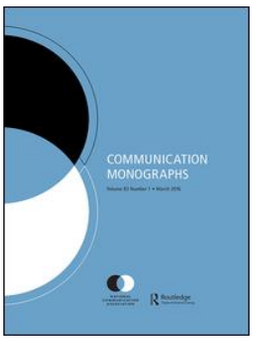

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INVITED ARTICLE

Rethinking rhetorical field methods on a precarious planet

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ABSTRACT

This essay offers a narrative of rhetorical field methods and intertwined climate justice exigencies. We argue the emergence of and resistance toward rhetorical field methods responds to a growing ecological consciousness, reflecting a changing understanding of the relationship between human agency and the planet. Drawing upon fieldwork from our own research and other scholars in the field, we organize our argument in three related themes: culture, interconnection, and voice. Given the expansive objects, people, and practices rhetorical field methods engage, this approach offers one compelling way to listen to and amplify marginalized voices. Overall, this essay explores how rhetorical field methods have provided and might further offer a compelling set of principles and practices for resisting structures of ecological and social precarity for life on Earth.

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Climate justice; culture; environment; rhetorical field methods; voice

> Anything living can be expunged at will or by accident; and its persistence is in no sense guaranteed. (Butler, 2009, p. ii)

> These global leaders are deciding what communities, what people, these representatives, as I say, are speaking on behalf of the entire populous … and … unfortunately, … the voices that they hear most are those who finance the current carbon paradigm that is destroying the planet. – Aaron Mair, the first African American president of the Sierra Club in a podcast interview with Pezzullo, on their experiences observing and participating in COP21. (Seven Scribes, 2016)

The planet may carry on, but life on Earth is precarious today. It is increasingly apparent that vulnerability of Earth's capacity to sustain our species poses an exigence we all would do well to hear and act upon. Climate science consensus is established (Carlton, Perry-Hill, Huber, & Prokopy, 2015; Cook et al., 2016), and while renewable energy markets rise, so do sea levels (IPCC, 2013; Patterson, 2017; Radić et al., 2014; Thompson, 2017). The preponderance of peer-reviewed evidence of anthropogenic (human-caused) climate change from global fossil fuel economies makes our species' ability to live on this planet uncertain without immediate and drastic cultural changes. Further, our research has emphasized the ways this crisis places a disproportionate burden of costs on frontline communities, predominantly constituted by People of Color, people who are poor, and those living in the Global South (Cox & Pezzullo, 2016; de Onís, 2012, 2016, in press; Pezzullo, 2001, 2007, 2013, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c; Sandler & Pezzullo, 2007).[1]

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The ways humans are making sense of this moment in history have been uneven, at best. Some have translated scientific expertise and their own firsthand experiences surviving climate-induced disasters into opportunities to develop new laws, new technologies, and revive community relations. Others have been reluctant to make changes and have begun to reject the possibility that science offers any expertise worth hearing. Most lie somewhere in between, reasonably convinced climate science is offering an early warning, but still not moved to respond radically.

The inability of our species to act on scientific and frontline consensus in a way that reflects the weight and significance of our current moment of climate crisis underscores the need for us to heed Cox's (2007) ethical imperative for environmental communication scholars to conduct research that attempts to address and reduce our unsustainability. Given how the "climate crisis" particularly signifies numerous interrelated ecological, economic, and social crises, we feel compelled to respond by listening to how communities are making sense of climate science and disasters, analyzing empirical research about the limitations and barriers to climate action, and fostering democratic engagement to improve humanity's odds of survival.[2] Rising to the editor's (Afifi, 2017) call to value the potential social impact of our work, this essay explores how rhetorical field methods have provided and might further offer a compelling set of principles and practices for resisting these structures of precarity.[3]

Beyond the occasion of this special issue on the state of methods in communication studies, rhetoricians long have been preoccupied with method (Jasinski, 2001; McGee, 1990; Nothstine, Blair, & Copeland, 1994). This concern is not one born of a lack of methodologies or methodological rigor; rather, the fraught tensions appear to lie primarily with the twentieth-century preoccupation with texts narrowly defined (Blair, 1999) and what Morris (2010) emphasizes as a refusal to accept "mechanistic, formulaic, scientific application" as the sole or most desired method for our research (p. 12).[4] Methodological frictions, therefore, have ebbed and swelled over time.

In the early 2000s, the turn of rhetorical studies toward field methods was heralded as a latent approach to research worthy of our attention for multiple reasons, including: "the opportunity to witness and record discourses that are left out of traditional written records … [and] an opportunity to study public discourse that is not yet recorded" (Pezzullo, 2003a, p. 350; see also Pezzullo, 2007). In addition to providing a way to research emergent and/or marginalized communities, field methods were valued as one approach to explore "inventional spaces" of meaning, identification, and community (Hauser, 1999, p. 33). From this perspective, field methods identify and interpret rhetoric as a process that constantly is negotiated, rather than as a static object.

Although rhetorical field methods are not new (Pezzullo & Hauser, in press), we are living amid a watershed moment. Along with a growing number of monographs exemplifying this tradition, three books underscore the significance of this time: Middleton, Hess, Endres, and Senda-Cook's (2015) *Participatory critical rhetoric: Theoretical and methodological foundations for studying rhetoric in situ*; McKinnon, Asen, Chávez, and Howard's (2016) *Text + field: Innovations in rhetorical method*; and Rai and Druschke's (in press) *The places of persuasion: Studying rhetoric in the field*.[5] As such, it is timely to rethink the value and stakes of rhetorical field methods for future research, particularly since ecological crises underscore our duty to consider how we, as scholars, might contribute to collective understandings of precarity and resistance.

Moved by the ways critical theory emphasizes the rhetorical nature of knowledge production, performance studies scholar Conquergood (1991) wrote in this journal, more than nearly two decades ago, about the ways ethnography should be rethought in relation to critical theory and a renewed commitment to examining the relationships between our labor and power:

> What kinds of knowledge, and their attendant discursive styles, get privileged, legitimated, or displaced? How does knowledge about communication get constructed? What are the tacitly observed boundaries – the range of appropriateness – regarding the substances, methods, and discursive styles of communication scholarship? And, most importantly for critical theorists, what configuration of socio-political interests does communication scholarship serve? How does professionally authorized knowledge about communication articulate with relations of power? (p. 193)[6]

The field is still coming to terms with the significance of Conquergood's intervention, which we view as a key force in moving rhetorical studies to reconsider methods. His argument affirms embodied fieldwork as an intersubjective, vulnerable, and sensuous way of learning specific contexts, or what Grossberg (2010) calls "conjunctures." Conquergood emphasizes that ethnography may decenter the text but remains deeply aware of the significance of interpretive processes of notetaking and the persuasive power of sharing stories. He argues that "rhetorical self-reflexivity has helped politicize ethnography" (1991, p. 193). Further, he concludes by goading us to sit with and feel accountable to the relationship between our research and power.

Persuaded by Conquergood's arguments about the body, boundaries, borderlands, performance, and rhetorical reflexivity, this essay attempts to extend the terrain he mapped by focusing on rhetoric instead of ethnography as an entry point. Conquergood (1991) wrote: "Ethnography is being rethought in fundamentally rhetorical terms" (p. 191). We further argue that rhetoric is being rethought in fundamentally *ethnographic* terms – or, more broadly, through the practice of field methods. This reconsideration does not mean that all rhetoricians are ethnographers or should be – or even that all our own research is field-based. Rather, our purpose in this essay is to consider how the use of field methods has had implications for how we imagine rhetorical studies to date and indicates emergent trends for the field, particularly as we face ecological crises.

As decisions impacting the vitality of our lifeworld are immanent, our research reflects an ethical obligation to engage unfolding events prior to others creating or deleting public records. The precarity of archives themselves is a sign of the times that has compelled many to document, digitally transfer, and rethink who has power to share or to destroy texts. In concert with climate justice and science advocates, this essay charts three related themes: culture, interconnection, and voice. Each exemplifies values that have consequences for climate action, which will require not only the ability to analyze texts, isolated, individual deeds, and carbon emissions, but also to transform our ways of living, capacity to feel presence, and ability to amplify underheard voices on the frontlines.

Throughout this essay, we provide excerpts from fieldwork (some our own, some from others) to signal the empirical exemplars on which this essay relies. While this article does not address nor resolve all the existing anxieties, tensions, and excitement about rhetorical field methods, we identify some of the main arguments of this contemporary moment in

relation to ecological crises and to encourage future research about our more and less sustainable cultural choices.

On culture: from speeches to a whole way of life

> Culture is ordinary: that is the first fact. Every human society has its own shape, its own purposes, its own meanings. Every human society expresses these, in institutions, and in arts and learning. The making of a society is the finding of common meanings and directions, and its growth is an active debate and amendment under the pressures of experience, contact, and discovery, writing themselves into the land. (Williams, 1958/1989, p. 93)

> In the last five years working with clammers, I have learned from how they make sense of change. Clammers follow the cyclical rhythm of the tides every day. With previous days' digs and tide charts as guides, they sense the right time to go out to the intertidal mudflat to dig for clams. As they do, they observe the variation in the fine grained texture of the mud across a mudflat and how this composition and variation affects the clams. They describe, in rich detail, the smell of the mudflat and the sounds that the mud makes as they wiggle their hoes into the mixture of rock, clay, sand, silt, shell, and organic matter. (McGreavy, in press, p. 4)

Rhetoric's relatively short-lived articulation to the study of individual speech texts by politicians reached a folkloric demise as far back as the 1960s. Some mark this moment as when Edwin Black (1978) argued rhetorical scholars should shift attention from methods to the contingent interpretations of the critic (McKinnon et al., 2016). Five years later, as Bitzer (1997) recalls from the 1970 Wingspread Conference, Larry Rosenfeld asked if rhetoric was becoming redefined as "everything but tidal waves" and, in response, Richard McKeon remarked, "Why not tidal waves?" (Pezzullo, 2016a). The anecdote is worth repeating because it reminds us that the conversation about rhetorical field methods has a longer history than many suggest. This story also reflects how a growing support for and backlash against ecological consciousness has been pivotal to the encouragement and discouragement of rhetorical field methods.

The articulation of rhetoric with culture (via cultural studies, critical rhetoric, and/or public culture) in the nomenclature of the field has not extinguished the need for some scholars to study texts produced by notable political leaders (for example, presidential or social movement leader public address scholarship); however, it has goaded rhetorical scholars to expand the horizon of, to borrow a phrase from Taylor (2003), our archives and repertoires. While rhetoric since ancient times has been imagined as contextual, inventive, and audience-centered, the explicit articulation of rhetoric with culture emphasizes the value of rhetorical analysis as a mode of critique to analyze democratic tensions and imaginaries in both extraordinary and banal moments. Some exemplars include: valuing politics in the streets (Enck-Wanzer, 2006; Endres & Senda-Cook, 2011; Haiman, 1967; Simonson, 2010); listening to vernacular voices (Hauser, 1999, 2011); observing locally constituted practices of citizenship, coalitions, and public policy (Asen, 2000, 2004, 2015; Brouwer, 2001; Chávez, 2013; West, 2014); taking memorials seriously (Blair, 1999, 2001); learning about meaning-making as part of practices in everyday life (Ackermann, in press; Bennett, 2009; Cintrón, 1997; West, 2014); attending to the land and other ecological elements (Carbaugh & Boromisza-Habashi, 2011; Na'puti, 2016; Na'puti & Bevacqua, 2015) – and, yes, even theorizing deductively from tides (Druschke & McGreavy, 2016; McGreavy, in press).

Articulating rhetoric with culture, in other words, broadens what we consider as rhetorical because, as Williams (1958/1989) once argued, studying culture is not just researching "the arts and learning" but also "a whole way of life" (p. 93). We have an obligation, therefore, to make space for work that studies the center and the margins and those that trouble the rigid binaries of such distinctions. Expanding the scope of objects and performances worthy of rhetorical scholarly attention does not decrease the value of methods; in fact, it increases the viable range of methods to draw upon as scholars let their questions guide their research. Following McKinnon et al., "methods" may be defined

> as the tools that researchers may use in order to collect data (e.g., field notes, personal reflections, transcripts, ephemera, and other documents), analyze data, and ultimately answer their research questions. *Field methods* may include interviews, focus groups, observation, personal narrative, ethnography, autoethnography, oral history interviews, performance, thematic analysis, iterative analysis, grounded theory, and many other forms of data collection and analysis [including participation]. (2016, p. 5, emphasis in original)

Notably, all rhetorical field methods are rhetorically constituted (Geertz, 1973, 1988; Simonson, 2014), embodied (Conquergood, 1991; Pezzullo, 2007), and multi-modal, drawing on technologies to travel, record, transcribe, and more (Hess, in press; Pezzullo, 2007).

Further, rhetorical field methods may be enacted in a range of ways. Fieldwork may be conducted by scholars who identify as belonging to that same community, movement, and/or culture, as well as by those who do not. Fieldwork also may be single- or multi-sited and last for various durations of time, ranging from a few hours to several years. The burden of proof for rigor, therefore, lies less in a rigid set of guidelines about rhetorical field methods itself and more in the scholar's capacity to make a compelling cultural critique from the evidence at hand or deduce conclusions from empirical evidence rather than preconceived assumptions.

For some scholars, rhetorical field methods have provided insights into the ways communities are constituted and constitute meaning through ecological concerns and aspirations. For example, our research on environmental justice advocates draws on rhetorical field methods to identify the inventional resources people find in and across their neighborhood, county, or region to make sense of and resist toxic pollution, disasters, and climate injustice (Pezzullo, 2001, 2003a, 2003b, 2007, 2009, 2010, 2016b). We find community members engage in naming practices that mark competing conceptions of progress, life, and death that are rooted in place and its changing ecological, social, and economic landscape, including eroding coastlines, rising seas, intensifying droughts, and economic emergencies fueled, in part, by unsustainable reliance on fossil fuels (de Onís, 2016, in press).

Focusing on different community engagement efforts to heighten responses to climate disruption, Endres, Leah Sprain, and Tarla Rai Peterson embody the role of "participant researchers" to document the 2007 Step It Up Campaign, a series of local U.S. climate change events that sought to bring urgency to our climate crises and to call out the lack of sufficient political responses to them (2009, p. 3). In doing so, Endres et al. theorize social movement construction in an age of blended online and on-the-ground activism by attending to "rhetorical strategies, modes of organizing, and practices of citizenship"

(2009, p. 6). Informed by her early fieldwork experiences with the Step It Up Campaign, Senda-Cook (2012, p. 131) also engages environmental concerns and draws on her fieldwork in Zion National Park to critique everyday practices, which she does by studying outdoor recreation to explore how the concept of "experiential degradation" helps explain recreational norms, membership, and perceptions about authenticity (p. 130).

For some, ecological imaginaries have provided a compelling vocabulary to reimagine human relations in regenerative ways. Crawford (2010), for example, discusses overcoming the rhetorical problem of a temporal-spatial lack of imagination that unnecessarily narrowly reads the contemporary realities and future aspirations of different communities. She argues this dilemma can be addressed by moving physically to the places about which dominant narratives are written – to rewrite them. This movement-as-intervention enables Crawford to respond to questions about power, spaces, and meaning-making in her study of English literacies, gender, and Vietnam, leading her to re-theorize rhetoric in terms of movement, or "growing routes" rather than as persuasion or rhetorical effect (2010, p. 71). She writes: "'Growing routes' describes a mode of feminist rhetorical practice that constructs and accounts for our roots in the world and our routes through the world over time" (2010, p. 76). She also notes that "root" and "route" can be homonyms, depending on one's pronunciation, suggesting the importance and complexity of movement and ecologies as a way some are literally and figuratively "writing themselves into the land" (Williams, 1958/1989, p. 93).

As Rai and Druschke (in press) also argue, at least in part, the recent revival of rhetorical field methods is a reflection of a growing collective awareness of these ecological interconnections. Rather than imagining ecological consciousness of tidal waves and other earthly elements as the demise of rhetoric, therefore, broadening cultural norms from an anthropocentric, egocentric model to one more indebted to a worldview in which we might imagine ourselves as biocentric and ecocentric holds promise to regenerate rhetorical studies and our capacity to reshape the world.

On interconnection: from alienation to feeling presence, traveling without guarantees

> It's *not* that I didn't know. I *did* know. And I've heard *many* people from that community talk. But, *being there* made a difference.
> (San Francisco Bay Area breast cancer activist on traveling to another region of the state of California, Pezzullo, 2007, p. 19)

> Whether travelling or whether people who are on the side of the street watching people walk by, it changes people's perspectives. … long walks are powerful because people respect you for doing it. They see it as a sincere act of solidarity with people who have to go through a difficult life. Especially doing a walk like that, in a more general sense travelling allows you [to] meet people and tell stories. I think it's powerful when you tell those stories. Every day out of those forty days we told stories, and people told us their stories. And we had a better understanding of how they viewed climate change as an issue and the deeper challenges that they face every day, whether it's an ecological issue in their own town or whether it's a corrupt government official or local leaders or a poorly managed dump site.
> (Naderev Yeb Saño, former Philippines' Chief Negotiator in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change on walking from Vatican City to Paris for COP21, personal communication with Pezzullo, March 4, 2015)

Location matters to field methods both physically and symbolically. Lindlof and Taylor define participant observation as "the craft of experiencing and recording events in social settings" (2002, p. 134). The *in situ* (Desmond, 1999), embodied participation, observation, advocacy, and investigation of a researcher engaging in cultural practices can take many forms. Rhetorical field methods researchers have embodied the role(s) of witness, performer, fellow worker, note taker, consumer, protestor, community member, and other positions in a host of contexts, including international climate negotiations (Pezzullo, 2015, 2016c), local rallies and protests (Endres, Sprain, & Peterson, 2009; Stevens, 2006), tours (Bowman & Pezzullo, 2010; Pezzullo, 2003a, 2003b, 2007, 2010), governmental and environmental agency proceedings (de Onís, 2016; Kinsella, Kelly, & Autry, 2013), and citizen advisory boards (Pezzullo, 2001), among many others. At these sites, identifying interconnections between, for example, everyday people and decision-makers, hosts and guests, fossil fuel producers and people suffering the most from that industry, are vital to identify.

To do this work, as noted previously, ethnographers may select single- or multi-sited studies, which may be of short or long duration. Some ethnography is based on long-term familiarity with a place, which holds the potential to offer in-depth insights about environmental justice exigencies and techniques for resisting injustice, as well as the evolution of these problems. Consider Depoe's (2004) environmental justice research and advocacy motivated, in part, by decades of living near the Fernald nuclear site in Ohio. When Depoe and his colleagues conducted interviews with a range of impacted individuals during different phases of the Fernald Living History Project, they asked questions over years about a longer historical perspective on personal and structural changes *in situ*. They also shared those interviews as part of a digital, public archive sponsored by the U.S. Department of Energy and drew on these resources to help work toward supporting local voices in shaping the future of the site.

Multi-sited ethnographic studies are typically shorter term, but they use comparative observations to study the successes, challenges, and stakes of community activism circulating and diverging across ethnic, regional, national, and other cultural borders. Marcus (1998, pp. 79–80) defines "multi-sited ethnography" as studying "the circulation of cultural meanings, objects, and identities in diffuse time-space. This mode defines for itself an object of study that cannot be accounted for ethnographically by remaining focused on a single site of intensive investigation." The instructive potential of engaging multiple sites is evident in the 2007 Step It Up climate action campaign mentioned above, which found its persuasive force in the number of events – a mobilization that Endres et al. (2009) mirrored in the researchers' recruitment of colleagues throughout the country to participate in, record, reflect on, and critique the different modes participants engaged in during the event. This multi-sited approach contributes to understandings of how many social movements in the twenty-first century take shape, spread, and synergize efforts between different communities by employing various strategies, tactics, and messages to carry out their objectives with varying degrees of success.

Another multi-sited ethnography is an earlier study of toxic tours (Pezzullo, 2007), which followed an advocacy practice in multiple sites of North America. One chapter focused on Matamoros, Mexico, compared and contrasted touring in person with touring vicariously through an advocacy film (which was made, in part, from footage

on the physical tour participated in by the researcher). This analysis was an attempt, in part, to further nuance our understanding of alienation and presence.

Feelings of alienation or separation, distance, and indifference take shape in many forms and can be especially debilitating for environmental sustainability, including a lack of awareness about one's environmental impacts and/or accountability to make more ecologically sound choices. Presence is the counterpart to this estrangement and functions as a magnifying effect of different encounters (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969). Fostering a sense of presence may make injustices, as well as ignored and silenced communities, feel more "present" to those living everyday life in ways that are experienced differently than their own (Pezzullo, 2007, p. 9). In this rhetorical sense, presence:

> indicate[s] when *we feel as if* someone, someplace, or something matters, whether or not she/he/it is physically present with us. Presence also refers, then, to the *structure of feeling* or one's *affective* experience when certain elements – and, perhaps, more importantly, relationships and communities – in space and time appear more immediate to us, such that we can imagine their "realness" or "feasibility" in palpable and significant ways. (Pezzullo, 2007, p. 9, emphasis in original)

While valuing firsthand empirical observations, physical presence does not guarantee a critical interruption of alienation and a feeling of presence (Pezzullo, 2007). Consider, for example, how we often are alienated from the labor involved in the clothes we wear every day, or the toxic pollution the production of our cell phones is predicated upon, or how violence between people can occur in the most intimate of settings. Further, consider how many of us are moved by films to boycott a company, or use social media as integral to our advocacy, or treasure photographs from our vacations; these media can make distant places and people feel present even when they physically are not.

Likewise, as Pezzullo and Depoe (2010) discovered engaging the aforementioned digital oral histories of workers in and residents near the nuclear facility in Fernald, Ohio,

> everyday life can serve as a rhetorical constraint for publicity because *we can become accustomed to anything*. Former workers and residents from Fernald share stories that sound horrific to most in most contexts, including the burning off of a worker's private parts, deaths, birth defects, drops in sperm count, acid fumes permeating nostrils and dropping on people's skin, water that has become undrinkable, and so forth. Yet, these stories of disaster long felt acceptable on an everyday basis to those who lived them. (p. 103, emphasis in original)

Such analysis reminds us that traveling or living in a place matters to our ways of learning, but the practice itself does not guarantee that field researchers will perceive all exigencies and lived experiences as mattering – nor does it guarantee that what we document and report will be read as significant for the different audiences that encounter research derived from rhetorical field methods.

Given the significance of location to rhetorical field methods, new and emerging media technologies also afford researchers and communities the opportunity to address audiences beyond those who are co-present. Despite the ongoing environmental injustices perpetuated by e-waste, media technologies can assist in presenting new ethnographic insights about environmental crises and injustices in interactive modes of circulation. For example, some environmental justice studies have employed PhotoVoice, which involves training community-member researchers to take photographs that can

be used to initiate discussions about environmental justice concerns. Conversations resulting from the PhotoVoice approach also can be shared with various decision-makers who might not otherwise encounter or consider the perspectives of marginalized voices (Harper, Steger, & Filčák, 2009). Others, such as Vannini and Taggart (2013, p. 307), include URL hyperlinks in their footnotes to the audio versions of interviews. Offering access to these recorded files heightens possibilities for reader interactions with the scholars' project and enables interviewees to be heard in their own words. Efforts to connect "there" with "here" might also unfold via "e-advocacy," as both of us have experienced. This ongoing engagement is enabled by previous on-the-ground encounters to contribute to social movement and rhetorical theory building prior to, during, and after engaging first-person fieldwork.

Focusing on method and media, Hess (in press) encourages us to become more technologically reflexive about our embodied rhetorical field methods as we record, circulate, and theorize, as well as how media affordances are shaping the sites we research. In his collaborative work with Hess and Herbig (2013), Hess studies how virtual apps are engaged at the site of a physical 9/11 memorial. They also co-produced a short, 15-minute film from that fieldwork, which poignantly explores a range of emotional reactions to those on site at the 10th anniversary of the tragedy, as well as practices of memorializing theorized by critics more broadly (Herbig, Hess, & Watson, 2011).

Given these approaches and the technological embeddedness that pervades academic scholarship, we should be wary of conflating feeling presence with physical co-presence, while seeking out and foregrounding a wider range of knowing, being, and caring about others in an age of climate crisis.[7] The challenge then becomes how to hear unheard and muted voices to begin reimagining our relationships and radical possibilities for feeling presence across time and space and between economic classes, national borders, historical epochs, and ecological spheres.

On voices: from listening to amplification

> I just stayed with some folks and got to know people for two weeks. They would ask me, "What are you here to do?" I would say, "Not much right now! Just hearing about the issue and hearing from you, and why people are involved and why they care about it so much." Just to get people to trust me. And there's definitely that breaking-in period for the first couple months, I would say, where even before you can actively get involved in a campaign, you want to have people trust you. And share some values with them so that they know that you're there for the right reasons. As a career organizer, that's something that I definitely try to do whenever I'm going into a new space, just do a lot of listening, share my motivations, and usually that smooths most things over.
>
> (Flavia de la Fuente, Sierra Club organizer, interview in Texas, Thatcher, 2016, p. 124)
> Aquí es el que duele, el que sabe./Here are the human beings that hurt, the human beings that know. –(Zaida Torres Rodríguez, nurse and community activist, interview in Vieques, Puerto Rico, de Onís, 2016, p. 108)

By interviewing the "human beings that know," rhetorical field methods may offer opportunities to listen to voices too often left out of official archives and to identify rhetorical processes that exceed singular events (Asen, 2015; Pezzullo, 2003a). While culture, meaning-making, and a sense of presence can be studied through archives, they also can be explored through rhetorical field methods that seek out underheard or unheard voices.

Eric King Watts conceptualization of voice urges rhetoricians to rethink what forms of speaking – and by whom – matter, beyond the traditional focus on eloquence and the human. He asserts:

> Voice emanates from the openings that cannot be fully closed; from the ruptures in sign systems, from the breaks in our imaginaries, from the cracks in history. It registers a powerful, some would say passionate cluster of feelings triggered by life finding a way to announce itself … this announcement required an endowment by hearers or publics daring enough to acknowledge the affective and ethical dimensions of speech-in-the-making. I say daring because there is no guarantee that voice will be welcomed or pleasing; just as often, voice shocks and incites violence and hatred. And so, voice signifies a connection that is fraught with tremendous uncertainty; it marks the space/time of a dangerous dialogue. It is not difficult to imagine the conditions where people can perceive voice as seditious, heretical, or sacrilegious. Voice tends to upset the status quo. (2014, p. 259)

While Watts (2001) is careful to argue that we should listen to indecorous voices that appeal and do not appeal to our own political worldviews, his argument reminds us that attending to power and injustice is integral to the study of rhetorical materials. Whether rhetoric is marginalized or mainstream, Watts argues voice is: (1) "energized by public reflections on the ethics of speech"; (2) "cultivated through shared emotions"; and (3) "actualized by public acknowledgment" (2001, p. 186).

Rhetorical field methods may draw on already existing oral histories for study, contribute interviews to extant archives, or build oral history collections in the absence of other records.[8] Such efforts create openings for sharing these voices with different publics, to diversify and, ideally, to democratize public discourse. For instance, Endres (2011), who has constructed American Indian oral histories of nuclear waste sites, argues that knowing oral histories will be made available for future researchers and publics through public archives, is a significant part of their value.

Wanzer-Serrano (2015, p. 169) also foregrounds the politics of voice and history in his decolonial study of the New York Young Lords, particularly emphasizing how women's voices too often are left out. As the group mobilized around various environmental justice issues, including demanding adequate municipal garbage services and testing for lead poisoning, some of the Young Lords' lesser-known struggles involved the "revolution within the revolution": an effort by women in the group to call attention to machismo by male leaders (p. 104). By sharing "Testimonios de Transgresión"/"Testimonies of Transgression" (p. 94), Wanzer-Serrano chose "to privilege the voices of women in the organization so that their stories of struggle can recalibrate the male-centered tales that are most often told" (p. 93). This move is especially important since discussions of physical violence against women in the group "is rarely retold in public forums – and is missing from all published accounts" (p. 101).

Efforts to amplify marginalized and muted voices in decolonial struggles often motivate research *in situ*. In her fieldwork critiquing the paradoxical presence of U.S. militarization in Guåhan and its simultaneous absence in the U.S. American imagination, Tiara Na'puti (2016) disrupts dominant, settler colonial narratives that ignore the fluidity of place and its ties to identity and contestations over meaning-making. Arguing that studying decolonization in a specific place can serve as an informative model "for decolonization elsewhere," she highlights the relationship of text, place, and self via a "Both/Neither" heuristic that acknowledges the liminality experienced by communities grappling with the effects of

settler colonialism and field researchers who are both connected to and separate from the places they study, even if they are from those same communities (p. 57).

We also find that cross-cultural comparisons might advance rhetorical field methods. Attention to translation – whether it involves navigating disciplinary differences, explaining complex technical language, and/or literally translating from one language to another – is a key consideration for ethnographic research (de Onís, 2015, 2016, in press). After all, there are consequences for whether expressions, experiences, and ephemera are translated and to what extent the translation resonates culturally and in one's preferred language. For example, in one of our research sites, English monolingualism, shaped by English-only mandates and a dearth of translations for marginalized non-English speakers, elides and erases certain experiences and restricts rhetorical agency. If certain communities are denied the practice and rhetorical materials of translation, they are denied livable lives. This oppression also hinders solutions to our climate crisis.

Impeding responses to our ecological emergency is a problem that Watts raises when discussing his initial discomfort with conceptualizing the affective happening of voice in anything but human–human relational terms. Moving from this initial position, his interest in human–zombie relationships prompts him to draw parallels between his focus on the undead and the imperative of "forestalling a zombie apocalypse looming on the horizon due to rapacious eating of each other and our shared Earth" (2014, p. 257). By thinking with Watts on wastelands, dehumanizing practices, and imperialism, we can draw strong parallels between human–zombie and human–environment relations. Poignantly, Watts invites readers to more deeply engage "unnamed loss" of "interests that are not heard, the persons and communities choking on the dust of coal and made to stand up for the polluter or else" (2014, p. 262).

Of course, there is an ethical burden to sharing these stories in spaces where they might not be heard otherwise. As a 93-year-old domestic worker noted in an interview: "I don't want my good name and what I'm telling you to be tossed around up there at that there University like some ol' rag" (Madison, 1998, p. 276). Listening, therefore, is only part of the ethical choices one faces; how and what to share where continues to pose challenges once the researcher begins to write.

In addition to those of us who identify as part of the communities we research, the activist networks and public engagement practices rhetoricians engage "in the field" often inform an explicit or implicit commitment to amplification. As Chávez (2013) argues:

> Emphasizing activist rhetoric, including publicly available texts such as speeches, blogs, statements, and posters, alongside a look at the argumentative rationales that activists create for their work, has been especially useful in understanding the myriad ways activists offer persuasive appeals and effect change. (p. 148)

Interactions in the field tend to call on rhetorical scholars to amplify the concerns observed, documented, and studied in these encounters. Amplification is not an understudied concept in rhetorical studies; however, given new media developments, this device and what it enables and constrains merits further critical attention in relation to rhetorical field methods and ecological crises. Following Thomas B. Farrell and his discussion of magnitude (1998, p. 1), we understand rhetoric as an art "of making things matter." This concept implicates "the gravity, the enormity, the weightiness of what is enacted, a sense of significance that may be glimpsed and recognized by others," as we size up

different rhetorical exchanges, effects, and ephemera and decide whether to respond and, if so, in what ways (p. 6).

Amplification can be mobilized and experienced in many forms. We, for example, observe how this device is used by social movement actors to transform dominant narratives, as well as to make connections between those who are alienated from their ecological impacts and the impacts themselves, whether that be human lives, endangered species, or government agencies at risk. For example, community members repurposed refinery ruins in Puerto Rico to generate a multimedia performance that relied on a projection that shifted the site's dominant meaning by positioning the lights as "the protagonist," to use the language of the performance's main organizer (R. Trelles, personal communication with de Onís, May 26, 2015). In doing so, local activists sought to galvanize the public support needed to exert pressure on government officials to remediate the toxic ruins. As another exemplar, *Racing extinction* (Ahnemann & Psihoyos, 2015) is a documentary eco-thriller film with a social media campaign (Oceanic Preservation Society, 2015), which involves projecting images of endangered animals with related text onto urban buildings and mountain sides. Likewise, in December 2016, the Sierra Club worked with artists to project rising sea levels and the message "Don't Trump the Planet" on the exterior of 40 Wall St., known as "The Trump Building," urging the U.S. Congress and the Executive Branch not to appoint a climate-change denier as the head of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency ("Rising Seas Submerge 'The Trump Building' on Wall Street," 2016; see also Pezzullo & Cox, 2017). Like ethnographers traveling for knowledge and seeking to find ways to circulate different voices in new spaces, environmental advocates aware of impacts on the frontlines of climate injustices use new technologies to foster conversation, debate, and action between seemingly disparate spaces.

While amplification is a common assumption of environmental advocates and sharing rhetorical field work, we also recognize the constraints shaping such efforts in the twenty-first century, which grow increasingly messy and overwhelming in our networked, cacophonous world. How can our scholarship appear worthwhile in the "content flood" (Cox & Pezzullo, 2016) of hearing more voices across greater distances in less time than ever before? How do we ethically and compellingly amplify the voices of frontline communities when opinion leaders and celebrities, who bring "big wattage" to these exigencies, often dominate the mainstream news and social media spotlight (Steingraber, 2017)? Is a lack of listening our primary barrier to climate action and justice today, or are we listening but not responding with sufficient urgency because acknowledging our precarious existence in relation to climate change and injustices might require changing everything (Klein, 2014), including how we imagine our research, our relationships, our role(s) in the world, and, ultimately, ourselves?

Discussion: engaging our collective precarity

In this essay, we have assessed the state of rhetorical field methods via climate crisis, including related environmental injustices and resistance. While we attempt to indicate broader methodological stakes, we highlight work that explores the precarity of our species to take seriously the call for communication research that values social impact. Our account recognizes and values the ways rhetorical field methods and environmental communication have shaped and continue to shape each other through deepening our

appreciation of how: linking rhetoric with culture broadens the range of objects, people, and practices worthy of our attention; growing ecological consciousness of our interconnectedness beyond life as isolated individuals goads us to study and to account for the possibilities and risks of our points of contact; and our enduring commitment to listening signals our radical hope for amplifying environmental and climate justice voices. These shared ethics of rhetorical field methods exceed and are indebted to overlapping conversations in environmental communication.

As indicated earlier, in a foundational move, Cox (2007) proposes that environmental communication belongs to the fields that are "crisis-oriented disciplines," such as conservation biology and cancer biology. He contends that these fields consider empirical crises as part of the impetus and the goal of research. Consequentially, reducing unsustainable attitudes and practices takes precedence over detachment or balance. Cox (2007) articulates a responsibility to this ethical imperative as central to environmental communication scholarship: "*to enhance the ability of society to respond appropriately to environmental signals relevant to the well-being of both human civilization and natural biological systems*" (p. 16, emphasis in original).

Environmental communication also is informed by its role as a "care discipline" (Pezzullo, in press; Pezzullo & Cox, 2017). This acknowledgment means we have an ethical obligation to respond to crises and also to *honor* the people, places, and nonhuman species who share our world. Thus, the role of environmental communication is to attend both to destruction and to recreation. From this perspective, research should consider not only challenges posed (e.g., climate science communication, coal industry rhetoric about the end of the market, and Indigenous use of social media to protect water in response to pipeline threats), but also values and practices that regenerate healthy relationships with human and biological systems, including reverence, nurturance, restoration of health, and inspiration (e.g., tourist communication about the beauty of biodiversity, the use of nature as a trope in religious rhetoric, and the ways public health professionals prescribe forest bathing and other ways to reconnect to the outdoors).

While crisis and care might seemingly counter each other, they also may give rise to the other and/or be connected in myriad ways. Likewise, rhetorical field methods may both deconstruct and reconstruct rhetorical norms:

> [D]rawing on critical ethnographic practices can offer the potential to *decentralize* – decolonize, diversify, deanthropomorphize – and to *regenerate* – rebuild, reimagine, rejuvenate – what rhetoric is becoming. Rather than compulsively reproducing the status quo, isolating ourselves from one another, or allowing conditions to become fallow, we should encourage passion about and commitments to rhetorical labor that nourishes the health of the field. (Pezzullo, 2016c, p. 188, emphasis in original)

We hope this essay helps underscore these complicated movements, motivating us to no longer take for granted our communities we love and to identify new inventional possibilities.

We believe that sparks of hope exist in the collaborative promise of our work as rhetorical scholars. In their theorizing and personal experiences with "Participatory Critical Rhetoric," Middleton et al. emphasize the value of shifting our scholarly role from "critical scholar" to "activist-scholar" to engage issues that matter in the present (2015, p. 35). In doing so, they remind us of the immediacy and urgency shaping entwinements of

fieldwork and ecological crises. This advocacy role positions rhetoricians as interactive inventors and enables documenting instances of prefigurative politics, integral to the remaking of our world.

Similarly, Sprain and Boromisza-Habashi (2013) contend that ethnography can serve as a valuable form of engagement with government officials, corporate representatives, community members, interdisciplinary teams, and other groups. Applied research can be used to inform, to assess, and to discover cultural competence and to "engage with strategic action" that strategizes, designs interventions, and offers feedback to different cultural communities (p. 184). Sprain and Boromisza-Habashi maintain that applied researchers can offer resources to others at the table that enable communication about challenging topics, including considerations of evaluative methods using different measures (e.g., surveys) and to what extent they resonate, for whom, and with what consequences. Their discussion also examines the pitfalls and possibilities of applied work, including tensions caused by distinctions between seeking to better understand social change and justice and practicing actual enactments. To grapple with such challenges, Sprain and Boromisza-Habashi argue for the importance of adaptability in these different interactive contexts – a fitting quality that foregrounds proactive, rather than reactive, responses, as humanity confronts the disruptions destroying our physical world, making it increasingly uninhabitable. To craft effective interventions, they suggest a two-fold approach: "(1) a coorientation to a social problem with others at the table (fellow scholars, practitioners, and, especially, community members) and (2) a commitment to seek a workable solution with them for that problem" (p. 185).

Coorientation and a commitment to workable solutions involve "the obligations and anxieties of living in community with others" (Watts, 2001, p. 180, 2014, p. 263). Our communal dynamic also grows increasingly challenging and important, if we consider various migrations, "making contacts among peoples [and non-humans] more frequent, living out-of-place more typical, being unsettled even a new norm, with interlingual contact familiar to many" (Carbaugh, 2014, p. 242). Additionally, dynamics between local structures and global networks can become apparent in fieldwork, as communities from different countries and continents can work together by learning from previous successes and failures elsewhere to avoid replicating exploitative practices that fuel our climate crisis. Sharing resources during trainings, offering advocacy campaign models, and other efforts provide a means for intervening in local ecological exigencies by working across cultural and geographic borders (Liu & Goodnight, 2008).

Given current climate demands, the labor we advocate is necessarily participatory, ethically committed, and without guarantees. As rhetorical scholars, we are trained to study constraints and contingent situations in spectacular and banal moments. Field methods offer an approach to rhetorical studies that acknowledges and reflects the interconnection between researchers, what/who we study, and the production of knowledge.

Climate change stretches us to feel the presence of the interconnection between subterranean fossil fuels and the atmosphere far beyond the Earth's surface, among ourselves and every other being on the planet, amid the voices of government and those on the frontlines of climate research and disaster. We hope that our current precarity on the precipice of climate chaos encourages more rhetorical field methods that interrupt taken for granted patterns of isolation and inertia. Perhaps it has never been more pressing for us to imagine new possibilities for building a more vital and viable planetary future for human life.

Notes

1. We argue environmental justice studies and ethnography share common values, making field methods an appropriate research approach (de Onís & Pezzullo, in press).
2. This ethical duty guiding environmental communication resonates with Madison's (2012, p. 5) definition of "critical ethnography" as a practice that "begins with an ethical responsibility to address processes of unfairness or injustice within a particular lived domain."
3. Tsing (2005) reinforces the significance of ethnography for addressing the cultural frictions of environmental destruction that are uneven, unstable, and significant.
4. Relatedly, rhetoricians focused on science communication have emphasized how ecology and rhetoric overlap in research assumptions and may be mutually beneficial for interdisciplinary research teams. Druschke and McGreavy (2016), for example, argue rhetoric and ecology engage multiple scales over time and seek better understanding of interactions, energy, and information (p. 51).
5. Some notable monographs that draw on rhetorical field methods include but are not limited to: Asen (2015); Bennett (2009), Brooks (2014), Chávez (2013), Cintrón (1997), Pezzullo (2007), Rai (2015), Wanzer-Serrano (2015), and West (2014).
6. Rather than romanticize "critical distance" as a criterion of integrity for academic research, Conquergood (1985, p. 9) invites critical ethnographic scholars to engage in genuine conversation through a "dialogical performance."
7. There are two ways Middleton and his collaborators have differed with Pezzullo on this point, though we all appear to have more in common than in disagreement. First, although they generously cite Pezzullo's scholarship thoroughly as influential on their arguments, Middleton, Senda-Cook, and Endres (2011) argue Pezzullo (2003a) does not mention her own body sufficiently in the *Quarterly Journal of Speech*. We caution here that, no matter the intersectional identities of the author, consistently making the author(s) the center of attention in analysis may run counter to the work of listening to marginalized and/or emergent voices. We, therefore, continue to feel it is important to underscore the significance of self-reflexivity in co-produced knowledge, while recognizing that no study is exhaustive. Second, in *Toxic Tourism*, Pezzullo (2007) analyzes a tour in person and a tour on film (produced from the tour she participated in as well as others). The goal was not to fetishize face-to-face interactions but to consider methodological affordances. Middleton et al. (2015) "argue that the information made available when bodies are present as rhetoric unfolds around (and with) them is qualitatively different from that shared through texts and mediation." Pezzullo (2003a, 2007) argues rhetorical field methods can gain us access to information and insight otherwise unattainable; nevertheless, she continues to find evidence that media, such as documentary films, may also disseminate information not previously known to an audience and to goad that audience to feel a sense of presence from otherwise alienated patterns of interconnection. Consider, for example, the successful advocacy campaign related to *Blackfish* (Cowperthwaite, 2013).
8. Oral history involves "a recounting of a social historical moment reflected in the life or lives of individuals who remember them and/or experienced them" (Madison, 2012, p. 28). Madison's (2010) critical ethnographic practices have included *Water Rites*, a multimedia performance based on critical ethnographic research in Ghana about water as a human right.

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