

Between Critical and Rhetoric: McKerrow's Contribution to Contemporary Critical Practice

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The introduction of critical rhetoric into the discourse of rhetorical studies constituted an important rupture with previous traditions within the field. Emerging out of a complex mix of political, philosophical, and academic trends, critical rhetoric produced significant shifts in the ways in which criticism was understood and practiced. The shifting and transformations did not, however, stop with the term's introduction in 1989. In this essay, we trace the development of critical rhetoric through three additional phases: the Marxist challenge presented by Dana Cloud; the shift to vernacular discourse in the works of Kent Ono and John Sloop; and the recent development of participatory critical rhetoric in the works of Michael Middleton et al. We pursue this historical tracing to demonstrate the points of rupture and discontinuity by which critical rhetoric has been transformed.

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Raymie McKerrow's (1989) conception of critical rhetoric represented an important moment in the development of late-20th-century rhetorical studies. Building on the ideological turn (Wander, 1983), feminist standpoint theory (Hartsock, 1985), and concerns about postmodern culture (McGee, 1982, 1984), the notion of critical rhetoric forged these disparate fragments together within a broadly Foucauldian sensibility. The initial 1989 essay on critical rhetoric solidified two important earlier trends in rhetorical studies: first, the recognition that the work of the critic was itself political, and second, a developing interest in the work of Michel Foucault and, especially, his discourse-focused approach to social relations. This effort was conducted, at least in part, as a response to a growing sense that poststructural insights posed a substantial, indeed profound, challenge to traditional notions of the humanities. It is worth recalling that only four years before McKerrow's essay appeared, Walter Fisher (1985) had objected to Foucault's perspective as antihumanist. Similar anxieties about the tenets of poststructuralism were raised by Dilip Gaonkar (1982), who recognized in Foucault's work a serious challenge to some of the core tenets of humanism. Although these claims were contested by Carole Blair and Martha Cooper (1987), it seemed clear that within rhetorical studies, as in the humanities in general, the introduction of French poststructural philosophy required serious reconsideration of even the most basic underlying assumptions—a point made clear by Barbara Biesecker (1992) in the immediate aftermath of the emergence of critical rhetoric.

Taken as a statement within the broader discourse formation of rhetorical studies, McKerrow's critical rhetoric, we will argue, emerged from this point of tension between the field's humanistic foundations and the introduction of contradictory poststructural thought. Critical rhetoric, in contrast to the humanistic tradition, would not subordinate rhetoric to the pursuit of reasoned truth, but would instead focus on, as McKerrow put it, "the dimensions of domination and freedom as these are exercised in a relativized world" (p. 91).

At the heart of this endeavor was the clever reconfiguring of two crucial terms: rhetoric and criticism. By reversing their usual ordering, McKerrow's (1989) essay highlighted the curious, although often neglected, space of tension between the two terms. In the traditional framing, the rhetorical critic was defined as an individual seeking to criticize practices of rhetoric often in the service of bringing unruly and unreasonable practices to light or in efforts to draw attention to exemplary moments of reasoned public discourse. In reversing the order, critical rhetoric repositioned the critic to be, first and foremost, a rhetorician who practices a form of rhetoric that is defined through its critical orientation—hence, critical rhetoric. Through this reversal of terms, McKerrow's 1989 essay brought together previous threads of contemporary theory and made explicit the inherently political nature of the critical enterprise.

While there are many ways in which the 1989 critical rhetoric essay has influenced subsequent rhetorical studies, here we want to isolate the way the term *criticism* was transformed within the discourse of rhetorical studies. We seek to trace the shifting terrain on which *critical rhetoric* attained meaning and the ways this term was attached to various sets of assumptions about rhetoric, criticism, and the critic. In particular, we will trace the shifting terrain of critical rhetoric from its 1989 conception through to the most recent emphasis on *participatory critical rhetoric*. Appropriately, our approach to this historical effort is inspired by Foucault's archaeological and genealogical projects. Drawing from Foucault's early interest in the ways discourse formations develop and transform, we do not so much trace the continuities across multiple iterations of the critical rhetoric project, but instead focus on the points of discontinuity (see

Foucault, 1972). In pursuing our inquiry into the history of critical rhetoric, we isolate the crucial points of rupture that have shifted and transformed the relationship between the notions of "criticism" and "rhetoric" and to trace these shifts across multiple iterations of critical rhetoric. In this regard, Foucault's conception of genealogy becomes useful. As Foucault conceived it, genealogical analysis was not a search for origins, but instead a tracing of the various forces of the past that produced shifts in discourse and, in many instances, continue to influence the shape of discourse formations. Genealogy is employed to examine the way the practices of the present are undergirded not by a stable heritage but by "an unstable assemblage of faults, fissures, and heterogeneous layers" (Foucault, 1977, p. 146).

In our view, critical rhetoric is a discursive practice positioned within the broader discourse of rhetorical studies and, indeed, one that has become commonplace. Indeed, the term *critical rhetoric* has become the standard within the field's domains of practice. However, the apparent unity and coherence of critical rhetoric as both concept and practice is, at least in a Foucauldian sense, illusory. As we will seek to demonstrate, the concept has been articulated and rearticulated numerous times across its 30-year history. These articulations—or rearticulations—of critical rhetoric have, we will argue, repositioned the relationship between "critic" and "rhetoric" and its connection to the broader discursive formation of rhetorical studies. Examining the history of critical rhetoric by attending to its points of rupture and discontinuity may help us to gain important critical distance from our current practices and, perhaps, to reconsider the ease with which we utilize the term *critical rhetoric*.

We pursue this tracing through four critical projects that we see as reformulations of the tension between the critical and the rhetorical: McKerrow's 1989 essay; the response to critical rhetoric from ideological critics, like Dana Cloud; John Sloop and Kent Ono's conception of "out-law discourse" (Ono & Sloop, 1995; Sloop & Ono, 1997); and, finally, the articulation of participatory critical rhetoric by Michael Middleton, Aaron Hess, Danielle Endres, and Samantha Senda-Cook (2015). We envision each of these projects as a point of shift or fracture in which the notion of critical rhetoric was reconceived. To pursue these projects as points of rupture, we will seek to isolate the particular points in which the notion of critical rhetoric shifted and transformed by focusing only on a few published essays within each section. Although this runs the risk of losing the nuance of the broader projects, it allows us to isolate the particular elements that shifted in each new iteration of critical rhetoric. We pursue this more focused analysis in part because of lack of space, but also, more importantly, because our focus is on the emergence of each new configuration of critical rhetoric. We seek, in other words, not an evolutionary story of how critical rhetoric developed, but rather a tracing of its discontinuities. As such, our focus will be on the shifts, at times quite jarring, that have occurred across the 30 years this term has circulated within rhetorical scholarship.

In each of our brief reviews of these projects, we will seek to isolate the shifting nature of the relationship between rhetoric and the critic and to highlight the discontinuities across this line of thinking. To be clear, we do this neither to chastise nor valorize McKerrow, nor to promote or denounce later iterations of the critical rhetoric project. Additionally, we are not seeking to discern some underlying continuity across these efforts; indeed, each subsequent iteration of the critical rhetoric project already engages in this kind of continuity building. Rather, we pursue this historical effort to identify different deployments of the statement "critical rhetoric" and to, as Foucault (1972) put it, "describe the dispersion of the discontinuities themselves" (p. 175).

McKerrow: Discourse, Domination, and Freedom

In the opening move of his 1989 essay, McKerrow defined the work of critical rhetoric as an examination of “the dimensions of domination and freedom as these are exercised in a relativized world” (p. 91). For McKerrow, these practices of domination and freedom were grounded in formations of discourse as theorized by Michel Foucault. Discourse here was not merely the language used, but a specific framework of intelligibility, which, as McKerrow wrote, “creates and sustains the social practices which control the dominated” (p. 92). Formations and strategies of discourse became the focus of the critical rhetorician’s attention as the critical rhetor sought to craft a compelling account of the particular practices of discourse within particular instances of domination. Whereas McKerrow expanded and adjusted his original position in numerous subsequent writings (see McKerrow, 1991, 1993, 1998), here we focus exclusively on the text of the 1989 essay.

As we understand it, critical rhetoric emerged within the discourse of rhetorical studies largely from the tension created by the introduction of poststructural thinking into the field. As noted, the basic tenets of poststructural thinking, especially through Foucault, contradicted many of the assumptions that circulated within the humanities broadly, and rhetorical studies in particular. How could we conceive of critical practice if we did not assume a set of ideals? What was the purpose of rhetorical criticism in a “highly relativized world” in which practices of discourse were guided by impersonal networks of power/knowledge that emerged from historical contingencies? McKerrow’s articulation of critical rhetoric sought to reconfigure not only the terminology of rhetorical criticism but also its primary function.

Ideological critics had already begun some of this work in their pursuit of a more actively engaged sense of the politics of criticism. Indeed, one key facet of the surface of critical rhetoric’s emergence was a demand from within academic spheres for a more direct pursuit of justice in research activity. For many academic scholars, the act of criticism required a critical stance toward dominant culture and state violence. During the period subsequently rendered “the ideological turn,” rhetorical theorists had sought to use the practice of criticism in service of a philosophical commitment to humanism (see Wander, 1983). Emerging within this tension between traditional rhetorical criticism and ideological criticism, critical rhetoric represented a rupture with previous attempts to mix rhetorical scholarship and political engagement. Rather than pursuing an idealized sense of truth or virtue, as in traditional rhetoric, or pursuing emancipation, as in ideological criticism, McKerrow’s 1989 essay sought to reconfigure issues of rhetoric, truth, and power in relation to Foucault’s sense of discursive formations and patterns of power and knowledge.

The primary purpose of critical rhetoric in the 1989 articulation was “to unmask or demystify the discourse of power” (McKerrow, 1989, p. 91), and to accomplish this goal, the critical rhetor engaged in two interrelated tasks: the critique of domination and the critique of freedom. Whereas Foucault would likely have balked at terms like *unmask* and *demystify*, McKerrow seemed to be pursuing something like Foucault’s focus on disrupting patterns of intelligibility and his efforts at “making facile gestures difficult” (Foucault, 1988, p. 155). McKerrow also pursued something like Foucault’s admonition for perpetual criticism through self-reflexive critique. Combining these two projects provoked considerable discussion about the tension between them (e.g., Biesecker, 1992; Charland, 1991; Hariman, 1991; Ono & Lacy, 2011; Wanzer, 2006). For our present purpose, what is important is noting the ways in which both critical tasks hinged on a point

of tension located within the conception of discourse. Drawing from Foucault, McKerrow depicted discourse as a regular formation of relations of power and knowledge, which simultaneously enabled action and limited the range of acceptable and meaningful acts. This limiting and enabling capacity of discourse required the critical rhetor to engage in, on one hand, a critique of relations of power that undergird social hierarchy and domination and, on the other hand, a self-reflexive critique of the conditions and affordances entailed within the act of critique.

Attending to discourse led the critical rhetor to focus not on normative structures, but instead on the conditions of discourse. The purpose of such a critical activity was not the advancement of a particular agenda, but rather a state of “permanent criticism—a self-reflexive critique that turns back on itself even as it promotes a realignment in the forces of power that construct social relations” (McKerrow, 1989, p. 91). Thus, the critic is positioned not so much in opposition to a set of power relations or in favor of a different set of power relations, but in a perpetually analytical, and at times antagonistic, relation to discourse’s promise of stability and intelligibility. The critic becomes an advocate and provocateur, offering a contrary interpretation of the discourses of sensibility and relationality. Or, as McKerrow puts it, critical analysis serves as “a performance of a rhetor advocating a critique as a sensible reading of the discourse of power” (p. 108).

In our understanding of the 1989 articulation of critical rhetoric, the critical rhetor produces an antagonistic rendering of the discourses of the present and, in so doing, demystifies the relations of power and knowledge that enable the status quo. Importantly, this antagonistic performance undermines not only the relations of domination but also the conditions that enable the critique itself and, in so doing, places the critic into a perpetually contrary relation. This is, in McKerrow’s words, “a critical practice that stands on its own” (p. 109) in the sense that it does not rely on any external normative or epistemological foundation for its critique. The agency of critical rhetoric was, therefore, derived not from the critic themselves but from the performance of the contrary rhetorical accounting of existing discourses.

McKerrow’s 1989 articulation of critical rhetoric can be seen as having a clear focus and identifying a space of tension within which the critical act occurs. For McKerrow, the critical rhetor attends to discourse and the ways in which formations of discourse create normal and normalizing patterns of intelligible actions. The critical rhetor’s rhetoric serves to destabilize these formations of discourse in ways that unmask their patterns and demystify their hold on propriety and truth. This practice takes place within a space of tension existing between the patterns of discourse in the status quo and the potential for “a newly articulated version” of patterns of discourse that will be “accepted as a basis for the revised social relations” (McKerrow, 1989, p. 100)—or, in McKerrow’s original language, between the critique of domination and the subsequent critique of freedom.

Cloud: Ideology and Political Activity

Dana Cloud’s (1994) articulation of critical rhetoric represented a major point of discontinuity, and it is this point of tension we wish to map here. Cloud’s insistence on differentiating the material conditions underlying power relations from McKerrow’s concern for discourse helped to renew the field’s interest in Marxism and sparked debates about how rhetorical studies should attend to dimensions of materiality (see

Cloud, Macek, & Aune, 2006; Greene, 1998, 2004). In what follows, we focus on Cloud's intervention because we view it as the first and the most significant rupture with the framework of critical rhetoric established in McKerrow's 1989 essay. We pursue this focus by tracing the ways in which the concept of critical rhetoric shifted when articulated within the framework of Marxist ideology. Our reading of Cloud's entry into this terrain views the defense of ideological critique as a rearticulated version of critical rhetoric that shifts the locus of analysis toward the rhetorical functions of domination and liberation. In this iteration, the critical rhetor's rhetoric provided an account of the operations of persuasion with a consideration of the circumstances of oppression and sought to use rhetorical knowledge in service of liberation.

In the essay, "Materiality of Discourse as Oxymoron: A Challenge to Critical Rhetoric," Cloud (1994) takes issue with the discourse-centric framework used by McKerrow while retaining some of the approach's critical affordances. For her, formations and strategies of discourse had effects in the constitution of ideological barriers for collective action, but to claim that they were the determining factor of social relations ignored the economic structures that motivated the use of persuasive tactics of control. According to Cloud, the Foucauldian assumptions of relativism undermined the opportunity for rhetoricians to enact judgment because they ignored what Cloud contends are objective truths (see Cloud, 2018).

While McKerrow's critique of domination encourages critical rhetoricians to unmask the reality obscured by the persuasion of ideology, Cloud (1994) argues, "What McKerrow's language obscures is the possibility that the critique of domination and the critique of freedom are mutually contradictory in the task of ideology criticism. We cannot talk about unmasking repressive, dominating power without some understanding of reality and oppression" (p. 155). This concern that critical rhetors would find themselves hopelessly unmoored from real politics and instead caught in a self-referential loop of endless critique was shared by others (e.g., Charland, 1991; Ono & Sloop, 1992; Zompetti, 1997).

Cloud's effort was to sever critical rhetoric as a practice from the poststructural foundations on which McKerrow had constructed it. In place of the poststructuralist theory of critical rhetoric, Cloud argued that critical rhetoric should be grounded in the tried and tested practice of ideology critique. This paradigm of rhetorical scholarship emphasized a political telos for emancipation while rejecting the perceived relativism of discourse-centric theories. In this reconception, critics had a capacity to investigate the persuasive processes of ideological discourse and, through the practice of critique, understand the mechanisms that work to constrain or enable liberatory political action. Realist ideology criticism, as articulated by Cloud, enabled critics to engage in the project of political judgment with a normative sense of instrumentality, desirability, and clear demarcations of oppressor and oppressed.

The shift of the focal point toward (or back toward) ideology opened up a space of tension within the critical rhetoric project. For Cloud (2011), this point of tension was between her intersecting role as an academic/activist, which sought to preserve the dialectic separation between theory and practice. Cloud argued that there was a distinction between the practice of criticism and political activity. She affirmed the importance of rhetorical scholarship that aimed to create a world that is more egalitarian, democratic, or peaceful through criticism, but emphasized the need for this knowledge production to be located outside of the academy. Cloud, drawing from the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, argued that

intellectuals should put ideas into the service of historical education, political analysis, and collective action. Criticism of prevailing ideologies and consciousness is part of intellectual work, *but critique must happen in conjunction with practical political activity if it is to be relevant at all to the democratic project.* (Cloud, 2011, p. 15, emphasis in original)

Sloop and Ono: Out-Laws, In-Laws, and Judgment

The critique offered by Cloud and others left an impression on the conditions of critical rhetoric's emergence and, in shaping its dispersion, led to a rearticulation of critical rhetoric as grounded in locality. Across a few essays, but primarily in their 1997 conceptualization of "out-law discourse," John Sloop and Kent Ono articulated what we understand as a new version of critical rhetoric. For too long, they argued, rhetoricians had focused on the hegemonic discourses of those who occupy positions of power. This attention to widely disseminated public texts had, they argued, "been done without the additional examination of texts that have profound effects on vernacular communities" (Ono & Sloop, 1995, p. 30). To provide a more accurate and useful picture of rhetorical practices, the critical rhetorician should examine the discourses of localized communities.

The shift toward localized, vernacular communities of rhetoric represented a substantial shift in the way critical rhetoric was deployed within the discourse of rhetorical studies. Departing from the initial emphasis on impersonal formations of discourse and relations of power and knowledge, Ono and Sloop reframed the concern within more localized practices and with the hope that examination of these practices might provide the kind of disruptive critical rhetoric that would constitute the critique of domination called for in the initial articulation of the concept in 1989.

In their essay on out-law discourses, Sloop and Ono (1997) recommended attending to the vernacular discourses of communities who lie outside the boundaries of dominant social order. They argued that the revelation of alternative models of judgment or rationality created a productive discomfort in mass cultural domains. The function of the critical rhetorician, then, was to publicize this out-law discourse in an effort to use its circulation as a means of disrupting structures of dominance. Sloop and Ono (1997) contended that "the logic of the out-law must constantly be searched for, brought forth, given the opportunity to disrupt operating discourses and practices that always work to enable and confine" (p. 66). Provoking the social imagination of (il)legality through rhetorical criticism generated disruption in the traditional ways of thought. The deliberate codification of out-law discourses by the rhetorical critic could use strategic points of resistance to adjust the institutionalized practices of sensemaking already in the field of play. Codification, in this conception, was more than simply revealing out-law discourses, but the tactical advocacy of alternative models of judgment by the rhetorician through the practice of criticism.

By critically studying communities that are historically oppressed, Sloop and Ono constructed a framework for political action. In examining vernacular discourses, they recommended that attention be paid to ways of speaking that *resonate* within and from historically oppressed communities (see Ono & Sloop, 1992). This focus on resonance required that the rhetorical critic understand the cultural logic of local communities and give attention to the ways of life that would support the proliferation and circulation of vernacular discourses. As a method for filling the emancipatory requirement of critical rhetoric, they argued

“that critique of vernacular discourse is necessary to render power relations among subjects visible; this approach, we believe, will allow critics to move beyond challenge to transformation . . . to engage in active political change” (Ono & Sloop, 1995, p. 21).

The vernacular out-law variation of critical rhetoric shifted the focus away from the functioning of dominant discourses and toward attention to local sites of resistance. The work of disruption, which McKerrow assigned to the critical rhetoricians’ critique, was also redefined. The critical rhetorician now served as a point of circulation for the disruptive out-law logics of the resistant community of interest. This shift, we would argue, emerged from the tension between McKerrow’s conceptualization and the critiques of the concept by ideological critics who questioned the political efficacy of McKerrow’s critical rhetor. Shifting the focal point away from the rhetoric of the critical rhetorician and toward the dissemination of discourses deemed outside the mainstream placed the question of political efficacy on the vernacular discourse rather than the critic’s rhetoric.

Middleton et al.: Bodies, Witnesses, and Risks

The 2015 book, *Participatory Critical Rhetoric: Theoretical and Methodological Foundations for Studying Rhetoric In Situ* (Middleton, Hess, Senda-Cook, & Endres, 2015), served as the culmination of several individual scholarly projects engaged in what has also been labeled “rhetorical field methods” (e.g., McKinnon, Asen, Chávez, & Howard, 2016). While this methodological turn has also been championed by others, we are here focused on the specific iteration of “participatory critical rhetoric.” The participatory critical rhetoric project’s aim was to highlight “the significance of embodied, emplaced, material, visual, affective, processual, and vernacular dimensions of rhetorical practice” (Middleton et al., 2015, p. xiii) through the infusion of qualitative field methods (e.g., ethnography, interviews, autoethnography) with the theoretical sensibilities of rhetoric. By explicitly invoking the terms *critical rhetoric*, Middleton et al. connected their project to a particular interest in issues of domination, judgment, and activism and thus into the historical trajectory discussed here. Indeed, these authors described their project as “grounded in the intellectual tradition of critical rhetoric” and therefore affording “critics the opportunity to stand with, for, and among the people whose rhetoric we study” (p. xiv).

Crucially, for participatory critical rhetoric, the locus of critical activity was within the critic’s body as an immanent presence within the field of discourse under investigation. This move to immanence represented a shift away from the position articulated by Ono and Sloop, who had emphasized the disruptive potential of the discourse of the community. For Middleton et al. (2015), the emphasis was on the political potential of the critic more than on the communal discourse. As they wrote, “participating in immanent politics is often the only way the politically-motivated participatory critical rhetorician can be sure that their engagement will offer a meaningful contribution, in the future or otherwise” (p. 44). In contrast to the out-law discourse project, political agency was positioned within the body of the critic who now creates the potential for critical rhetoric through their bodily presence. Centering critical rhetoric within the body of the critic provided “a way of restoring the political consequence of academic productivity” (p. 48). The locus of critical rhetoric shifted again. McKerrow had positioned it within a critical relationship between critic and discourse, and Cloud had situated it within the socioeconomic conditions underlying discourse. Ono and Sloop positioned the locus within the vernacular community, and now, for Middleton et al., the locus was repositioned within the embodied presence of the critic. As they argued, the participatory critical rhetoric

project "is defined by what the embodied, emplaced critic chooses to do (or not do) when claims are made on the critic's body by the communities that have shared their fears, their trust, their insights, and (sometimes) their resources with the critic" (pp. xviii–xix). The critic's body, in turn, became the site for political agency, allowing the critic to "intervene in structures of power and engage with communities by doing rhetoric" (p. xviii).

The critic's immanent bodily action also absorbed the tension between the critique of domination and the critique of freedom. Middleton et al. (2015) argued that participatory critical rhetoric

endeavors to emphasize the role of the critic as an activist both in their scholarly efforts and in their embodied engagements with the rhetorical communities they examine . . . Specifically, participatory critical rhetoric recognizes that critics who participate with communities in the field cannot restrict their political efforts to objective commentary alone, but rather that claims are made on critics to take immanent political action. (p. xviii)

Embodied presence shifted the dual nature of domination/freedom toward a form of critical reflexivity located within the critic's body through recognition of "their vulnerability, emotional attachments, and political commitments, in addition to their past experiences and characteristics of their body" (p. 82).

Critical presence did not erase all forms of critical tension, but relocated them into a network of affect between the body of the critic and the other bodies and materials encountered. This tension was articulated through a set of terms that seem crucial to the articulation of the participatory critical rhetoric project: witness and risk. Borrowing from the work of John Durham Peters (1999), Middleton et al. (2015) conceived of witnessing in the dual sense of one who sees and records actions but also who bears responsibility for what has been seen and recorded. The function of witnessing was located with the body of the critic and its "interconnections between the embodied and discursive dimensions of local rhetorical practices" (p. 51). In turn, the critic's rhetorical witness not only carried forward the record of what has been seen, heard, and felt but also transmitted the moral responsibility to others. As they argued, the critical claims "become the foundation for collective identifications and acts of solidarity positioning critics to make meaningful contributions to the communities with which they interact" (p. 52). Witnessing, then, was seen as the core critical orientation for the critic whose body became a nodal point for both the record of experiences and the moral responsibility for future action.

If witnessing emphasized the potential orientation of the critic's body, then the notion of risk emphasized the potential orientation of other bodies toward that of the critic. Risk, as articulated in Middleton et al. (2015), entailed potential physical danger to the participating critic as well as social and "emotional entanglements" (p. 80). The critic's bodily vulnerability was crucial to being immanent within the field of discourse and to being "available to participants" (p. 74).

As we understand it, participatory critical rhetoric centers the critical activity within the critic's body as an immanent presence within a space of discourse. This constituted a substantial, though not entirely unprecedented, shift from earlier iterations, which had focused on formations of discourse (McKerrow), ideological messages (Cloud), or resistant vernaculars (Ono and Sloop). Participatory critical rhetoric's focus

on the critic's body also relocated the crucial space of tension related to the activity of criticism within the critic's body. This reorientation was simultaneously a subject of the discourse they study—thus, a witness—and subjected to the discourse they study, thus, at risk. The agency of critical rhetoric, in this most recent iteration, lay within this critical body as it was privileged as the location of critical analysis and political potency.

Conclusion

The introduction of poststructural thought into rhetorical studies resulted in what we understand to be deep points of contradiction within what Barbara Biesecker (1992) referred to as "the house that Aristotle built" (p. 351). Critical rhetoric emerged from this point of tension between traditional rhetoric and poststructural sensibilities. In its initial articulation, this tension was framed within the complicated relationship between what McKerrow termed the critique of domination and the critique of freedom. As we have sought to demonstrate, the location of this generative point of tension has not remained stable. Critiqued by ideological critics like Cloud for ultimately masking oppression and vacating any potential political efficacy, subsequent iterations of critical rhetoric moved away from the critique of formations of discourse and abandoned the tense space of perpetual criticism. For Ono and Sloop (1992), the critic chose a critical commitment as a telos in relation to some vernacular community to anchor their critical activity. Instead of attending to the constant flux of discursive practices, the critic focused instead on sites that deviated from mainstream frames of judgment and sought to publicize their out-law discourse. In their conceptualization, localized sites of resistance provided a means of using resistant, out-law discourses to trouble the dominant logics of in-law discourses. Hence, the tension between domination and freedom was shifted to a tension between in-law and out-law frames of judgment. For Middleton et al., the dual roles of the critic/activist merged through a focus on the immanent presence of the critic within the field of discourse. This bodily immanence shifted the point of tension toward the way the critic's body effected and was affected by the community through the conception of witnessing and risk. Taking direct action in the field placed the critic in a privileged position as one whose assistance was needed to remedy social wrongs, thereby placing the critic's role as one of privileged entitlement. There is here a notable expansion in the perceived agency of the critic and a shift in the ways through which the critic can and ought to engage in the world (see Phillips, 2002).

Our goal in tracing these shifting concerns has been to demonstrate the disjunctures between these iterations of the critical rhetoric project. We have not done this in an effort to demonstrate the improvements that subsequent projects have made to the original 1989 articulation—as in a model of evolution—nor has it been to criticize later projects for deviating from the original, as in a model of fidelity. Rather, we have pursued this investigation to demonstrate the points of shift and discontinuity surrounding the term *critical rhetoric* across the 30 years of its existence. The articulation of critical rhetoric as a bodily experience immanent to the field of discourse being studied is a very different articulation than is evident in McKerrow's 1989 essay. Indeed, although they share genealogical similarities, it is notable how different these articulations of critical rhetoric are from each other. Each new emergence seems to blur the concerns of the previous articulation in an act that seems to create continuity, but, in important ways, represents a kind of seismic shift.

Of course, our efforts to trace these shifts have been limited. Although we have located the initial point of emergence of critical rhetoric within tensions created by the introduction of poststructuralism, mainly the works of Foucault, into rhetorical studies, it seems likely that a more extensive archaeology of these shifting grounds would find other forces at work: the ongoing crisis of the humanities; anxieties about the state of modern democracies; the corporatization of higher education, etc. Perhaps one implication of our brief historical effort is to recommend future research into the broader sets of tensions and regularities that have enabled, and constrained, our understanding of the critical activity. Future researchers might trace these points of tension further to create a richer sense of how the terms *critical* and *rhetoric* have circulated and attained meaning within the discourses of rhetorical studies and beyond. They might also attend to the various other theoretical trends that have been implicated within the development of critical rhetoric: materiality, affect, performance studies, space and place studies, posthumanism, etc. It seems likely that attention to the complex confluence of theoretical currents may yield productive insights into the forces that have led to the current shape of rhetorical studies.

As a corollary to this point, future students of rhetorical criticism might also productively trace the lines of fracture and transformation surrounding critical rhetoric as they have engaged and influenced a wide variety of other theoretical and critical concepts within the field. One can note, even in our adumbration of the term, the ways in which the shifts we note have been implicated in recent scholarly interest in issues including materiality, space and place, and affect, as well as growing interest in embodiment.

A third implication of our efforts is to recommend deeper attention into the question of what we understand to be the ends of critical work. Although this may seem obvious to every critic, it is perhaps time for a wider archaeological/genealogical exploration of what we understand our critical work to be about and how those ends have shifted over time. We believe our essay has only begun the work of asking how the discourse formations of rhetorical criticism, and later critical rhetoric, have shifted, as well as how these transformations have impressed regularities into notions of the critic, politics, and the practice of criticism.

As a final implication, we believe our efforts call for more attention to the disruptions within rhetorical studies stemming from the works of Foucault. As Biesecker noted more than 25 years ago, Foucault's work violates many of the core assumptions of rhetoric, and yet his work has slipped into our bibliographies alongside Aristotle and Burke with surprising ease. It is, for instance, worth noting that the shifts in critical rhetoric we have observed parallel in interesting ways the development of Foucault's own project: from an emphasis on discourses (*The Archaeology of Knowledge*), to a focus on relations of power (*Discipline and Punish*), to a final interest in the speaking body (*The History of Sexuality*). Ultimately, it remains unclear whether rhetoric disciplined Foucault or Foucault disciplined rhetoric.

Our goal in this short essay was to provoke some questions about the way critical rhetoric has circulated within the discourse of rhetorical studies and to think more about the way its emergence troubled our understanding of rhetoric, of criticism, and of the way these terms are conjoined. By reversing the habitual ordering of rhetoric and criticism, McKerrow's 1989 essay inaugurated a rupture in the theory and practice of rhetorical criticism. In this essay, we have sought to trace the trajectory of this rupture and argued that it be understood as a series of ruptures rather than a single, coherent lineage. It seems likely that these series of ruptures will continue to trouble the relationship between critical and rhetoric into the

future, and in many ways, this seems fitting for a theory that sought not to solve critical problems but to pose them into perpetuity. Honoring MCKerrow's original sense of *continuous criticism*, the emergence of new configurations of how criticism might be performed alters the landscape and thereby invites continued challenges for critics and publics alike.

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