

On Being There

An Introduction to Studying Rhetoric in the Field

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The study of rhetoric is both enriched and perplexed by being present, *being there*, in the places where rhetoric does its work. As forms of inquiry predicated on being there, field methodologies—including ethnography, participant observation, oral history, interview, case study, and survey—offer particularly powerful tools for studying the textures of places and politics that shape rhetoric and within which rhetoric emerges, circulates, enacts, and dissipates. Rhetorically inflected fieldwork offers important insights for understanding (and, indeed, tools for participating in): the situated power and force of language; the symbolic means through which people produce meaning, generate social energy, and coordinate action in everyday life; and the connections between language and ontology, rhetoric and materiality, and words and things as they manifest in various places and times. This collection builds on a resurgent return to the field in rhetorical study to reach dual aims: to articulate ways that field methodologies might contribute to understandings of rhetoric and the practices of rhetorical criticism, and to explore how rhetoric and its study might contribute and speak back to interdisciplinary field-based research, more broadly.

We argue that immersing oneself in the dynamic, living, breathing ecologies that give rise to rhetoric and its work enhances the capacity to understand and observe rhetoric as a three-dimensional, situated force. As such, fieldwork is well suited for capturing, comprehending, and sometimes intervening within everyday rhetorical performance and production; for

cataloguing and representing myriad vernacular and situated experiences, cultures, practices, embodiments, meaning-making systems, and texts; for grappling with what ethical and meaningful collaboration with human and other-than-human actors might entail; and for building interdisciplinary rhetorical theory and practice capable of responding to the contradictory, complex, shifting, and recalcitrant conditions of our world's salient exigencies. Further, we suggest that these concerns with rhetorical performance and production, vernacular and situated meaning making, ethical collaboration, and complex exigencies, among other things, what we might broadly lump under the heading of rhetorical sensibilities, offer important extensions of existing field methodologies and field-based rhetorical work.

In this collection, we build on conceptions of rhetoric as ecological,¹ emplaced,² material,³ and new material.⁴ We understand rhetoric as multi-dimensional, existing as and tethered to the many forces and tools, histories and consequences, ideas and discourses, things and processes, desires and hopes, public memories and cultural narratives, people and other beings, symbols and materialities, ways of knowing and relating, and all manner else, that constitute and enable the powers of persuasion in any particular place. Beyond this sense of rhetoric as a complex constellation of persuasive forces in the world, we see rhetoric as a capacity of sorts to both perceive and act within this constellation: a form of responsivity and response. Such a capacity might be individual, collective, and even ecological to include human designs and more-than-human things that assemble in this way or that to incline particular lines of sight or action. In this sense, rhetoric becomes a tool—not simply of persuasion, connection, and collective action, but also of perception and orientation within these constellations. And in this perspective, the places of persuasion become not only heuristics for locating and enacting the available means of persuasion, but also the tangible places in which rhetoric as capacity and constellation reveals itself.

In light of its complexity, the study of rhetoric pulls researchers and practitioners in two directions. One direction demands an investigation of the particularities of place and time—the forces, actions, practicalities, and exigencies that make up the dynamic textures of place. In trying to capture rich accounts of rhetoric's emplaced power, one examines the cultural, economic, historical, and material odds and ends that enliven and animate rhetoric here but not there, now but not then, for us but not them. Without such context, one denies rhetoric of its situated resonances, the centerpiece of its secret powers, and is left looking at a deflation of sorts that cannot

satisfactorily answer how rhetoric really works. The other direction seeks to transcend the singularities of place, urging one to form abstract takeaways, concepts, theories, axioms, guidelines, pedagogies, and critical readings of rhetoric that sit above the dynamism and idiosyncrasies of everyday life such that rhetorical knowledge might be imagined as transportable, as useful elsewhere, anywhere, for someone, anyone, else.

These opposing pulls of particularity and abstraction bring us face-to-face with an ancient rhetorical crisis: how might we begin our inquiries when every/thing—hyperlocal words, actions, desires, bodies, soils, interactions—is said to be rhetorical, but everything rhetorical is only fully intelligible by looking beyond itself to connections to things ambient, idiosyncratic, and out there in the particularities of biosocial environments? How do we study forces that act, seduce, and guide without intention yet nevertheless shape the terrain of persuasion? Or arguments that move us profoundly without adhering to logic or rationality or even full cognition? Given this tension between, on the one hand, the particularities of place that threaten to be too sprawling to anchor a discipline and, on the other, the abstract rules, concepts, and theories of persuasion that threaten to eviscerate rhetoric of the contexts upon which deep rhetorical knowledge and production depend, what is it that we study when we say we are studying rhetoric? While these tensions between particularity and abstraction exist in all disciplines, there is something fundamental about their endemic and enduring presence in rhetorical study.

Field methodologies are especially promising for navigating these pulls between particularity and abstraction and for infusing fieldwork with the weight of these tensions. Fieldwork allows researchers to study both rhetoric's emplacement and fieldwork's complexity by offering access to and insight into a wider range of texts, perspectives, and experiences than we might otherwise discover. This might include the narratives and arguments offered through interviews and observations; the extra-textual aspects of persuasion and rhetorical performance that require our sensory facilities to perceive, like the sour stench of an alleyway, the sweat on a clam digger's brow, and the bodily warmth of a quick embrace; or the situated rhetorical forces that can only be observed through inhabitation, such as how place, power, materiality, embodiments, texts, and rhetoric intermesh and matter in particular situations.

The authors gathered in this collection—scholars tethered to English and communication, but also to agronomy, biology, ecology, education,

natural resources science, and political science—fuse rhetorical sensibilities with field methodologies to illuminate diverse disciplinary (and extra-disciplinary) perspectives on the power of rhetoric in everyday life. Our authors illustrate the values and challenges of conducting research that emerges from being there within case studies that range from contests within urban gentrifying spaces to water quality closures in Maine mudflats and from the effects of digital tools on field research to the human-scale effects of meritocracy within Kosovo’s fragile democratic state. In other words, being there to study and experience the ways rhetoric co-constitutes everyday life can offer researchers opportunities to illuminate, reflect on, invent, and potentially intervene in rhetoric’s emplacement through a variety of texts, perspectives, and experiences; sensory facilities; and situated rhetorical forces.

Being There with Rhetoric

We recognize that the notion of being there is itself a commonplace, both revered and vexed, within scholarship on field research; it is used to emphasize the immersive nature of qualitative research and the necessity of a researcher’s embodied presence, rhetorician or not, to gather data within a field site. Harry Wolcott states simply enough that one underlying aspect of all fieldwork is that it requires “being there,”⁵ while Clifford Geertz features being there as essential to one of the core practices of fieldwork: the production of thick descriptions that richly narrate the dynamics of everyday life within a field site.⁶ But many scholars both inside and outside the discipline of rhetoric challenge the value of being there for reasons including: researchers’ inability to shed the disciplinary, ideological, and identity-based lenses that shape their perceptions; being there as a researcher does not equate to knowing what it means to be “authentically” there (though authenticity is a fraught commonplace in and of itself); and thick descriptions are always already rhetorical, heuristical inventions that can only capture partialities of actual field sites, calling into question the entire enterprise of qualitative research.⁷

These are substantive and significant criticisms that rhetorical perspectives seem uniquely positioned to grapple with. Rhetoric can offer fieldworkers a keen attunement, for instance, to the notion that ethnographic and field-based accounts of the world are implicitly representational, both analogic and heuristical, and tend to offer situated, multiple truths that circulate within a place. Accordingly, the authors in this volume trouble the

notion of the transparent value of field events, using them instead as lenses onto the *topoi*, or commonplaces, of field sites; as ways to understand the roles that rhetoric plays in constituting a shared life; and as indicative of the many things that become entangled in human communication, be these material, political, interpersonal, ideological, cultural, economic, or the like. Instead of searching for access to a singular and stable truth offered, legitimized, and anchored by fieldwork, our authors ask what phrases, ideas, forces, practices, and desires have purchase in their field sites, questioning how language, symbols, and other forms of communication interact with, create, and emerge from both local ecologies and global discourses/policies. Among other things, our authors rely on their diverse rhetorical sensibilities to turn their critical gazes, as Ralph Cintron suggests, to the “failed expectation” that language will represent, exactly, the thing—or place, or event—in itself.⁸

Within the emerging subdiscipline of rhetorical field research, being there offers a point of entry for this type of critique. And being there is fundamentally defined both through the presence of the rhetorician’s body within a field site (ranging from an interview room to a community meeting and from a public bus trip to a riverbank) and through the practices of inhabitation, observation, participation, and interaction that enable researchers to gather data and/or effect change within the places of persuasion. Without ignoring its fraught complexity as a potentially exploitative methodology,⁹ extending the ethnographic concept of being there to rhetorical studies means asking what one might discover about or do with rhetoric by virtue of being there in the field, itself another vexed concept.

The definition of the “field” we are advancing carries both literal and metaphorical connotations, constituting as much the literal places we inhabit and observe as researchers as the representations of those places for persuasive purposes and audiences beyond. Put another way, field sites are simultaneously locations for inquiry; socially inflected ecologies from which rhetoric emerges, circulates, and performs its work; places (as well as metaphors/synecdoche/heuristics for places) in which rhetoric comes to life, entangled with meaning and forces; amalgamations of people, things, materialities, exigencies, public memories, collective dreams, myths, events, macrolevel influences and microlevel energetics that manifest as singularities in place and time; and representations of the places of persuasion that engage in the earnest (if also impossible) labors of bearing witness to the complexities of a place. Traditions of field research provide the means for

immersive engagement with and within the complex, nascent, and various manifestations of rhetoric in everyday life, as well as the narrative-driven or performance-oriented genre conventions that facilitate rich, robust representations of worlds far too complex to capture otherwise.

Rhetorical fieldworkers have studied everything from the material, performative, gendered, racialized, and embodied aspects of rhetoric¹⁰ to the networked,¹¹ environmental,¹² everyday,¹³ spatial,¹⁴ vernacular,¹⁵ and publicly consequential qualities of persuasion,¹⁶ among many other inquiries. All of those studies emerged from the practice of being there: not to testify to the singular, observed truth of a site, but to examine, engage with, and sometimes intervene in what Kenneth Burke refers to as “the flurries and flare-ups of the Human Barnyard.”¹⁷ Ultimately, this collection seeks to join and enrich emerging and ongoing conversations, some new and some ancient, about the opportunities that field methods afford: for enriching and expanding our approaches to theorizing, studying, and practicing rhetoric in situ; for highlighting the unique limitations, challenges, consequences, and ethical concerns of rhetorically oriented field research; and for exploring ways that rhetoric’s study and practice might assist us in solving urgent collective challenges.

The Roots of Rhetorical Fieldwork

While rhetorical study has long insisted on the situatedness of rhetoric, a renewed interest in field methods affords opportunities to expand access to objects of study and their complex interrelations—such as informal texts and accounts, marginal and vernacular perspectives, more-than-human agencies, performance, events, embodiments, affect, materiality—and to craft more richly contextualized, deeply grounded accounts of rhetoric in everyday life that are made possible through ongoing proximity to and immersion in the field. Such interest in fieldwork and such inclinations to expand our objects of study is by no means new to rhetorical study but the recent resurgence of both does reveal in our contemporary moment some need—be this in our theories, practices, objects, methods, and/or inquiries—for more directly engaging (whether to better understand, represent, or intervene within) the complexities of place in our world.

Of course, Dwight Conquergood noted long ago the “thriving alliance between ethnography and rhetoric” as evidence of the “yoking” of “emblematic terms from both disciplines . . . such as ‘rhetorical culture’ and ‘cultural

rhetoric.”¹⁸ That yoking can be seen in the ongoing interdisciplinary and international “Rhetoric Culture” project, which ethnographically explores, as key participants Ivo Strecker and Stephen Tyler put it, the “rhetorality of culture” and the “creative role of rhetoric in the emergence of culture.”¹⁹ The Rhetoric Culture project—which includes Ralph Cintron, Michael Carithers, Ivo Strecker, Stephen Tyler, Robert Hariman, and others—examines the related questions of what ethnographically inflected rhetoric and rhetorically inflected ethnography might look like, answering with a series of capacious and theory-laden accounts of the political textures of everyday life.²⁰

The emergence of studies that engage in what has become known as rhetorical ethnography has taken this accounting of the “rhetorality” of everyday life into a deep focus on the vernacular aspects of rhetoric,²¹ while many of the same scholars honed in, too, on the spatial aspects of rhetoric and rhetoric’s ability to enact, emplace, inform, and be informed by the places that had otherwise seemed to fade into the background.²² Related qualitative work in material rhetoric foregrounded public sites²³ and bodies,²⁴ in part through a close attention to rhetoric’s ancient texts and their emphasis on embodiment, performance, and affect.

The movement to the field represented in this volume, then, emerges, in part, from this shift toward studying local, ordinary, vernacular, deeply situational, and spatial manifestations of rhetoric (and writing) that emerge within everyday life. This interest in the everyday manifests as a sensitivity to the diverse and myriad perspectives, practices, and publics that co-constitute collective life in the world, often under the radar of, or rarified within, public archives and discourse. Fieldwork is recuperative in some ways, but also inventional: attending to and theorizing from the spaces where rhetoric works as facilitating something like the negotiation of life in common. These inventional capacities also allow, in some cases, for the forms of intervention that rhetorical fieldwork can take.

These multidimensional foci on the everyday, the spatial, and the vernacular link to materialist perspectives, which might be broadly defined through interests in the persuasive qualities of bodies, objects, and spatiality and with the interconnections between rhetoric and materiality. This literature is rich and varied, but broadly speaking over the past three decades or so the material turn might be defined by some of the following inclinations that provide the theoretical oomph that has inspired many rhetorical field research projects, both within this collection and more broadly:

- 1) the proclivity to critique conceptions of rhetoric and persuasion focused strictly on rhetoric's symbolicity in favor of perceiving rhetoric as emplaced, and to study the enmeshments of rhetoric and materiality, words and things, subjects and objects;²⁵
- 2) the acknowledgement of and attunement to non-discursive, non-strategic, extra-linguistic, and material aspects of persuasion, such as affective forces and bodily knowledges;²⁶
- 3) a disposition towards studying rhetoric's consequences, effects, and circulations, as opposed to or in tension with its symbolic content/meaning or with concerns of strict intentionality;²⁷ and
- 4) an orientation towards ecological, networked, and ambient perspectives, which rework the rhetorical situation by pointing to its dynamic capacities and expanding the horizon of things that interconnect with and mutually constitute it.²⁸

This final broad move toward viewing rhetoric ecologically and ambiently is one that also conceives rhetoric ontologically, and, thus, calls for theorizing the dazzlingly complex and multilayered enmeshments, amalgamations, assemblages, networks, and ecologies that emerge as co-constitutive and deeply emplaced formations of being composed of symbols, language, materialities, bodies, peoples, actors, spaces, things, lines of sight, processes, dispositions, practices, ideologies, ways of knowing, and so on. Albeit to varying degrees, ecological orientations expand the boundaries of rhetoric beyond discursive formations and human agencies to also include consideration of the persuasive agency and influence of relationships among objects, things, spaces, genres, institutions, animals, bodies, affect, and matter. While the connections between words and things, bodies and places, humans and other-than-humans, have been part and parcel of rhetoric since its inception, we argue that rhetorical field methods provide the means and tools for deepening our understanding of these connections in various places and times, such that, following Thomas Rickert, rhetoric itself becomes a modality for attunement.²⁹ In the chapters that follow, readers will find contributors playing in and through these various material theoretical trajectories.

In addition to such material inclinations, the sometimes-explicit and sometimes-implicit subtext of this collection invokes rhetoric's enduring

concerns with praxis, civic action, and social justice, and to action-oriented and activist research practices that attempt to engage communities ethically and to intervene in the world and its pressing exigencies.³⁰ This work reminds us that rhetorical field studies owe a sometimes-overlooked debt to collaborative and action-oriented projects in subdisciplines of writing studies, such as community-based writing, community literacies, service learning, participatory action research, and professional writing.³¹ Broadly speaking, that body of research urges rhetoricians: to engage with communities, publics, and workplaces; to develop partnerships that allow the deep study of the elements of the rhetorical situation relevant to crafting and circulating texts and rhetoric, as Karen Barad puts it, “from the inside”³²; to understand rhetoric’s various and uneven consequences; and to find ethical and situationally appropriate modes of response and intervention. This link to writing studies encourages researchers not only to look beyond the university’s walls for objects of critique and analysis but also to develop reciprocal relationships with others and to attend to the production and circulation, not just analysis, of salient arguments. Field-based projects might take cues from community-based writing research that emerges in multiple forms: whether highly institutionalized³³ or deterritorialized³⁴ or positioning students and scholars as writing about, for, or with communities.³⁵

Related studies in participatory action research and professional writing have also provided useful models for field rhetoric by traveling into the community-based and professional sites where writing and rhetoric do their work to offer models, methodologies, and ethical orientations.³⁶ Despite, or maybe because of, their differences, this collective body of knowledge sets the stage for field rhetoricians in multiple ways: focusing the discipline’s attention on nonacademic spaces in which rhetorical practices occur; training a critical eye on the intricacies of power that play out through the policing and privileging of certain types of literacy; and pushing researchers not only to pay attention to the world “out there,” but also to physically inhabit it, collaborate with the bodies and materials within it, and even work to change it. This work adopts a critical stance while opening the possibility that the rhetorician might, in fact, intervene in what she studies and become, in Ellen Cushman’s words, “an agent of social change.”³⁷ Community-based writing and its related fields first begged the question that the “proper” place of the rhetorician, in both critical and constructive modes, might be “out there” rather than “in here.”

This intervention emerges, in part, from the call for critical, activist, and

action-oriented practices that not only study the rhetorics of places and people, but also seek to actively *do* rhetoric with others to collectively solve what Horst Rittel and Melvin Webber long ago referred to as wicked problems with multiple public stakeholders and no clear solutions.³⁸ Within the emerging subdiscipline of rhetorical field methods, one strand of this work traces its roots to Raymie McKerrow's critical rhetoric tradition; these include, among others, Aaron Hess's argument for using critical-rhetorical ethnography to enact "advocacy through direct participation" and Phaedra Pezzullo's work to understand rhetorical performance as advocacy, as well as related research.³⁹ Paired critical and constructive approaches have emerged, too, in the subdiscipline of rhetoric of science, focused largely on medicine⁴⁰ and the environment.⁴¹ This aim of discovering the usefulness of rhetoric for addressing complex, shared problems taps into the long-standing role of rhetoric as a means of addressing public questions in the face of competing, myriad, diverse perspectives and uncertain paths. We hope, too, this tendency offers a path for navigating the complex ethical issues this move necessarily entails.

In sum, rhetorical field research draws on various work associated with the material turn, which theorizes and offers concepts to explain the richness and situatedness of rhetoric and the possibilities for engagement and action. This theoretical inclination includes emergent interest in new materialist and ecological perspectives that offer important reminders to rhetorical fieldworkers to look beyond the human body, both materially and in its symbols, to understand the fullest and most inventive capacities of rhetoric. We value the work of new materialisms to attend to a wider field of agential relations, among humans and other-than-humans alike, and we see those new materialist perspectives as especially potent when paired with community-based and activist perspectives that focus a researcher's vision on hierarchy, power, ethics, and fraught possibilities for action. While these community-based, material, and new material inclinations represent distinct, if overlapping, tendencies and subfields, they share commonalities that give rise to immersive, embodied fieldwork: the call to study rhetorical objects that cannot be solely located in textual artifacts or symbols but that require being there; the call for observing persuasive forces that only a body among other bodies and things in a particular place and time has access to (affective frames, the sensual, the performative, the vernacular, the experiential, the ambient, and so forth); and the need to be present over time to perceive and capture rhetoric's workings within ecologies, networks, and

assemblages. Collectively, *Field Rhetoric: Ethnography, Ecology, and Engagement in the Places of Persuasion* emerges from these broadly material, deeply situated, and ecological orientations and is poised to contribute to these conversations not only through theoretical insights, but also via a series of cases and robust methodologies that capture the workings and life of rhetoric in an array of places.

The Lay of the Land

The authors of this collection are linked in their common work to both theorize and enact rhetorical field practices and to consider how the study of rhetoric within its everyday situations and ecologies might serve as a means to better understand and even sometimes intervene within the work of rhetoric in the world. While each chapter works to apprehend some of the subtlety and power of rhetorical fieldwork for both theory-building and praxis, we highlight what we see as some of their most productive and innovative contributions by grouping chapters into the following three sections: (1) Field Methodologies, (2) Field Ontologies, and (3) Field Inventions.

Section 1: Field Methodologies

The chapters gathered in Field Methodologies articulate and experiment with new methods and analytics for field research through extended engagements with farmers, unwed mothers, and community activists in rural, urban, and remembered spaces. Building from interviews, stakeholder meetings, and participant observation, these chapters work to explain the processes of rhetorical fieldwork and theorize from particular cases to introduce agonistic methodology, semantic network analysis, field-based historiography, and rhetorical cartographies as additions to a robust methodological toolkit that enables researchers to explore the complexities and consequences of rhetoric *in situ*.

Caroline Gottschalk Druschke's chapter, "Agonistic Methodology: A Rhetorical Case Study in Agricultural Stewardship," takes up the recent call in rhetoric of science for a turn toward practical engagement and intervention, which she argues demands a methodology that illuminates the ways competing rhetorics are called on, created, and enacted in everyday life. Gottschalk Druschke employs *agôn* as both subject matter and methodology in her research with farmers working to improve water quality in an

Iowa watershed. Identifying material-symbolic points of tension in subjects' descriptions of their beliefs and practices, Gottschalk Druschke attends to the friction that emerges when universal commonplaces like "feeding the world" and "cheap food," as Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing puts it, "enter the fray."⁴² Gottschalk Druschke argues that rhetorical fieldwork is an agonistic encounter: forcing the lived experience of discontinuity and irresolvable contradiction, expanding disciplinary understandings of rhetoric, and generating significant insights for intervention.

Heather Brook Adams's chapter, "Historiographic Remembering and Emotional Encounters: Possibilities for Field-Based Rhetorical Research," melds rhetorical analysis, historiography, memory and affect scholarship, and fieldwork to recover US histories of unwed pregnancies and maternity homes, introducing what she calls field-based historiography: a methodology extending beyond the archive to explore pasts that may exist in few places but memory (both intimately private and public). Adams discusses her conversations with participants and investigates how open secrets, communal silences, emotional intensities, and circulating rhetorics of embodied shame contribute to ecologies of rhetorical practices that shape gender, power, and agency.

Carl Herndl, Sarah Beth Hopton, Lauren Cutlip, Rick Cruse, Elena Polush, and Mack Shelley, in "'What's a Farm?': The Languages of Space and Place," explore Bruno Latour's call for a materialist project of bringing people and things together to "compose" a better world by adopting a rhetorical approach to analyzing the transcripts of three rapid technology assessment workshops (one with scientists and engineers, two with farmers) coordinated by one of the authors.⁴³ Using traditional qualitative coding and thematic analysis with semi-automated semantic network analysis (SNA), they identify major conflicts between the vernacular of farmers and the dominant technical discourse of scientists in destabilizing ways. The authors consider how SNA can "map" the rhetorical practices of two or more groups, illuminating rhetorical places where they overlap as potential sites for intervening in the ongoing activity of emerging publics of scientists and citizens.

In "Rhetorical Cartographies: (Counter)Mapping Urban Spaces," Samantha Senda-Cook, Michael Middleton, and Danielle Endres examine what they call rhetorical cartographies, a method for describing how communities construct their identities in part through the embodied, lived "mappings" of spaces they inhabit and (re)create through everyday practices.

Embodied rhetorical practices (re)make spaces in ways that put spaces and their identities in co-constitutive relationships. The authors apply rhetorical cartographies to contemporary urban and professional spaces to discover how people from different socioeconomic groups map their lived experience. In doing so, they evoke Michel de Certeau's theorization that pedestrians walking the streets discover a radically different place than those viewing it from atop high rises.⁴⁴ By tracing several rhetorical urban cartographies, the authors illustrate how this concept explains the embodied activities of urban (sub)cultures and highlight the constitutive rhetorical relationships among identity, embodiment, and space.

Section 2: Field Ontologies

This section explores cases, from war-torn Kosovo to coastal Maine to decaying post-industrial landscapes in the Midwest, that illuminate the idea that rhetoric is of and about the conditions of being. This shift to rhetoric as ontological marks rhetoric as both a modality for attunement, as it is mobilized in Section 1, and an artifact of the dynamic entanglements of place. The authors in this section offer varied examples of deep attunement to sense and affect from the mundane to the sublime—including things like glances, wind, ambient noise, melancholy—while rooting their analyses and interpretations just as deeply into material, ecological, political, and economic worlds.

Ralph Cintron's ethnographic research in "A Bus Trip Named Desire" renders visible the internal life of rural young men and women who were his accidental companions on a bus trip from Kosovo's capital, Pristina, to North Mitrovica, one of the most explosive political flashpoints on the planet. These stories of individual and national desire amid economic and political turmoil and transition allow Cintron to explore the nation's self-created image of itself as a "managerial modernity"; the need for a vast informal economy from which corruption becomes a critical lifeline for individuals and international elites themselves; the public attempt to replace corruption by international organizations' labor with transparency and meritocracy; and, given all of this, the slide of the ideal of democracy as transparent and just toward oligarchic rule.

In "Belonging to the World: Rhetorical Fieldwork as Mundane Aesthetic," Bridie McGreavy, Emma Fox, Jane Disney, Chris Petersen, and Laura Lindenfeld consider rhetoric and conservation action planning in a three-year

ethnography with a diverse group of municipalities, fisheries groups, businesses, nonprofits, and individuals working together along the Maine coast. Their research explores the mundane quality of conservation action planning and the ways that specific objects, as processes, create capacities for rhetoric, where mundane refers to the everydayness and materiality that, together, create what becomes possible. Rhetoric occurs within the daily routines that may appear banal and dull: identifying sources of bacterial pollution, fixing leaky septs, restoring eel grass, and building websites. The mundane quality of conservation action planning emphasizes the vibrant material assemblages—of clams, mud, bacteria, septic systems, humans, technologies, and more—that create rhetorical capacities and help shape planning.

In “Rhetorical Life among the Ruins,” John Ackerman’s fieldwork in post-industrial, Midwestern neighborhoods considers how everyday physical attributes and material infrastructures engender the commonplaces of invention. If, as he contends, *topoi* are material as well as symbolic emplacements, then the material and economic straits of local communities may constitute the very resources for survival, progress, and political movement in otherwise bleak urban landscapes. Building from Yael Navaro-Yashin, Ackerman considers the catalytic rhetorical capacity of “ruination” as an anthropological, affective occurrence and as a popular urban design principle that shrewdly capitalizes on what comes before and, therefore, what has been rendered available in the rhetorical sense.⁴⁵ Here, ruination moves beyond post-industrial narratives of deficit and decay toward accounts of the productive collective capacities of urban spaces that constitute the precondition for resilience and renewal.

Section 3: Field Inventions

While innovation and critical reflection play an important role in the chapters throughout the volume, the contributions to Field Inventions foreground the role and experience of the researcher in especially substantive and consequential ways, exploring the field researcher’s dynamic emplacement and the inventional possibilities of the relationships observed and formed through fieldwork. Contributions in this section also place strong emphasis on understanding, marshaling, and pushing against ways that our theoretical concepts and disciplinary inclinations shape the terrain of invention that researchers draw on to understand, capture, and represent

the workings of rhetoric in the everyday. Workplaces, advocacy organizations, urban squares, and online spaces are offered in these chapters as the places of persuasion, from which the authors offer new vocabularies, theoretical connections, and reflexive approaches.

In “Fieldwork and the Identification and Assembling of Agencies,” Jeffrey T. Grabill, Kendall Leon, and Stacey Pigg’s scholarship explores why rhetorical theories and methodologies have long struggled with locating the practicalities of rhetoric as a social practice. They contend that rhetoric’s theoretical and methodological vocabulary often stabilizes or isolates rhetors or their performances, creating a distinction, and often a binary, between materials and discourse. Drawing from their collective rhetorical field research on a community arts project and a public environmental controversy, the authors adapt both conceptual and practical apparatuses: studying the work, mechanisms, devices, and actors that do rhetoric, while moving beyond a materials/discourse binary to reconsider what they refer to as the sociomaterials of rhetoric. Through fieldwork, the authors consider new ways to think about who/what does rhetoric and how we understand its impacts, while constructing practical methods for doing rhetoric in the world and conceiving of rhetorical theory as always endeavoring to be useful as a resource for others.

erin daina mcclellan, in “Rhetoric(s) of Urban Public Life,” articulates and mobilizes the concept of lived rhetorics—defined as “rhetorics that are always in some phase of formation, part of larger discourses, and related to particular bodies”—to examine our shared and emplaced co-creation of the world. Drawing on qualitative interpretive methods and rhetorical analysis, mcclellan articulates a practice of rhetorical field methodology as critical invention. In the chapter, mcclellan draws on observation and interviews in a public square in Portland, Oregon, to consider critical invention as a process with consequences for both research subject and researcher.

Aaron Hess’s scholarship in “Rhetoric, Ethnography, and the Machine: Technological Reflexivity and the Participatory Critic” examines the nexus of the participatory rhetorical critic and digital communication technology. Arguing that rhetorical fieldwork requires reflexive attention to how technology affects the production, transmission, and reception of rhetoric, Hess offers an accounting of how rhetorical critics/ethnographers might consider technological reflexivity by combining embodied rhetorical approaches with theorizing about the digital rhetorical self. Hess draws from various rhetorical fieldwork experiences, including massive mediated protests, public

commemoration ceremonies, and smaller moments of vernacular advocacy. At times, technology becomes a source of data collection or expression; at others, it affects the nature of advocacy on the street or changes how we produce our own scholarship. Ultimately, Hess proposes interrogations regarding how rhetoricians might reflect upon the nature of fieldwork and technology.

Drawing Constellations

Taken together, this volume offers a collection of related but varying visions, methods, and theoretical underpinnings for rhetorical fieldwork, pointing to the value of engaging in and with the places of persuasion for understanding utterances in context, understanding objects of study in situ, and offering opportunities for engagement and intervention. While we have gathered here some of the key voices in this emerging subdiscipline, our work is not exhaustive or even entirely representative, and we hope it will serve as a springboard to future discussions, including an exploration of the ethics of rhetorical engagement in the field. We are heartened to see an increased interest in the study and practice of rhetorical field methods, and we look forward to what this work will continue to tell us about rhetoric and about the fields we engage. We hope this volume serves as a flexible roadmap for those interested in engaging in the field, and as a touchstone to prompt important conversations about method, practice, intervention, and ethics and about the role of rhetoric in our complex constellations.

Notes

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