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Environmental Criticism

Danielle Endres

We live in a time of rampant environmental crisis and environmental injustice. Environmental criticism seeks to analyze the role of material and symbolic rhetoric in deconstructing, mediating, and composing relationships between humans, more-than-humans, and the environment. This essay offers a reflection on the status of environmental criticism as a subfield within rhetorical criticism with a focus on two *topoi* that have animated discussions about rhetorical criticism for many years: text and critical judgment. Through exploring these *topoi,* I reflect on the state of environmental criticism, what it has to offer to broader conversations within rhetorical criticism, and some future directions. The essay concludes by arguing that environmental criticism is an inherently critical approach that is premised on the idea of a crisis/care discipline.

Keywords: Environmental Communication; Environmental Justice; More-Than-Human Rhetoric; Nature/Culture

We live in a time of rampant environmental destruction and injustice that has been described as the Anthropocene, a geological era defined by human intervention that has altered major planetary systems via technologies, industrialization, and the instrumental overuse of the world's resources. The introduction of anthropogenic coal ash, greenhouse gas emissions, non-naturally-occurring radionuclides, and toxic chemicals into the planetary ecosystem has contributed to environmental injustices, increasing loss of biodiversity, burgeoning toxicity, and climate chaos. A sense that human society has already crossed a tipping point by forever changing the planet and our place in it is pervasive among climate activists, environmentalists, as well as scholars working in environmental study fields. For example, since 2013 the amount

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of CO_2 in the earth's atmosphere has consistently exceeded 400 parts per million (ppm) for the first time in recorded history, greatly exceeding what climate scientists have called the safe upper limit of 350ppm. For many environmental scholars, hope can be hard to come by. Yet, environmental rhetoric scholars continue to confront environmental injustices and ecosystem destruction by examining, deconstructing, and composing anew human relationships to the environment. Many environmental rhetorical critics are invested in challenging dominant anthropocentric systems and responding to the Anthropocene by encouraging a radical shift toward ecocentric ideals and practices. As Bridie McGreavy contends, "Rhetoric can help trace a path out of the Anthropocene and into refuge by remembering, in new ways, the relationships between ecology as *oikos*, home; crisis as *krisis*, turning; and poetry as *poesis*, making together" (McGreavy, 2018, p. 91). The robust, complex, and thought-provoking research in environmental rhetoric gives me hope for resistance, resilience, and survival.

In this essay, I reflect on the status of environmental rhetorical criticism, hereafter environmental criticism, as a subfield within rhetorical criticism. There are, of course, many ways to characterize environmental criticism. I will not duplicate Phaedra Pezzullo's (2016) recent essay tracing the origins of environmental thought in rhetorical criticism, its marginalization in rhetorical studies, and its contributions to innovation in rhetorical studies. Nor will I duplicate the efforts of environmental communication scholars who have defined, articulated the areas of research, and identified theoretical and methodological developments within environmental communication (Cox & Depoe, 2015; Hansen & Cox, 2015; Milstein, 2009; Pezzullo, 2017; Senda-Cook, 2017). Rather, this essay complements Pezzullo's (2016) "partial story" by adding a "further layer" to the story (p. 27). I focus my inquiry into environmental criticism on two *topoi* that have animated numerous discussions about rhetorical criticism: text and critical judgment. Focusing on these *topoi* allows me to reflect on the state of environmental criticism, what it has to offer to broader conversations within rhetorical criticism, and some future directions for environmental criticism. In so doing, I highlight touchstone works in environmental criticism that have inspired me.

The Scope of Environmental Criticism

Environmental communication scholars are invested in knowledge production that addresses the relationships between humans and the environment. Within popular perception, the environment may be seen as something out there—nature, wilderness, or pristine landscapes—or something separate from humans—the scene or backdrop in which we live our lives. Yet, within environmental studies disciplines, the environment is more than far-off wild location or background context; it is an ecological set of relations—including humans, animals, air, water, plants, mountains, and more—that constitute the planet earth. The discipline of environmental communication examines "the pragmatic and constitutive modes of expression—the

naming, shaping, orienting, and negotiating—of our ecological relationships in the world, including those with nonhuman systems, elements, and species" (Pezzullo & Cox, 2017, p. 13). Environmental communication includes the many subdisciplines that make up the field of communication from interpersonal to media to organizational to strategic to rhetoric.

Environmental criticism is a subarea within environmental communication that engages with the role of symbolic and material forms of rhetoric in deconstructing, mediating, and composing relationships between humans and the environment. Environmental critics study rhetoric's role in mediating human relationships with the environment from a range of vantage points, nearly always situating their analysis within particular environmental crises, injustices, or alternate ways of knowing, including: climate change; energy; environmental justice; toxicity and pollution; food systems; social movement, activism, and counterpublics; animal rhetoric; conservationism and the development of environmentalism; recreation in national parks; environmental controversy; indigenous environmentalism; and public participation in environmental decision-making. Exceeding this broad swath of research foci, I want to hone in on three foundational assumptions that infuse the field of environmental criticism: the nature/culture binary, more-than-human rhetoric, and the crisis/care discipline.

Interrogation of the nature/culture dualism, whether explicitly stated or not, is at the root of much environmental criticism. Anthropocentric belief systems assume that nature is separate from culture, thus elevating humans to a special status outside of nature, the environment, animals, and other non-human beings. The nature/culture dualism can also be expressed in a number of other binaries such as: material/symbolic, prey/predator, environment/body, and animal/human. Julie Schutten's (2008) analysis of *Grizzly Man*, a popular documentary film by acclaimed filmmaker Werner Herzog, highlights how this film about a man who lived among and was eventually eaten by bears in Alaska "maintains the nature/culture binary through the recovery narrative and narcissistic anthropomorphism" (p. 201). This is one example of how dominant discourse entrenches an anthropocentric notion of humans as separate from the natural world. Environmental critics highlight the peril in the nature/culture dualism and cite it as one of the root causes of environmental destruction. Julia Corbett (2018) reflects on the nature/culture dualism: "What a cultural set-up: we're not on the same team [although] we share the same planet" (p. 4). Ecocentrism offers an alternative to the nature/culture dualism inherent in anthropocentrism. Although manifest in a variety of different belief systems and philosophies—such as deep ecology, ecofeminism, and indigenous ecological knowledge—ecocentrism breaks down the separation between nature and culture, revealing humans to be part of the entire planetary ecosystem. Pezzullo (2017) contends that instead of a binary, "nature and culture more compellingly may be imagined as elements that *coconstitute* each other materially and symbolically as part of the environment" (p. 3). Schutten and Rogers (2011) highlight the Neo-Pagan movement's practice of magick as an imperfect example of such coconstitution. Magick,

they argue, is a dialogic, nonhierarchical, non-instrumental relationship with between humans and the environment.

David Abram (1997) introduced the term more-than-human to encompass all of the many animate beings that make up our world, including animals, landscapes, air, water, and mountains. This term is not meant to reverse hierarchy and imply that more-than-humans are better than humans. Rather, it simultaneously recognizes that humans are animals and acknowledges that it is not just humans who are capable of communication, intersubjective relationships, and agency. While traditional theories of rhetoric assume that rhetoric is a human faculty, environmental criticism has been a catalyst for emergent theories of material and ecological rhetoric that theorize how places, animals, landscapes, pollutants, and other more-than-human beings are capable of rhetoric, extending the focus of rhetoric to those "beings who surround us but who are frequently silenced" (Seegert, 2014, p. 160). A more-than-human rhetoric expands our notion of who and what has the ability to engage in rhetoric—intraspecies and interspecies rhetoric—even if these rhetorical practices may be inaccessible, undetectable, or foreign to some human audiences. This shifts our understanding of rhetorical agency to a capacity to influence that allows for more diversity in forms of rhetorical agency. Expanding the capacity for agency beyond the human actor (which is a leap not all are willing to accept) opens conversations about how rhetorical agency can involve more than making choices about forms of verbal speech or writing and how intentionality performs differently across humans and more-than-human beings. There are multiple forms of rhetorical agency within the more-than-human world, and a plant's rhetoric might be different from a coyote's rhetoric or a human's rhetoric.

In the inaugural issue of *Environmental Communication: A Journal of Nature and Culture*, Robert Cox (2007) asked whether environmental communication should be considered a "crisis discipline" with an "ethical duty" based on "normative assumptions that lend urgency to our scholarship and professional service" (p. 6). The climate crisis and the impending need for a just energy transition are just two examples of urgent issues that environmental critics seek to address through, for example, examination of the rhetorical strategies used by the coal industry to continue its dominance despite the incontrovertible evidence that coal contributes to climate change (Schneider, Schwarze, Bsumek, & Peeples, 2016) or critical analysis of how televisual depictions of a world without electricity encourage maintaining status quo fossil fuel energy production (Cozen, 2017). Although not all environmental critics agree with the crisis discipline thesis, it is nonetheless a guiding force for many environmental critics who envision their scholarship as contributing in some small way to ameliorating environmental destruction and encouraging just, sustainable, and ecocentric alternatives. As a complement to the crisis orientation, Pezzullo (2017) argues that environmental communication is also a care discipline, which "underscores and values research devoted to unearthing human and nonhuman interconnections, interdependence, biodiversity, and system limits. This means we have not only a duty to prevent harm but also a duty to honor the people, places,

and nonhuman species with which we share our world" (p. 11). Within the critical crisis/care orientation, there is a pragmatic, ethical, and sometimes political bent to environmental criticism that is often less apparent in other forms of rhetorical criticism.

Text and Critical Judgment in Environmental Criticism

Previous special issues on rhetorical criticism have taken up a variety of *topoi* important to the practice of rhetorical criticism, including theory, method, text, context, the role of the critic, critical judgment, and the purpose of rhetorical criticism. Rather than focus on one *topos*, I use the remainder of this essay to think through how environmental criticism reflects and influences two key *topoi*: text and critical judgment. I will argue that environmental criticism's focus on the nature/culture binary, more-than-human rhetoric, and a crisis/care approach uniquely contributes to further expansions of how rhetorical critics make sense of their object of study and forms of critical judgment.

Text

The question of what constitutes a text, or the object of study for rhetorical critics, remains a robust area of inquiry for rhetorical studies. Although rhetorical criticism was traditionally founded on analysis of oratory and public speaking (Wichelns, 1925) and the first special issue on rhetorical criticism in *Western Speech* in 1957 focused exclusively on the analysis of speeches, the field has seen a gradual expansion of objects of analysis that accompany related expansions in the definition and the scope of rhetoric. Contemporaneously, environmental critics, and some rhetorical critics aligned with different subareas, are pushing boundaries of the "text" by interpreting animal rhetoric, the rhetorical force of animate nature, and embodied and emplaced instantiations of rhetoric that are gathered via fieldwork and other qualitative methods. These forms of rhetoric resist textocentrism in which written texts are "valorized" "to the exclusion of other media, other modes of knowing" (Conquergood, 2002, p. 151). Environmental critics draw heavily on the greatly expanded notion of rhetorical texts, including analyses of visual, material, embodied, mediated, performative, animal, non-human (objects and things), emplaced, and live forms of rhetoric. However, as Pezzullo (2016) notes, environmental criticism has also contributed to many expansions of the object of study; "A more diverse terrain for the production of rhetorical criticism is one greatly indebted to environmental scholarship" (p. 37). In particular, environmental critics are at the center of transformative turns toward more-than-human rhetoric and rhetorical fieldwork.

As I argued above, the prospect of more-than-human rhetoric is an assumption that lies deep within environmental criticism. While not all environmental critics analyze more-than-human rhetorics, there is an acceptance of these forms of rhetoric among environmental critics that precedes rhetorical studies' recent engagement

with the insights of new materialisms, posthumanism, and actor–network theory (for an excellent review of the emerging conversation about more-than-human ontologies in rhetorical studies, see Ewalt, 2018a). Although new materialisms and posthumanism are making their way into environmental criticism as well, many environmental critics came to more-than-human rhetoric from different pathways and touchstone works from the 1990s. Often inspired by Donal Carbaugh's (1999) *Just Listen* essay, Richard Rogers' (1998) transhuman theory of communication, George Kennedy's (1992) rhetoric as energy thesis, David Abram's (1997) *Spell of the Sensuous*, or Gregory Cajete's (1999) illumination of indigenous ecologies, environmental critics have transformed the rhetorical text to include more-than-human voices. Environmental critics are particularly interested in internatural communication that "explores interaction among and between natural communities and social groups that include participants from what we might initially describe as different classifications of nature" (Plec, 2013, pp. 5–6). Although initially conceived with regard to human-animal communication, internatural communication can include forms of intra- and interspecies rhetoric among all living organisms as well as other forms of rhetoric by and with inanimate parts of the planet's ecosystem, such as a geologic rock layer, a mountain, or radioactive element. Recent environmental criticism work has revealed the rhetoric of coyote scat (Seegert, 2014), an orca named Tilikim engaged in protest rhetoric against captivity (Burford & Schutten, 2017), the rhetorical force of a beached whale (Callister, 2013), how prairie wildflowers act rhetorically on human bodies (Ewalt, 2018b), and the rhetoricity of earthquakes (Smay, 2018). These studies challenge conventional notions of text, invite further exploration of how we understand rhetorical agency, and open possibilities for (re)imagining human relationships with environment and resisting the anthropocentric nature/culture divide.

Environmental critics are not the only rhetoricians interested in expanding our understanding of rhetoric to include animals, nature, land, and things; yet, they come to this topic from a particular standpoint and intellectual lineage. In line with the crisis/care discipline orientation, environmental critics understand forms of more-than-human rhetoric as a way to listen to what the more-than-human world is desperately trying to tell us in response to ongoing ecological destruction. Jeremy Gordon, Katherine Lind, and Saul Kutnicki (2017) argue "in the midst of impending ecological catastrophe, evidenced by global climate change and biodiversity loss, rhetoric manifests itself in the survival instincts of animals who face ravaged ecosystems and the existential threat of mass extinction" (pp. 222–223). Although we need to recognize that survival instinct is not the only motivation behind more-than-human rhetoric, it is a reality we must face in the Anthropocene. In addition to further expanding what counts as text in rhetorical criticism, environmental criticism's focus on more-than-human rhetoric provides a proving ground for innovations in rhetorical theory and method including questions of agency, intentionality, dissemination, the definition of rhetoric, and new techniques for accessing, analyzing, and representing more-than-human rhetoric.

Environmental critics have also catalyzed the participatory turn in rhetoric, in which critics are increasingly drawing on qualitative methods, such as ethnographic fieldwork, interviewing, oral history, and other forms of participatory research practices to access, document, and analyze forms of live *in situ* rhetoric. Forms of rhetorical fieldwork go by many names—rhetorical field methods, participatory critical rhetoric, critical rhetorical ethnography, field rhetoric, ethnographical rhetoric—and draw on a variety of intellectual lineages both within and outside of rhetorical studies (Hauser, 2011; Hess, 2011; McKinnon, Asen, Chávez, & Howard, 2016b; Middleton, Hess, Endres, & Senda-Cook, 2015; Middleton, Senda-Cook, & Endres, 2011; Pezzullo, 2007; Rai & Druschke, 2018a). While these approaches vary, one constant is the way in which rhetorical fieldwork continues to expand the object of study in rhetorical criticism from the analysis of already-documented texts to analysis of embodied and emplaced rhetoric as it unfolds in its immediate instantiation, placing a critic within the site of rhetorical invention to take on multiple roles such as critic, audience member, participant, observer, and rhetor.

Environmental critics have been at the center of the move toward fieldwork from its inception. In her essay on the Toxic Links Coalition's challenge to the narrative of National Breast Cancer Awareness month and her book on the environmental justice movement toxic Pezzullo (2003, 2007) offers one of the first articulations of ethnography, rhetoric, and performance to analyze extratextual forms of embodied protest rhetoric that would not have otherwise been available for analysis under a strictly textual approach to rhetorical criticism. Pezzullo's long-term engagement and participation with environmental justice movements became an inspiration for environmental critics, myself included, who turned to ethnographic fieldwork and other participatory qualitative methods seeking to answer questions about the relationship between humans and the environment that could not be answered via analysis of already-documented written or visual texts. Notable examples of environmental rhetorical fieldwork include Samantha Senda-Cook's (2012, 2013) scholarship on the summer she spent living in Zion National Park observing and participating in rhetorics of outdoor recreationists, trails, and places within the park. Based on sustained participation with clammers living and working in coastal Maine, Bridie McGreavy (2018) opened her rhetorical criticism to be "shaped by the mud, the tides, the clammers, and more, in ways that exceed full awareness but that rely on belonging to a field site and showing up sensitive to ecology, metaphor, and kairos" (p. 98). Anthony Sutton (2018) participated alongside the Aroostook Band of Micmac as a farmer, critic, and partner in working toward food sovereignty and environmental justice. Tiara Na'Puti's (2016) fieldwork in Guåhan illuminates how the indigenous Chamorro people resist and survive the environmental injustices, loss of land, and affronts from colonial military buildup and ecological destruction on the islands. Finally, through fieldwork and e-advocacy with environmental advocates in Puerto Rico, Catalina de Onís (2016) experienced "human and nonhuman animals, landscapes, and the cultural artifacts shaped by and found in manifold environments" in the field (p. 103). These touchstones reveal the breadth of environmental

criticism's engagement with fieldwork, allowing critics to not only access *in situ* forms of rhetorical invention but also to engage with the more-than-human rhetorics that are difficult, if not impossible, to access through conventional written texts.

As with the move to more-than-human rhetoric, environmental critics are not the only rhetoricians engaged with rhetorical fieldwork. Yet, there is an affinity between environmental criticism and rhetorical fieldwork because many of the objects of study for environmental critics come from untraditional, marginalized, and historically under-documented voices, human and more-than human alike. Innovations within environmental criticism's use of rhetorical fieldwork have led to theorizing rhetoric's materiality, ecology, emplacement, and embodiment in significant ways. Moreover, due to their attunement to the environment and skepticism about the nature/culture dualism environmental critics are particularly suited to forms of engagement in the field that recognize the environment as more than context for rhetorical invention but as active participant in rhetorical invention. Through fieldwork, clams, mud, trails, hurricanes, animals, insects, mountains, and pollution take an active role in the environmental critic's analysis, thus shifting from a static notion of written or documented text to a fluid notion of a multimodal embodied, emplaced, affective, sensorial, and ecological text. In their review of the articulations between field methods and environmental criticism, Pezzullo and de Onís (2018) highlight how environmental critics' efforts to respond to ecological crises—not the least to climate change—are bolstered by the turn to fieldwork.

Critical Judgment

Environmental criticism's engagement with more-than-human rhetoric and the crisis/care discipline contours a perspective of critical judgment that both values participation with human *and* more-than-human rhetors and audiences and encourages publicly engaged forms of scholarship that seek to make direct connections between critical findings and ongoing environmental issues.

Critical judgment describes the act of interpretation by a rhetorical critic; it is what a rhetorical critic does. The concept is interrelated with standpoints on the role of the critic, the purpose of criticism, and the relationship between critics, rhetors, and audiences. According to Edwin Black (1978) "a specific person—the critic—is the sole instrument of observation" in rhetorical criticism (p. xi). Black's perspective grants the critic a great deal of autonomy in making judgments about the artistry, effects, consequences, or political implications of a particular text or set of texts. The turn to rhetorical fieldwork has expanded the notion of critical judgment such that perspectives of rhetors and audiences gathered from fieldwork are considered in a critic's interpretation (e.g., McKinnon, Asen, Chávez, & Howard, 2016a; Middleton et al., 2015). While introduced via conversations in rhetorical fieldwork, paying attention to the sense-making of rhetors and audiences can also inform critical judgment in conventional forms of rhetorical criticism. When critical judgment is attuned to audiences and rhetors, the critic cedes some of their interpretive authority

in favor of considering how rhetors and audiences interpret and perceive rhetorical phenomena.

Within environmental criticism, rhetors and audiences include more-than-human beings, raising questions about how critics might make critical judgments about non-human forms of rhetoric and the consequences of human rhetoric on more-than-human audiences. What responsibility do critics have to consider more-than-human beings or the environment as rhetors and audiences in their critical judgments? Given the hierarchical dominance of humans within anthropocentric perspectives and the difficulty many humans find in perceiving and listening to the more-than-human world, Peterson, Peterson, and Rai Peterson (2007) call for critics to find ways to "amplify and translate the voices of nonspeaking human and extrahuman subjects" within "a society of interdependent human and extrahuman citizens that participate in decision-making" (p. 77, 84). Within such an approach, the aim of critical judgment moves beyond one that is focused on human audiences, and allows for the possibility of evaluating how rhetorical texts might also speak to more-than-human audiences who might interpret rhetoric in different ways than human audiences. Within the Anthropocene, in which human actions, including rhetorics, have indelibly changed the planet, this perspective also encourages seeing the more-than-human world as an audience for all rhetorical action.

Critical judgment might be grounded on the assumption that the role of the critic is to illuminate the rhetorical artistry of a text without making a judgment on its immediate effects or to deconstruct the ideologies present within a text without ultimately making an ethical judgment about those ideologies. Another version of critical judgment assumes that the critic's political commitments cannot be separated from the act of interpretation, and it is the role of the critic to acknowledge their politics and make critical judgments that can contribute to positive change. While all of these forms of critical judgment are present within environmental criticism, the prevalence of the crisis/care discipline orientation shapes critical judgment and the role of the critic toward pragmatic, publicly engaged, or applied research that can contribute to ameliorating environmental destruction and injustice. In his articulation of the crisis discipline, Cox (2007) offers a normative assumption that environmental communication research should make a substantive contribution toward enhancing "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). He further argues that "scholars, more generally, have a duty to speak publicly *when the results of their scholarship* point to danger" (p. 16). This orientation reflects that many environmental communication scholars are motivated to do research because of their concern about ecological crises and encourages scholars to engage research-informed modes of public scholarship and advocacy that can bring the results of their research to communities outside the academy.

When applied to rhetorical criticism, this normative orientation suggests that critical judgment—the product of our research—can, and should, contribute to

improving societal understanding and deliberation about environmental issues, offering alternatives, and creating more sustainable practices. This might take a variety of forms. An environmental critic may work from ideological or critical approaches to make critical judgments toward destabilizing dominant systems of power, even if those judgments are contingent (Ono & Sloop, 1992) and subject to change with time and reflexivity. Steve Schwarze (2007) cautions environmental critics to avoid "reductive analysis" and "producing predictable judgments" that might result from the critic's own ideological motivations and instead focus on critical judgment that moves "beyond the production of mere opinion, belief or conviction about environmental issues" (p. 91, 96). The ethical commitments that motivate many environmental critics combined with a desire to reach audiences outside the discipline and academy has also led many environmental critics to see the role of the critic and the purpose of critical judgment in relation to producing forms of activist and publicly engaged scholarship. Within these models, critical judgment allows for research-based responses that may contribute to activist efforts, improve public advocacy, or engage audiences outside the discipline of rhetoric, including scholars from other disciplines, policymakers, publics, and the environment. Robert Cox, Tarla Rai Peterson, Phaedra Pezzullo, Leah Sprain, Kathleen Hunt, Catalina de Onís, and Tiara Na'puti are examples of scholars who make it a priority to find ways to produce publicly engaged research. Some of them also act as advocates or consultants for environmentally focused organizations, government entities, or activist groups. Critical judgment might also entail defending science—a concept some critics have devoted careers to deconstructing—particularly the scientific consensus on anthropogenic climate change (Ceccarelli, 2011). The crisis/care orientation for environmental criticism, therefore, pushes beyond traditional notions of critical judgment, the role of the critic, and the audience of rhetorical criticism to a praxis-oriented form of critical judgment that is attuned to how criticism can contribute to addressing environmental crises.

Future Directions

In a move away from privileging "the constitutive and constructive role of communication in approaching environmental issues" (Cantrill & Oravec, 1996, p. 2), environmental criticism has and will continue to have implications for ongoing conversations about the materiality of rhetoric. Material rhetoric has taken on a variety of meanings, including the material consequences of discourse, the rhetoric of material objects, and the structural conditions that influence rhetoric. Environmental criticism's recognition of the animate nature of the more-than-human world and its capacity for rhetoric demonstrates how "the 'material' has come to extend beyond concrete physical objects and fixed places, to how we immerse ourselves with(in) the world and articulate with it" (Wells, McGreavy, Senda-Cook, & McHendry Jr., 2018, p. 20). In addition to expanding the concept of the material, environmental critics push the boundaries between material and symbolic. Seegert's (2016)

definition of rhetoric as the interaction of relational signals exceeds a distinction between symbolic and material forms of rhetoric and instead encompasses both within the definition of rhetoric. Viewing rhetoric this way shifts common understandings of the relationship between rhetoric (symbol) and materiality from a causal relationship to a bidirectional and mutually constitutive relationship: a material/symbolic phenomenon. As they continue to grapple with materiality, environmental critics will continue to bring important insights to conversations about rhetoric's materiality, particularly as related to more-than-human rhetorics.

Environmental critics are also turning to ecology, not simply as a way to describe the interrelationship between beings in the environment, but also as a way to theorize rhetoric. Three recent books provide examples of a theoretical reorientation toward ecological thinking, which provides space for a focus on more-than-human rhetoric: McGreavy, Wells, McHendry, and Senda-Cook's (2018) *Tracing Rhetoric and Material Life: Ecological Approaches*, Peter Goggin's (2013) *Environmental Rhetoric and Ecologies of Place*, and Candice Rai and Caroline Druschke's (2018a) *Field Rhetoric: Ethnography, Ecology, and Engagement in the Places of Persuasion* underscore the interconnectedness and interdependency of rhetoric with bodies, landscapes, technologies, and other elements of the more-than-human world. They employ ecology as a model for representing the interrelationality between rhetoric, materiality, and more-than-human beings. The move to ecology is an important one for environmental critics as it responds directly to the nature/culture dualism, anthropocentrism, more-than-human rhetoric, and the crisis/care orientation. With regard to more-than-human rhetoric, Rai and Druschke (2018b) suggest that an ecological perspective pushes "the boundaries of rhetoric beyond discursive formations and human agencies to also include consideration of the persuasive agency and influence of relationships among objects, things, spaces, genres, institutions, animals, bodies, affect, and matter" (p. 8). Furthermore, as Wells et al. (2018) argue "ecological orientations to our tactics of intervention, modalities of investment, and approaches to human-nonhuman well-being enrich our capacities to care for and with the world" (p. 4). It is yet to be seen how continued engagement with ecological orientations will challenge and push environmental criticism and rhetorical criticism in potentially productive ways. For example, Joshua Barnett (2018) posits that Timothy Morton's concept of ecological awareness offers a challenge to the field's focus on crisis. Future research in environmental criticism might further engage this and other topics that have implications for rhetorical theory, criticism, and the role of the critic.

In a final future direction for environmental criticism, I offer a provocation based on Flores (2016) racial rhetorical criticism. Flores writes: "I will go so far as to argue that rhetorical studies is fundamentally—at its core—the study of race and to argue, therefore, rhetorical critics must participate in the expanding area of racial rhetorical criticism" (Flores, 2016, p. 6). I am inspired to think through how Flores' argument speaks back to environmental criticism. In what ways are environmental communication and environmental criticism implicated in the

#Communicationsowhite (Chakravartty, Kuo, Grubbs, & McIlwain, 2018) and #rhetoricsowhite (Calafell et al., 2018; Wanzer-Serrano, 2019) critiques? How are norms of whiteness and white supremacy evidenced in environmentalism? How is the field of environmental criticism enabling or constraining a focus on racial rhetorical criticism?

Environmental Justice scholarship is the most obvious starting point for productive engagement between racial rhetorical criticism and environmental criticism. Environmental justice research focuses on how race factors into environmental decision-making, the unequal distribution of environmental hazards, and the burden placed on already marginalized and historically underrepresented populations to make their neighborhoods and homelands national sacrifice zones (Bullard, 2005). For example, climate injustice and energy injustice are a "double whammy" for some communities. Indigenous Native Americans and First Nations are among the communities that will face disproportionate and profound devastation and changes to their ways of life due to climate change (Whyte, 2013). Native American reservations also are more likely to experience energy poverty wherein lack of proper insulation, substandard housing, rural isolation means that these communities use more energy yet have less local control over energy production and spend a higher percentage of their income on energy than non-Native communities (Honor the Earth, n.d.). Environmental justice work is less common in environmental criticism than research that focuses on more mainstream forms of white (and affluent) environmentalism. Nonetheless, there has been a small but steady interest in environmental justice among environmental critics. In addition to de Onís' energy coloniality and Pezzullo's toxic tourism research mentioned above, Taylor Johnson's (2018) investigation of nuclear colonialism at the Nevada Test Site demonstrates that the ecological impacts of militarization intersect with racism and colonialism. Yet, confining examination of race to the environmental justice area of environmental criticism is insufficient. If we are to follow Flores' call, environmental criticism must recognize that racism and white privilege are endemic within environmental discourses, meaning that issues like climate change, community gardens, wilderness preservation, environmental social movement, and animal rhetoric all intersect with race. For example, Darrel Enck-Wanzer's (2011) analysis of *The Garden*, a documentary about a Los Angeles community garden and the Latinx farmers who maintain it, reminds environmental communication scholars that the community garden movement cannot be examined without attention to race.

If environmental critics take up an engagement with racial rhetorical criticism, there are many possible avenues for research. First, explicitly naming and critiquing the rhetorical norms of whiteness, racism, and colonialism in mainstream environmentalism and environmental discourse is one step toward better seeing how race and indigeneity matters to all environmental issues. Just one example is that Yosemite National Park was founded on erasure of indigenous peoples, particularly in the composition of pristine and sublime nature photography that did not include the

Ahwahnechee Miwok people but was used to persuade legislators to justify creation of the park (DeLuca & Demo, 2000).

Second, environmental criticism could uncover and draw from non-Western ecological epistemologies. Vine Deloria, Jr., Jace Weaver, Greg Cajete, and Megan Bang describe how both traditional and contemporary beliefs and practices across many of the over 500 distinct Native American cultures are characterized by ecological relationships with the land that acknowledge the agency and animism of non-human participants while carefully avoiding essentialization and the ecological Indian stereotype (Cajete, 1999; Deloria, 2003; Medin & Bang, 2014; Weaver, 1996).

Third, environmental critics committed to more-than-human rhetoric should grapple with the complex intersections between colonialism, racism, and other forms of oppression between human and more-than-human beings. Troubling arguments may arise, for example, when a focus on more-than-human rhetoric does not include an historical understanding of how racism and colonialism interpolate some humans as animals, subhuman, savage, or inherently closer to nature. Environmental critics might also seek answers to the question of whether the "dreaded comparison," in which animal rights activists speak of the enslavement of animals, is justified. Marek Muller (2017) is beginning to wade into this complicated work by examining possible resonances and divergences between critical animal studies and postcolonial studies. It may also be productive to examine how settler colonialism entails the management of "people, land, flora and fauna" in the service of colonial power (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 4) and "can be interpreted as a form of environmental injustice that wrongfully interferes with and erases the socioecological contexts required for indigenous populations to experience the world as a place infused with responsibilities to humans, nonhumans and ecosystems" (Whyte, 2016). Such an approach is embedded in the complex interrelations between human and more-than-human beings within settler colonialism.

Fourth, although Flores' narrowed her racial rhetorical criticism essay to race, based on her acknowledgment of the importance of intersectionality, environmental critics should interrogate the relationship between the environment and race, gender, class, sexuality, citizenship, ethnicity, and nationality.

Finally, working at the nexus of racial rhetorical criticism and environmental criticism must not be undertaken lightly. If environmental critics take up some of these questions and topics, they should proceed carefully, historically, and deeply, doing their best to avoid surface-level engagement.

Conclusion

In closing, I argue that environmental criticism is a critical approach that is premised on the critic's ethical duties, fundamental challenges to anthropocentrism and the nature/culture binary, acceptance of more-than-human rhetorical agency, and resistance through amplification of silenced and marginalized voices—human and more-than-human alike. By critical, I move beyond what is implied in the performance of

rhetorical criticism as an exercise in critical interpretation, analysis, and judgment to an orientation that interrogates systems of power within the human relationship to the environment. I am not explicitly connecting environmental criticism with critical rhetoric, ideology criticism, or another particular thread of critical scholarship in rhetorical studies or continental theory. Of course, there are environmental critics who specifically tie their work to these traditions, but the field of environmental criticism also draws on rhetorical figures and tropes, Burkean dramatism, and the wide range of theories, concepts, and approaches used within rhetorical studies. Rather, I contend that it is a critical subdiscipline to the extent that the foundations of environmental criticism include inherent challenges to dominant ideologies—the nature/culture dualism, a human-centered definition of rhetoric, and anthropocentrism. It is also a subdiscipline that seeks to address ongoing environmental crises that are rooted in these systems of power, perhaps the most urgent of which is climate change. There is an active debate among environmental critics (and more broadly within the environmental humanities) about whether the moral, social, and material exigencies, the urgency, and the global scale of climate change merits shifting all of our scholarship toward climate change. Regardless of one's answer to that vexing question, laying out the possibility of a more ecocentric way of being, an assumption that implicitly underlies much environmental criticism, is a pathway toward radically reimagining of our relationship with the environment and a form of hope in the Anthropocene.

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