

# Ecological Rhetoric: Strands and Trend

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**Abstract** Since the 20th century, the increasing focus on the environment has drawn people's attention to the concept of ecology, bringing about Ecolinguistics, Ecoliterature, Ecosemiotics, etc. However, ecological rhetoric as a subdiscipline needs to be clarified. This essay aims to explore its origin, major strands, and future trend. We find that ecological rhetoric can be traced to Kenneth Burke's thoughts in the 1930s, and that there are four major strands -- ecological composing, *in situ* rhetoric, transhumanism, and rhetorical ecology, of which *in situ* rhetoric is the most promising, justified by its philosophical foundation, transdisciplinarity, inclusiveness and operability. Philosophically, "embodiment" of *in situ* rhetoric originates from the body philosophy of Nietzsche, Merleau-Ponty, Lakoff and Johnson, etc.; the collaboration between rhetoric and other disciplines (anthropology, cultural studies, etc.) displays its transdisciplinarity; inclusiveness is shown in the wide range and diverse forms of research subjects; and its operability is accounted for from the feasible integration of rhetorical categories and ecological fieldwork. These four elaborated features can justify our choice of *in situ* rhetoric as the potential trend of ecological rhetoric.

**Keywords** Ecological Rhetoric, Ecological Composing, *in situ* Rhetoric, Transhumanism, Rhetorical Ecology

## 1. Introduction

The term "ecology" was introduced into the vocabulary of science in 1866 by Ernst Haeckel. In his *Generelle Morphologie der Organismen*, "ecology" refers to the

"whole science of the relations of the organism to the environment including, in the broad sense, all the 'conditions of existence' "(as cited in [62], p. 140). Initially, ecology was a branch of biology; since the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the progress of economy and technology has brought about environmental crises, which awakened people's ecological consciousness. This increasing attention to the notion of ecology makes it known beyond the confines of biology. Gradually, this term finds itself in other disciplines and brings the emergence of corresponding disciplines like Ecolinguistics, Ecosemiotics, Ecoliterature, etc., demonstrating its potential in interdisciplinary research. In rhetorical studies, there also appears the use of "ecology". For example, Ells [22] uses the term "ecological rhetoric" in his essay and defines it as "rhetoric grounded in an ecological perspective", which means that "everything (rocks, air, water, politics, bodies, thought, argument) consists fundamentally of the same substance" (p. 321). In his view, "ecological rhetoric" not only concerns environmental issues but also the "connections among language, thought, and the world" (p. 321). However, his definition of "ecological rhetoric" focuses more on "ecological", while the sense of rhetoric is not that apparent. There are numerous definitions of rhetoric; considering the research objective of this essay, we draw from Blair et al.'s [6] definition of rhetoric as "the study of discourses, events, objects, and practices that attends to their character as meaningful, legible, partisan, and consequential" (p. 2). Though the term "ecological rhetoric" has appeared and many rhetorical scholars (e.g. [19], [20], [63]) have indeed embraced the notion of "ecology" in their studies, "ecological rhetoric" as a term is rarely employed explicitly. In response to the ecological turn in academia, this essay aims to adopt "ecological rhetoric" as an umbrella term to explore the different manipulations of

ecology in rhetorical studies. We will address the following three questions: What is the origin of contemporary "ecological rhetoric"? What are its major strands? Which should be the future trend of "ecological rhetoric" and why?

## 2. The Origin of Ecological Rhetoric

Like other disciplines, the combination of ecology and rhetoric also has a certain historical origin, which can be dated back to Kenneth Burke's work in the 1930s. In *Attitudes toward History* (*AtH*, 1937/1961), he first mentions "ecology" by name, stating that,

*Among the sciences, there is one little fellow named Ecology, and in time we shall pay him more attention. He teaches us that the total economy of the planet cannot be guided by an efficient rationale of exploitation alone, but that the exploiting part must eventually suffer if it too greatly disturbs the balance of the whole... ([8], p. 150).*

Laurence Coupe, who regards Burke as the first critic systematically analyzing culture from an ecological perspective, comments that Burke's whole career may "be understood as a profound experiment in green thinking" ([14], p. 413).

Though Burke does not explicitly discuss the "ecological rhetoric", the ecological thought in his work can function as a herald of ecological turn in rhetorical studies, which is elaborated in Seigel's "One little fellow named Ecology": Ecological Rhetoric in Kenneth Burke's *Attitudes toward History* ([57]). First, Seigel explains that the "efficiency" critiqued by Burke shares a striking resemblance with the ecological criticism of efficiency in Sears' *Deserts on the March* (1935, [56]), an influential ecological work at that time. For example, like Sears, Burke renders efficient farming practices that lead to ecological disasters as inefficient in the long run. Besides, Burke also figuratively expands his discussion of efficiency in the realm of society, which is a hint of the rhetorical application of principles from ecology. Second, Seigel claims that the "comic frame" in *AtH* "is in essence an ecological frame" ([57], p. 394). Comedies have the feature of "inclusiveness", which makes people aware that they are part of communities. This feature contributes to the concern of interrelationships between individual lives and the connection of different contributing factors to a given situation in "comic frame". Therefore, the "interrelationship" and "multi-perspectives" of "comic frame" are similar to the standards of ecological balance, indicating the sign of ecological rhetoric in *AtH*. Accordingly, we can learn that ecological thoughts during that time had a great impact on Burke, whose explicit concern of the ecology then provides us with a solid foundation to explore the ecological approaches in contemporary rhetorical studies.

## 3. Major Strands of Ecological Rhetoric

Though the origin of "ecological rhetoric" can be traced back to Burke in the 1930s, it was not until around the 1970s that rhetoric really embarked on its ecological turn. This section will focus on several major strands of "ecological rhetoric" arising from that time up to now. Specifically, the four patterns of "ecological composing", "in situ rhetoric", "transhumanism", and "rhetorical ecology" will be discussed in a roughly chronological order.

### 3.1. Ecological Composing

Composition is always an important field of rhetorical studies. The exploration of ecological composing can be dated back to Coe [11], whose "eco-logic" of writing emphasizes the "wholeness" of composition. Since Coe, there are more and more composition scholars inviting the concept of "ecology" into their studies, showing the features of focusing on connections/relationships of different elements and the dynamism in writing system. As a matter of fact, this ecological turn is relevant to the process-orientation in composition studies. Hairston [27] criticizes the traditional product-oriented paradigm of teaching writing and calls for a process-oriented one. A more detailed discussion on the development of process-oriented composition can be found in Rule's *Situating Writing Processes* ([55]).

As mentioned above, the explicit treatment of "ecology" in composition studies can go back to Coe [11], whose exploration calls for writing instructors to pay attention to the "eco-logic" of writing. About ten years later, Cooper [13] proposes an ecological writing model, regarding composition as a social activity where a person is engaged with diverse socially constituted systems continually. While Cooper's model has apparently shown the ecological sense of composition, Syverson [64] tries to enhance it and introduce more elements into the ecological model of composition. She believes that the complex system of writers, readers and texts actually lies in a larger ecology, which includes "environmental structures, such as pens, paper, computers, books, telephones... as well as other complex systems operating at various levels of scale, such as families, global economies, publishing systems, theoretical frames, academic disciplines, and language itself" ([64], p. 5).

The focus on the environment in composition studies is also shown in Weisser and Dobrin's collection named *Ecocomposition: Theoretical and Pedagogical Approaches* ([66]). For them, ecocomposition places ecological thinking and composition in dialogue with each other so as to both consider the ecological properties of written discourse and the ways in which "ecologies, environments, locations, places, and natures are

discursively affected" (p. 2). Besides, "relations" is a key word of "ecomposition", for it not only emphasizes the relations between discourse and different types of environment but underlies the "complex interrelationships between the human activity of writing and all of the conditions of the struggle for existence" (p. 13). This stress on the relationship with environment also encourages students and teachers to pay more attention to their "surrounding environments and the organisms that they encounter in those environments" (p. 18). And there are more and more writing teachers applying "ecomposition" to their class. For instance, Kunz [32] brings the notion of ecomposition into the writing curriculum, and discusses how environmental and social consciousnesses can be implemented through it. Apart from that, Inoue [31] connects "ecology" with writing assessment. The various relations of elements in writing system become more complex with the development of new media. Dobrin's collection *Ecology, Writing Theory, and New Media: Writing Ecology* ([17]) can be regarded as an elaboration of complex ecological methodologies, which meets the call for explaining the complexity of writing as a system in the digital age.

We thus can learn that in the pattern of ecological composition, the relationships in writing activities are increasingly emphasized by scholars, which helps to view writing as a dynamic system from the ecological perspective, and advocates more focus on the environments of writing.

### 3.2. *In Situ* Rhetoric

*In situ* originates from Latin. According to *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, it means "in the natural or original position or place". Based on "*In Situ* Rhetoric: Intersections Between Qualitative Inquiry, Fieldwork, and Rhetoric" ([23]), *in situ* rhetoric refers to "naturally occurring rhetoric that is accessed, documented, and interpreted as it occurs in the moment of rhetorical invention... an all-encompassing sensual experience that happens in a particular time and place and through particular bodies" (p. 516). Therefore, *in situ* rhetoric invites rhetorical scholars to travel to the places where rhetoric happens, providing them with more opportunities to experience and contact with material entities.

This connection with material has been relevant to scholars' attention on the materiality of rhetoric since the 1980s. To be specific, the most prominent advocate of materialist rhetoric is Michael McGee, whose thought is summarized by Cloud [10] that "[r]hetoric is material simply by virtue of its pragmatic effects on the world" (p. 146). Later, more rhetoricians (e.g. [35], [38], [48]) attend to rhetoric's materiality. They all see discourse as material for its influence on social reality. Recently, the materiality of rhetoric includes various entities rhetoricians encounter in their work. Blair [4] believes that things like inscribed

stones, ink, paper, and air vibrations, etc. all belong to rhetoric. This focus on the materiality of rhetoric brings an increasing number of rhetoricians to engage themselves in *in situ* methods, so as to have close contact with the material in this world ([67]). In line with the definition of *in situ* rhetoric and its focus on materiality, "embodied", "emplaced", and "intersectional" experience is regarded as the prominent features of *in situ* rhetoric.

The most apparent *in situ* method in rhetorical studies is shown in the rhetoricians' observation of memorial places, like museums, monuments, etc. Marback [34] discusses the vandalizing of the Monument to Joe Louis in Detroit and calls for giving the object its due, for the object itself participates in meaning-making. Besides, Blair et al. [6] also mention that public memory places are "fundamentally rhetorical" (p. 2). In rhetorical criticism, the *in situ* turn has something to do with Blair [5], who claims that "being there" matters. Through her own experience in the National Museum of American Art, and through considering the difference between televised presidential speech and bodily experience of being present, she believes that to be a credible rhetorical critic, the distinction between "embodied experience" and "using reproduction" deserves attention. Blair's "being there" resonates with other rhetoricians who prefer *in situ* methods. This focus on memorial places and emphasis of embodied experience "have invited an ecological understanding of public rhetoric by showing how physical things participate in constituting narratives of past and future" ([67], p. 17).

Apart from public memorial places, *in situ* rhetoric also embraces mundane elements in life. In terms of discourses in everyday life, Pezzullo [49] finds that participant observation can provide an opportunity to study the discourse that is not yet recorded. And when it comes to spaces in daily life, some scholars put their attention to places of consumerism. Dickinson [16] explores Starbucks' "rhetoric of naturalness" through careful observation and analysis of the coffee shop, suggesting that "[r]hetorical critics and theorists determined to get after the consequential materiality of rhetoric can turn to the places of the practices of the everyday" (p. 6). In addition, the wild (e.g. forest), public places (e.g. public bathrooms), cities, etc. (e.g. [15], [68], [69]) are all included to explore the rhetoricity of mundane spaces within *in situ* rhetoric.

This mundane turn also appears in the field of ecological care. McGreavy et al. [36] interview people who work on a conservation action plan in the French Bay to study the role of vernacular discourses in the development of it. Similarly, Conley and Mullen [12] go to the Red Rock Canyon to examine the notebook kept at the summit of Turtlehead Peak and analyze the writings left by the hikers. They state that the nature-culture binary shown in the notebook works as rhetorical equipment for navigating the ecological complexities of everyday life. Apart from the discourses, in ecological care *in situ*, mundane objects and places are also

rhetorical participants, resonating with Marback's [34] calling for "giving objects their due". For example, combining participant observation with interviews, Senda-Cook [58] claims that the maps and trails in Zion National Park help visitors shape their perception of nature.

In addition, bodies also play a role in *in situ* rhetoric which emphasizes the "live rhetoric", closely related to the embodied, material, and mundane activities. McHendry et al. [37] argue that bodies in the field have more profound experiences than the "critical commitments brought to the fields and texts taken from the field" (p. 302). Just as Middleton et al. [42] state, "[r]hetorical field methods, on the other hand, focuses on locating bodies of rhetors, critics, and audiences in situ and embraces the challenge of representing how those bodies perform rhetorically" (p. 395).

From the above discussion, we can learn that *in situ* rhetoric encourages the participation of objects, places, and bodies in rhetorical studies. Moreover, when this encouragement appears in the field of environmental protection, people's ecological awareness will be enhanced.

### 3.3. Transhumanism

In traditional constitutive theories, nonhuman and nature hardly play a role in meaning-making, and they rarely act as agents, against which, Rogers [54] introduces the term "transhuman" into the discussion. Specifically, Rogers listed four criteria for transhuman communication theory,

*(1) the resurrection of a place for natural forces, traits, and structures in communication theory while avoiding a return to natural determinism; (2) an affirmation that we humans are embodied creatures embedded in a world that is not entirely our own making; (3) a rehearsal of ways of listening to non-dominant voices and nonhuman agents and their inclusion in the production of meaning, policy, and material conditions; (4) the deconstruction of common sense binaries such as subject/object, social/natural, and ideational/material, and a reconstruction of relationships as dialogic: recursive, interdependent, and fluid.* (p. 268)

Rogers' transhuman approach invites more environmental communication scholars to consider the significance of diverse forms of human-nature-animal relation in meaning-making. Following Rogers, Nils Peterson, et al. [47] oppose constructivism which separates the human constructed world from the natural and real world, believing that Rogers' transhuman approach helps explore how to communicate with extrahuman others. In line with the attention on "extrahuman", the studies of Milstein (e.g. [44], [45]) should be mentioned. Most of his works mainly focus on fieldwork in the transnational tourism of whales. Through communicating with naturalists, tourists, and whale researchers, he gains great insights into human-nature relations. Apart from

"transhumanism", Milstein and Kroløkke [46] introduce the term "transcorporeality" to discuss human-nature relations. This term refers to "the recognition of the substantial interconnections between human corporeality and the more-than-human world" ([1], p. 23). It emphasizes that vulnerability, which is "a sense of precarious, corporeal openness to the material world" (p. 23), can promote the environmental ethics.

Therefore, both transhumanism and transcorporeality show the gradual emphasis on the non-human or more-than-human world, reflecting the ecological thinking in communication studies. These concepts also evoke an ecological understanding of the "animal rhetoric". Plec [51] focuses on animal communication, so as to help reconsider the role of communicating in the construction and transformation of human relationships with the world beyond humans. Instead of using "zoosemiotics", "biorhetoric", "communibiology", etc., Plec develops a term named "internatural communication", which can not only include the meanings of above-mentioned terms but also embrace the possibilities of human and animal communication with other life forms. Similarly, Burford and Schutten [7] analyze the documentary *Blackfish* and claim that from this internatural communication lens, the captive orcas should be regarded as their agents, thus deconstructing the ideology of human having power over animals.

### 3.4. Rhetorical Ecology

Proposed by Jenny Edbauer in 2005, "rhetorical ecology" functions as an augmentation to popular conceptual frameworks of the rhetorical situation, especially that of Lloyd Bitzer [3]. For Bitzer, a rhetorical situation consists of "exigence", "audience", and "constraints", which provides us a useful way to explain why and how discourses are produced. However, the elements that constitute this rhetorical situation are rather independent from each other, which makes Bitzer's rhetorical situation insufficient to explain the circulation and fluidity of public rhetoric. Therefore, Edbauer proposes the concept of "rhetorical ecology", which regards rhetorical situation as a part of "an ongoing social flux" ([20], p. 9). Different from Bitzer's static rhetorical situation, "rhetorical ecology" focuses more on the interaction, transformation, fluidity, openness, and dynamic of the elements in rhetorical situation.

This rhetorical ecology also helps open the door for scholars to explain the circulation of rhetoric. For example, Chaput [9] focuses on the rhetorical circulation in late capitalism, and claims that Edbauer's rhetorical ecology offers a useful way to describe the affective circulation of rhetoric within the neoliberal moment. Later, some scholars (e.g. [53], [60], [65]) all try to adopt the concept of "rhetorical ecology" to discuss how rhetoric and rhetorical elements interact, and transform one another. Recently, Smith [61] also adopts this notion to explain the

transformation of neoliberalism in the events of modifying Bear Ears National Monument's boundaries by Obama's and Trump's proclamations. For we are in the digital age, the circulation and spread of public rhetoric have become commonplace, particularly with the development of online social platforms. A case in point, Hatfield [29] discusses the digital rhetorical ecology, which mainly deals with the viral spread and circulation of suicide letters on social media. And the similar discussion of rhetoric in digital matters can also refer to other scholars like Gries [26] and Edwards [21], etc.

To conclude, rhetorical ecology is helpful for people to explain the transformation, spread, and circulation of rhetoric in the digital age. And just as what Wells et al. [67] comment, Edbauer's work is a "landmark piece", which "inaugurated an abiding interest in the 'rhetorical ecologies' of public rhetoric" (p. 15). In 2022 Biennial Conference of the Rhetoric Society of America, "Rhetorical Ecologies: A Roundtable Discussion of a Threshold Concept" is also listed in its schedule. Though the concept here is more inclusive, it still shares much similarity with the features of rhetorical ecology discussed in this section.

#### 4. Potential Trend: *In situ* Rhetoric

According to what is discussed above, we can learn that those strands share different degrees of affinity with the discipline of rhetoric, and "ecology" in different patterns shows different intensions. Composition is a sub-discipline of rhetoric; "ecological composition", thus, is restricted to writing. "Transhumanism" coming from the communication field, shows an indirect connection with rhetoric. "*In situ* rhetoric" and "rhetorical ecology" are more inclusive and rhetoric-centered; regarding the signified of "ecology", the latter mainly indexes the relational system (multi-element interaction), while the former covers both the environment-related topics and the relational system. Hence, considering the affinity with rhetoric and the potentiality of "ecology", we choose *in situ* rhetoric as the most promising strand of ecological rhetoric. Besides, in this section, we will further justify the selection of it as the future trend from its philosophical foundation, transdisciplinarity, inclusiveness, and operability.

##### 4.1. Philosophical Foundation

With regard to the philosophical foundation of *in situ* rhetoric, we should reemphasize its two prominent features. As discussed in section 3.2, *in situ* rhetoric stresses the participation of rhetorical agents in the places where rhetoric happens, revealing that "embodied" and "emplaced" are its two major features. Based on Middleton et al. [41], the "embodied" feature mainly calls for considering the presence of material bodies in the field, which functions to help gain perspectives not available through other channels and serves to help express the affect that may be difficult to put into words. The stress on the

experiences of bodies in meaning construction works in concert with the so-called "philosophy of body". As for the "emplaced" feature, it mainly highlights the role of "place/space" in *in situ* rhetoric, which suggests that the embodied experience of rhetoric always happens with a place. Accordingly, we can conclude that in both features of *in situ* rhetoric, "embodiment" lies at the core.

The center on "embodiment" has its philosophical foundation, which at least can be dated back to philosophers like Nietzsche, who builds up the consciousness of the significance of the body. Against the traditional mind-body dualism, Nietzsche believes that "everything begins through the body" ([25], p. 96). Since Nietzsche, the recognition of "body" has been no longer strange in philosophy. In the first half of the twentieth century, Husserl, Heidegger, Foucault, Deleuze, etc. all took the "philosophy of body" into consideration. In the second half, the representatives are Merleau-Ponty, Lakoff and Johnson. These philosophers' discussions cover the perspectives of phenomenology, postmodernism, and cognitive linguistics.

Though they all embrace the philosophy of body, "[i]n the philosophical effort to rigorously study embodied experience there is probably no better place to start than with Merleau-Ponty" ([28], p. 75). In *Phénoménologie de la perception*, Merleau-Ponty states that "[t]he body is the vehicle of being in the world, and having a body is, for a living creature, to be interwoven in a definite environment, to identify oneself with certain projects and be continually committed to them" ([40], p. 94). His concept of body is not only the physical body but the "human body appearing as a conscious, significant behaviour, to other equally conscious significant behaviors" ([2], p. 171). The body is not the machine that merely indicates "a collection of externally related parts that operate through direct, linear causal force" ([28], p. 79), but the "living body", a carnal condition for perceiving things, which has consciousness and intentionality. Therefore, his embodiment calls for people to "return to the world of actual experience . . . to rediscover the system 'self- others- things' as it comes into being" ([40], p. 66).

Similarly, in cognitive linguistics, Lakoff and Johnson's *Philosophy in the Flesh* (1999) also proposes the term "embodied philosophy"/ "philosophy in the flesh". They emphasize that "[w]e can only form concepts through the body. Therefore, every understanding that we can have of the world, ourselves, and others can only be framed in terms of concepts shaped by our bodies" ([33], p. 555). As a matter of fact, their discussion of "flesh" is closely connected with the thoughts of Merleau-Ponty. As they mention in their book that "[o]ur flesh is inseparable from what Merleau-Ponty called the 'flesh of the world' . . . Our body is intimately tied to what we walk on, sit on, touch, taste, smell, see, breathe, and move within. Our corporeality is part of the corporeality of the world" ([33], p. 565).

So from Merleau-Ponty as well as Lakoff and Johnson,

"body" is not merely the mechanistic object, but the flesh that has its intentionality. Their interpretation of the body is largely against the traditional intentionality of consciousness; rather, they turn to the intentionality of body. Instead of separating the mind and body, they try to establish the unity of material and spirit. These philosophers regard body as the core of meaning-construction and the threshold of perceiving the world, indicating that "embodiment", characteristic of *in situ* rhetoric, has a solid philosophical foundation.

#### 4.2. Transdisciplinarity

Apart from its philosophical foundation, *in situ* rhetoric also features "transdisciplinarity", which means the blending of qualitative rhetorical inquiry with other disciplinary approaches. Middleton et al. [43] explain that "transdisciplinarity demands that sub-disciplines internalize the theoretical commitments and methodological practices of other scholarly traditions in ways that do not simply subsume and reproduce those practices and commitments" (p. 578). Based on their explanation, the following will focus on the collaboration of *in situ* rhetoric with ethnography, cultural studies, and communication studies.

The most prominent transdisciplinarity of *in situ* rhetoric is shown in the link between rhetoric and ethnography, which is evident in several works that promote the development of *in situ* rhetoric. Hess [30] proposes the term "critical-rhetorical ethnography" and applies ethnography means like participant observation and interviews to analyzing the rhetorical concepts of "kairos", "phronesis", and "invention" through a case of participating in a vernacular activity. Similarly, Middleton et al. [42] emphasize that "rhetorical field methods are a practical and theoretical synthesis of critical rhetoric, performance studies, and ethnography that function as an orientation that utilizes methodological tools from (but is not bound by) these subdisciplines in order to understand 'live rhetorics'" (p. 388). Hence, we can see that in *in situ* rhetoric, ethnography plays an important role; its synergy with rhetorical inquiry works as the part and parcel of the transdisciplinarity.

*In situ* rhetoric also displays its transdisciplinarity in the connection with cultural studies. Middleton et al. [41] propose the "participatory critical rhetoric", which stresses the relations of power, politics, and participation. In addition, the performance studies are also taken into consideration. Pezzullo [50] describes his "toxic tours" in "Cancer Alley" (i.e. Louisiana), which are regarded as "cultural performances" that can function rhetorically to help build communities of resistance. Also communication studies, especially on environmental communication, collaborate with *in situ* rhetoric. Adopting Burke's identification, Druschke [18] engages himself in eastern Iowa Clear Creek watershed and explores the role of

farmers' and landowners' identification in oil and water conservation.

We can then conclude that *in situ* rhetoric encourages the conversation and cooperation between rhetoric and anthropology, cultural studies, or communication studies, which notably display its "transdisciplinarity". This transdisciplinarity, on the one hand, can help revitalize rhetorical scholarship by offering new ways of examining rhetorical phenomena; on the other, it provides the opportunity for studies of other disciplines to regroup themselves on rhetorical meaning-making activities.

#### 4.3. Inclusiveness

Compared with the other three strands of ecological rhetoric, the potentiality of *in situ* rhetoric is also reflected in its inclusiveness. First, regarding the research subjects, what is concerned by *in situ* rhetoric may cover the subjects in the other patterns: the relations of rhetorical elements in rhetorical ecology, the human-nature relation in transhumanism, and the relational systems in ecological composition. Second, the multiple forms of rhetoric that can be analyzed via *in situ* also contribute to its inclusiveness. For *in situ* method calls for fieldwork, which means that critics will be faced with the multimodality of rhetoric, not only the verbal and textual forms but the extra-textual and non-verbal forms like images, rhythms, or even the "rhetorical performance that require[s] our sensory facilities to perceive, like the sour stench of an alleyway, the sweat on a clam digger's brow, and the bodily warmth of a quick embrace" ([52], p. 3). For example, Dickinson [16] explores the "rhetoric of naturalness" conveyed by the smell and sound in Starbucks.

Besides, we can also find the trace of the core feature (i.e. embodiment) of *in situ* rhetoric in the other strands, e.g. in transhumanism, some studies focus on the fieldwork, which also stresses the importance of embodiment in understanding human-nature relations. Also in ecological composition, the calling for students to walk outside their classrooms and to recognize the environment around them reflects the significance of embodiment.

So, from the perspectives of the wide range and diverse forms of research subjects as well as the sharing feature of embodiment, we can say that to certain extent *in situ* rhetoric covers what is discussed in the other three patterns. This inclusiveness contributes further to our belief that *in situ* rhetoric is indeed the most promising strand.

#### 4.4. Operability

Operability is the last but not least reason for our choosing *in situ* rhetoric as the trend, which we are to discuss from both the theoretical and practical perspectives. Theoretically, *in situ* rhetoric can employ both traditional and contemporary rhetorical theories or concepts as its framework. For example, in his article, Hess [30]

successfully combines the rhetorical concepts of "invention", "kairos", and "phronesis" into his research. Getting inspiration from scholars like Hess, we can also take into consideration other categories, such as "arrangement", "identification", "presence", etc. On the one hand, both traditional and contemporary rhetorical concepts can provide a theoretical base for *in situ* rhetoric; on the other, those theories may hopefully be enriched and developed with the exploration of *in situ* rhetoric.

Practically, the operability of *in situ* rhetoric can be seen in the diversity of research objects it covers and the clear steps of doing *in situ* rhetorical criticism. From the perspective of research objects, just as we introduce in section 3.2, they may range from official matters like memorial places and monuments to vernacular ones such as bodies, everyday discourses, and places for daily activities. This multiplicity makes it more possible for people to explore the rhetoricity of things they are interested in. As for the steps of *in situ* rhetorical criticism, they may share many similarities with the widely accepted procedures of doing rhetorical criticism elaborated by Foss [24], which include "selecting an artifact", "analyzing the artifact", "formulating a research question", "reviewing relevant literature", and "writing the essay". Besides, as stated in section 4.2, *in situ* rhetoric is closely connected with subdisciplines like ethnography; therefore, participant observation, oral history, interview, case study, etc. can be conveniently adopted to collect data. Senda-Cook [58], who adopts interviews and participant observation, successfully confirms the rhetoricity of maps and trails in managing tensions between access-preservation and safety-risk in Zion National Park. Concerning the "embodied" and "emplaced" features of *in situ* rhetoric, the immediate effects and judgments can facilitate critics to "access to multiple perspectives and vantage points on the rhetorical act" ([41], p. 131).

Apart from what is discussed above, some other representative works like *Text + Field: Innovations in Rhetorical Method* ([39]), *Field Rhetoric: Ethnography, Ecology, and Engagement in the Places of Persuasion* ([52]), and *Readings in Rhetorical Fieldwork* ([59]) all lay a solid foundation for guiding *in situ* rhetorical criticism. We are then justified, practically as well as theoretically, in believing that *in situ* rhetoric has strong operability.

## 5. Conclusion

This inquiry manages to locate the origin of ecological rhetoric, clarify its four major strands, and justify the *in situ* rhetoric as its potential trend. With regard to its origin, ecological rhetoric can be traced back to Kenneth Burke's ecological thought in the 1930s. The four strands are expounded in chronological order, including "ecological composing", "*in situ* rhetoric", "transhumanism", and "rhetorical ecology". Considering the ontology of rhetoric

and the intension of "ecology", we believe that *in situ* rhetoric is the most prominent strand of ecological rhetoric, which is further supported by the elaboration of its philosophical foundation, transdisciplinarity, inclusiveness, and operability.

In addition, we think that ecological rhetoric should not limit its scope to environmentalism or ecological care; instead, any fluid multi-element interaction with distinctive rhetoricity can be the subject under its discussion, which indicates that it is of great necessity for ecological rhetoric to keep its ontology of rhetoric. Therefore, among the four features that contribute to the potential trend of *in situ* rhetoric, we believe that "operability" is vital in its future development, particularly concerning the theoretical base; we insist that the ontology of rhetoric need to be the foundation of ecological rhetoric. As the potential trend, *in situ* rhetoric is expected to shoulder the responsibility of promoting the exploration of classic rhetorical categories (e.g., logos, ethos, pathos, presence, identification) from the ecological perspective and its related approaches, though a tough challenge for researchers, *in situ* rhetoric heralds a promising future of ecological rhetoric.

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