



Participatory Critical Rhetoric: Theoretical and Methodological Foundations for Studying Rhetoric In Situ

By Michael Middleton, Aaron Hess, Danielle Endres, Samantha Senda-Cook



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Increasingly, rhetorical scholars are using fieldwork and other ethnographic, performance, and qualitative methods to access, document, and analyze forms of everyday *in situ* rhetoric rather than using already documented texts. In this book, the authors argue that participatory critical rhetoric, as an approach to *in situ* rhetoric, is a theoretically, methodologically, and praxiologically robust approach to critical rhetorical studies. This book addresses how participatory critical rhetoric furthers understanding of the significant role that rhetoric plays in everyday life through expanding the archive of rhetorical practices and texts, emplacing rhetorical critics in direct conversation with rhetors and audiences at the moment of rhetorical invention, and highlighting marginalized voices that might otherwise go unnoticed. This book organizes the theoretical and methodological foundations of participatory critical rhetoric through four vectors that enhance conventional rhetorical approaches: 1) the political commitments of the critic; 2) rhetorical reflexivity and the role of the embodied critic; 3) emplaced rhetoric and the interplay between the field, text, and context; and 4) multiperspectival judgment that is informed by direct participation with rhetors and audiences. In addition to laying the groundwork and advocating for the approach, *Participatory Critical Rhetoric* also offers significant contributions to rhetorical theory and criticism more broadly by revisiting the field's understanding of core topics such as role of the critic, text/context, audience, rhetorical effect, and the purpose of criticism. Further, it enhances theoretical conversations about material rhetoric, place/space, affect, intersectional rhetoric, embodiment, and rhetorical reflexivity.

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Editorial Review

Review

Since its inception in ancient Greece, rhetoric has been inseparable from public life. Born of the polis, where orality had not yet ceded its eminence to literacy, rhetoric developed as a verbal art in response to exigencies inevitable in urban communal affairs ruled by citizens through more or less deliberative processes. Little wonder then that one finds Aristotle's formulation of rhetoric as one of technique (*techne*), in contradistinction to poetics, which is concerned with pure *making* (*poiesis*) as reflected in the Attic drama or tragedy. *Participatory Critical Rhetoric* is a timely addition to the time-honored tradition of Western rhetorical scholarship. Reflective of a time when rhetorical perspective is proving to be as salutary as any discipline in the humanities and social sciences, this book brings the study of rhetoric to the cusp of 21st-century social theories and criticism in general. It does so—and this is the collection's most distinguishing feature—by updating rhetorical studies with such research tools as participatory observation, interview, and related qualitative methods. Well organized, clearly written, and rich in ethnographic insights, this book will be a useful guide for scholars interested in recapturing the rhetors' voices, unavoidably muffled by dominant media and conventional documentation. Summing Up: Highly recommended. Upper-division undergraduates through faculty. (*CHOICE*)

Overall, *Participatory Critical Rhetoric* makes significant developments by providing numerous helpful heuristics for theorizing and carrying out field-based rhetorical work. It will be indispensable for scholars interested in critical rhetoric or in situ rhetorical analysis. It will also be helpful for scholars invested in activism, body rhetoric, affect, or rhetoric and place. (*Quarterly Journal Of Speech*)

Participatory Critical Rhetoric heralds a watershed moment in rhetorical studies, in which the field is no longer accepting the characterization of such approaches as merely marginal or experimental. Embodying the collaborative spirit they wish to encourage, Middleton, Hess, Endres, and Senda-Cook weave their own fieldwork notes and insights throughout their synthesis of key terms and figures of this scholarly tradition. (Phaedra C. Pezzullo, University of Colorado Boulder, author of *Toxic Tourism: Rhetorics of Travel, Pollution, and Environmental Justice*)

Written by the leading proponents and practitioners of rhetorical field methods, this book combines deep scholarship and the authors' personal experiences to illustrate the scholarly and political importance of studying rhetorical places. I recommend this book to my students and colleagues who are exploring place, space, and progressive political practice. (Greg Dickinson, Colorado State University)

Participatory Critical Rhetoric is a timely contribution to the growing conversation surrounding field methods, critical rhetoric, and participatory research. By focusing on four topoi—immanent politics, critical embodiment, emplaced fields of rhetoric, and gaining perspectives from participants—this book elegantly weaves on-the-ground experiences and sense making with conceptual and theoretical understandings of rhetoric. The result is a truly novel accounting of participatory critical rhetoric that illuminates its comprehensive character. (erin mcclellan, Boise State University)

Participatory Critical Rhetoric provides a valuable framework for conducting participatory and critical field research that can contribute to social and political change. Clearly written and including the four authors' illustrative "tales from the field," it is an excellent text for graduate and upper-level undergraduate students

as well as scholar-activists in rhetoric. (Peter D. Simonson, University Colorado Boulder)

About the Author

Michael Middleton is assistant professor of argumentation and public discourse in the Department of Communication at the University of Utah.

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