical rhetoric, but run in tandem with the participatory spirit that we have outlined here.

In our own experiences in the field, each of us has had profound moments of bearing witness of the machinations of power guided by colonial logics or legacies. During his work with DanceSafe (Hess, 2011), Aaron learned firsthand accounts and experiences of the racist history and commitments of the prison industrial complex, as drug users shared stories of arrest and incarceration via the hands of police. During fieldwork with Art Herbig at the Rally to Restore Sanity (Herbig & Hess, 2012), Art and Aaron met with Muslim Americans who felt excluded from the national political narrative and continued oppression founded in Western logics. Shedding tears over the continued Islamophobia found in national news narratives, Art and Aaron bore witness to their painful stories of suffering. Mike's work engaging with and learning from communities of homeless activists revealed both the varying levels of (in)visibility that aligned with and reinscribed colonial legacies of racialized violence, and the ways those histories were sometimes challenged (and sometimes capitulated to) by the communities of activists with whom he worked. In Samantha's research on national parks, colonialist strategies of land acquisition surfaced consistently throughout the National Park Service's history. In Danielle's work with indigenous Native American nations and nuclear colonialism, she has been attentive to ongoing practices of settler colonialism and modes of resistance, survivance, sovereignty, and self-determination enacted by Skull Valley Goshute, Western Shoshone, and Southern Paiute people and using indigenous epistemologies and theories in her analysis. Yet, despite a centering of colonialism in her body of work, Danielle has been pushed to account for her reliance on critical rhetoric, Foucauldian theories, and other theorists, a topic that she continues to grapple with in reflection on past and future research projects.

We share these moments not to claim that our work was always already informed by a decolonial perspective or that we have become decolonial rhetoricians. Rather, we share them to point out moments in our own work where more attentiveness to decolonial and other critiques of rhetoric could (and should) more explicitly inform our critical scholarship. In doing so, we hope also to highlight the potential of participation as a means to "engage in forms of praxis that can more productively negotiate the borderlands between inside and outside, in thought and in being" (Wanzer, 2012, p. 654). These moments, perhaps fleeting at times, illustrate the epistemic challenging of perspectives borne out of fieldwork, the engagement with immanent politics of local communities, and the reflexive embrace of multiperspectival judgment. Although we have focused mainly on decolonial critiques of critical rhetoric in this article, we do acknowledge that coloniality is not the only realm in which rhetorical critics need to have constant vigilance in our reflexivity about the relationship among power and rhetoric, intersectionality, and privilege. In her essay on racial rhetorical criticism, Lisa Flores (2016) contends, "I will go so far as to argue that rhetorical studies is fundamentally—at its core—the study of race and to argue, therefore, rhetorical critics must participate in the expanding area of racial rhetorical criticism" (p. 6). Extending this to the various dimensions of power and intersectionalities of power beyond race that undergird all rhetorical practice, we hope that fieldwork, either through participatory critical rhetoric or another approach, will be attentive to these forms of power.

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