



Reprogrammable Rhetoric: Critical Making Theories and Methods in Rhetoric and Composition

Michael J. Faris and Steve Holmes (eds.). Utah State University Press, 2022.
320 pages. \$35.95 paperback

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BOOK REVIEW

Michael J. Faris and Steve Holmes (eds.). *Reprogrammable Rhetoric: Critical Making Theories and Methods in Rhetoric and Composition*. Utah State University Press, 2022. 320 pages. \$35.95 paperback.

Michael Faris and Steven Holmes' new edited collection is a timely intervention into our increasingly broad understanding of what it means to live, write, and make. Extant literature exploring the spaces and boundaries of critical making as a field has often elided the specific disciplinary concerns and enthusiasms with which scholars come to the project of making and thinking with things in favor of a focus on a more general (and often muddy) conception of interdisciplinarity and the rupture of traditional scholarly bounds. It is refreshing, thus, to see a title appear that centers a specific disciplinary genealogy and practice (rhetoric and composition studies), while also acknowledging the internal rifts that appear within these fields (what Faris and Holmes call "the theory and practice divide").

The role of technological practice as vital to much of critical making—whether through makerspace tinkering, electronic mediations on screen and in the hand, or traditional "digital" handcrafting technologies such as fiber arts—helps shape the editors' introduction. Making use of "reprogrammability" as a central conceit for discussions of "making" allows the editors to demonstrate the ways in which maker projects mirror many aspects of the writing process, with their emphasis on prototyping, revision (and re-visioning), and exigency: "making things to do something" (5). Reprogrammability recasts the fields of critical making as a flexible set of affordances and constraints for exploring the traditional concerns of rhetoric: notably, what is making *for*, in rhetoric and composition studies? What can it *do* that "digital rhetorics" (more traditionally deployed as a way of reading screen-based texts) does not? And *who* is the rhetor: who gets to make? In the case of the last question, Faris and Holmes have been self-conscious in their selection of essays to re-center (reprogram) maker rhetoric to include issues of indigeneity, exclusionary citational practices, and nonhuman agency. While this is not an isolated approach (critical making studies generally appears to be undergoing an overdue reckoning as it refocuses—reprograms—attention to issues of equity, diversity, and indigenous knowledge), the editors are clear that this reorientation has specific urgency for rhetoric and writing studies. As they note, "It does our field little good to do things and make things if such conversations are not accompanied by robust and rigorous political and ethical frameworks to differentiate which forms of critical making help us to build a better and more equitable or just community" (13–14).

In a move appropriate to rhetorical studies, Faris and Holmes have selected and arranged their authors' contributions topologically, focusing on four specific spaces in which critical making is being deployed as part of current disciplinary conversations: textuality, eversion (digitality), play, and pedagogy. These *topos* allow for a convenient way of arranging the wide diversity of critical making projects into practice-specific conversational spaces. The section titled "Eversion and Critical Making," for example, referencing Matthew Halm and David M. Rieder's conceptualization of electronic media work as a kind of "inside-out" practice, pulls together works in electronic media that include physical computing, electronic poetics, and augmented reality, looking under the hood at ways in which rhetors work with computing technologies to reveal new insights into cultural practices and sites. Similarly, the section entitled "Critical Play as Critical Making" foregrounds play: both in the more usual

sense of game design/interaction and, implicitly, “play” in the sense of movement between poles of affordances and constraints.

One of the admirable features of this collection is the way in which it includes works from a diversity of fields within rhetoric and composition studies—digital rhetorics, technical communication, classroom pedagogy—while still maintaining a rigorous focus on what these fields have in common: a sense of purpose in practice. Sometimes that purpose is field-specific: advocating for and exemplifying the inclusion of physical computing as part of the core identity of rhetorical studies, as in Halm and Rieder, or teaching praxis, as with Bree McGregor and John Jones’ pedagogically grounded essays on paper circuits and classroom crafting, respectively. Other times, chapters work across domains, such as Andrew Pilsch’s study of the “circuits of eloquence,” which offers a rhetorically grounded approach to machine poetics. Similarly, the section entitled “Text Mining as Critical Making” reorients practices that have often been cast as the domain of text-heavy computational digital humanities, showing the potential for this kind of work as a kind of maker practice. Aaron Beveridge and Nicholas Van Horn’s essay on big data analysis using the small, low-cost Raspberry Pi platform, for example, offers a concrete implementation of DIY data mining, while Ryan Omizo focuses on reprogramming as practice in his revision of an existing DHCommons project, the Faciloscope.

Kellie M. Gray and Steve Holmes’ essay on critical text mining and Cana Uluak Itchuaqiyaq’s work on “the neutrality of defaults” in text mining and technical communication scholarship both provide a clear connective tissue between critical textual practices and issues of inclusion and kinship. And many essays in this collection similarly foreground the important work of building communities: in particular, Wendi Sierra’s essay on indigenous representation in game design and the ways in which working together acts as a practice of bridging across expertises and worldviews, Kendall Gerdes’ essay on “solidarity machines,” and Michael J. Faris’ essay on queer world making. Sean Morey and M. Bawar Khan’s essay on augmented reality activism suggests, in addition, the notable role of place and space in the building of activist and monumental works around which communities can form and flourish.

As one would expect in a field working with material objects, the essays foreground bodies and embodiment—whether explicitly or implicitly. David M. Sheridan’s essay on the circulation of touch, for example, evokes the generative and experimental pleasures of visual and tactile/haptic experiences. In this vein, the chapter that stands out particularly for me is the first chapter, by Steven Hammer, on bodies and their relations. Drawing on disability and sound studies, Hammer’s essay acts as a kind of careful grief work that represents the best of what critical making is or could be when intertwined with an intimate world of bodily and affective experiences. Many of the essays in this collection similarly draw on the authors’ own experiences and practices, implicitly reminding readers of the false binary between scholarly, positivist “objectivity” and embodied close encounters with the material, the technological other.

Given their careful selection process that balances foregrounding specific projects with more general disciplinary concerns (and showing how these two are, in fact, intertwined and mutually constitutive), Faris and Holmes have created a book that should attract a wide audience interested in critical making as it is playing out in rhetoric and writing studies. These essays offer exemplars for graduate and early career scholars who might be interested in incorporating critical making into their work but lack models to look to for inspiration and exploration. Individual essays, thus, might be particularly useful in graduate classes on rhetorics of technology, digital pedagogy and methods,

and technical communication. I look forward to encountering more work from the editors and contributing scholars in this comprehensive, thoughtfully arranged edited collection.

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