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Book Review: *Making Matters: Craft, Ethics, and New Materialist Rhetorics*

by Leigh Gruwell
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When I took up macrame during the first year of my Ph.D., I spent time hiking in the woods to find tree branches to use for my macrame hangings. Finding the perfect branch takes time, so I was forced to slow down on these hikes and observe my surroundings with keen eyes. I was also conscious that I wanted to be respectful of the environment, and so any branches I took from the woods had to come from the ground. Macrame introduced slowness and intention to my life, two things I desperately needed during that first year. Through my engagement with the outdoors, facilitated by composing alongside materials gathered from outside, I created space to embrace more slowness and intention in my everyday interactions with other humans and nonhuman things. I open this review by examining my embodied relationship with craft to illustrate the exigence behind Leigh Gruwell's book, *Making Matters: Craft, Ethics, and New Materialist Rhetorics*. Gruwell's book argues for a new materialist rhetoric and craft agency that highlights the necessity of observing a larger network of independent actors and their agentic possibilities through their intra-action and entanglement within an assemblage. Her book is especially interested in interrogating power dynamics and ethical engagement with nonhuman agents.

Leigh Gruwell makes a case for locating her conception of craft agency at the center of rhetoric and compositions' embrace of new materialist rhetoric. Using new materialism to argue for the importance of reflecting on power dynamics within a "radical repositioning" of how we conceive of the actors in a network, she argues that human and nonhuman actors work and compose alongside each other, and that we must recognize how the nonhuman becomes rhetorical through this engagement (13). Because this view maintains that rhetoric is a "relational, material practice," Gruwell posits that it's important that any analysis of human and nonhuman agents consider how power functions within making practices. But Gruwell hopes to do more than contribute a new way of analyzing more-than-human rhetoric as a material and relational practice; Gruwell also argues that rhetoric and composition needs to reevaluate its relationship to craft. Because craft already considers human and nonhuman relationships, craft provides a way for Gruwell to analyze power structures and the role of embodiment within a given assemblage.

Chapter one introduces the concept of craft agency to explore agentic responsibility, equitable entanglements, and material relationality as they emerge through and from human and nonhuman relationships and intra-actions. Gruwell draws on new materialism, multimodality, assemblage theory, and feminist materialism to position how craft's attention to the material

and intra-actions between humans, objects, and their environments allows it to examine “material manifestations of power” given craft’s attention to *process* (34). Putting forth a definition for craft agency, Gruwell argues that while craft provides a framework for recognizing the various actors in a network and understanding they each possess agency, craft agency maintains the political necessity of ethical engagements with human and nonhuman beings.

Gruwell is careful in the first chapter and subsequent chapters to acknowledge how new materialism and scholarship on craft have ignored Indigenous and decolonial scholarship that predate new materialism. To counter this western-centric knowledge production, Gruwell aptly provides citations for important scholarship in Indigenous and decolonial theory and scholarship composed by Indigenous and Black rhetoricians while critiquing the eurocentrism and whiteness of new materialism and scholarship on craft. However, while Gruwell clarifies her awareness of the eurocentrism of new materialism and craft rhetorics, her two focal sites of analysis are examples of predominantly white crafting spaces and movements. While Gruwell notes this and features many examples of Black and Indigenous crafter movements and spaces, her decision to center two predominately white movements can be read as contradictory given her marked attention in the text to citation politics and her critiques of craftivism’s whiteness.

JOMR readers may find themselves most captivated by chapters one and two, given their attention to defining and historicizing craft in rhetoric and composition. Chapter two considers how craft conceptualizes understandings of rhetoric before looking at the history of craft in the field, paying special attention to multimodality and craft in writing studies. Gruwell pushes readers to view rhetoric as craft and craft as rhetorical. In doing so, she “stress[es] how agency emerges from the intra-actions of human and nonhuman actors” and calls for an ethics of entanglement that insists on a “material, embodied, responsive process” (41). To engage this material, embodied, responsive rhetoric, Gruwell argues that *techne* provides a way for thinking about the process of making through its translations as “*art, skill, or craft*” that emerges from “intra-actions between bodies and their environments” (50). Considering *techne*, *mêtis*, and *kairos* together, Gruwell traces how attention to the materiality and embodied nature of rhetoric allows for a consideration of ethics and agency in human and nonhuman intra-actions.

Chapter three introduces the term craftivism; craftivism elucidates and elaborates the ways that crafting and activism can both create and disrupt power inequities through new materialist inquiry conscious of intra-actions between human and nonhuman actors while maintaining an “activist agenda” (60). Craftivism is defined as decentralized and diverse, made up of various materials, practices, and participants. Thus, Gruwell draws on many examples of craftivism. In addition to the two focal examples she explores in chapters four and five, she also points to many Black and Indigenous craftivist organizations. Noting that craftivism is sometimes equated with lazy activism, Gruwell posits that Indigenous and Black artist collectives, in particular, demonstrate craftivism’s political potential. Gruwell ends the chapter with a discussion of an ethics of entanglement, which she argues characterizes craftivisms “potential to create reciprocal, equitable, and ethical entanglements among all actors that constitute a craftivist assemblage” (80).

Chapter four analyzes Ravelry, an online community for knitters, crocheters, and other fiber artists. Making clear that digital spaces are material, Gruwell argues for a recognition of how digital spaces contribute to craftivism in ways that highlight the materiality of physical craft and the potential that digital spaces offer for a radical reimagining of agentic intra-actions. While I discuss examples from chapter 4 and chapter 5 together, I will note that Gruwell misses an opportunity to discuss connections between Ravelry (where many pussyhat knitting patterns were posted) and the Women's March. Continuing her discussion of craftivism, in chapter five, Gruwell looks at the 2017 Women's March in response to the election of Donald Trump to understand how digital rhetoric and craftivism came together to produce material protest objects like pussyhats and demonstration signs. Gruwell's attention to digital rhetorics, protest signs, and other craftivist examples like the AIDs quilt offer generative points of consideration for *JOMR* readers concerned with the intersections between multimodality and activism. Arguing for increased attention on a "tradition of protest-as-materiality," Gruwell's focus on the multimodal actors operating within the larger protest ecology offers generative space for a new materialist rhetorics to explore protests and their agentic possibilities.

Again calling attention to craftivism's eurocentrism, Gruwell notes that the Women's March is a predominantly white, cisgender, and able-bodied example of craftivism. Gruwell points out that the Women's March did not effectively consider the embodied differences between material actors working alongside each other before, during, and after the protest. Thus, Gruwell spends time discussing the political implications of pussyhats, protest signage, and digital demonstrations but is quick to acknowledge critiques of the Women's March, elucidating her commitment to thinking through power inequities within and caused by craftivism (105). Notably, however, this is one of Gruwell's few mentions of ableism despite her reliance on Jay Dolmage's conception of *métis* and consideration of Hephaestus in chapter two and her attention to the embodied process of making throughout the book.

The book concludes by examining writing studies' relationship to craft to argue that the discipline needs to reclaim process-oriented craft to ensure that disciplinary practices align and acknowledge material constraints on education. Moving through a history of the ways that craft has been taken up in writing studies, Gruwell argues that while craft has been contested in the field, it offers a way to portray writing and rhetoric as collaborative and material. Arguing that the field moved away from craft due to its romantic connotations at a time when the field was attempting to legitimize itself as a discipline, Gruwell posits that writing studies have consented to a neoliberal ideology that looks to writing as a managerial skill. Instead, using Shari Stenberg's "located agency," Gruwell argues that craft agency offers writing studies a way to "locat[e] ethics...attuned to the specificity of agents' material locations and...take responsibility for the entanglements that form in those locations" (143). *JOMR* readers interested in introducing multimodality in the composition classroom would be captivated by this chapter's discussion of multimodal pedagogy that "recognizes that composing is a situated, intra-active process that both creates and is created by larger rhetorical assemblages" (145). Gruwell offers a way for instructors teaching multimodality to emphasize power and ethical considerations in their discussions of diverse composing practices.

The introduction to Gruwell's book closes by arguing that "what is most revolutionary about new materialist rhetorics, then, is not their dissolution of the traditional subject or rhetorical agency itself, but their recognition of the transformative power of relationships" (12). This closing sentence demonstrates Gruwell's commitment to offering a new way of understanding material interactions and intra-actions within an inclusive definition of rhetoric. This inclusive definition of rhetoric offers an understanding of how power structures and influences material intra-action and considers an ethics of entanglement between the human and nonhuman. Gruwell's desire to demonstrate a new way of seeing and understanding rhetoric and her pointed consideration of ethics opens up space to consider the influence of power in multimodal rhetoric.

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