MAKING MATTERS

Craft, Ethics, and New Materialist Rhetorics

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Introduction
RHETORIC IN THE MAKING

Ada Lovelace's story is by now a familiar one. The woman who is often described as the mother of computer programing was born of unique privilege in early nineteenth-century England. The daughter of mathematician Lady Byron and poet Lord Byron, a teenage Lovelace began working closely with engineer Charles Baggage on his analytical engine machine, and she quickly recognized its capacity to perform tasks beyond basic calculations. By her twenties, Lovelace had written what was, essentially, an algorithm for the machine to perform and just like that, the framework for modern-day computing was born (Fuegi and Frances 2003; Plant 1997). A lesser-known feature of Lovelace's story, however, is that her mathematical breakthrough was inspired, at least in part, by the Jacquard loom, a machine that automated weaving. A technological innovation in its own right, the Jacquard loom used punch cards—much like those used by the earliest computers—to store binary data that could create patterns for weaving (Burgess, Gollihue, and Pigg 2018; Fuegi and Frances 2003; Harlizius-Klück 2017; Plant 1997). For Lovelace, the similarities between computing and weaving seemed much more natural than they might to modern-day readers: as she explained it, "the Analytical Engine *weaves algebraical patterns* just as the Jacquard-loom weaves flowers and leaves" (qtd. in Fuegi and Frances 2003, 17; emphasis original). That is, at least as Lovelace saw it, the craft of weaving and the craft of coding were simply different sides of the same coin.

Lovelace's story highlights how the digital and physical are not as distinct as our everyday usages of those terms might imply. Rather, from its very origins, the digital has been rooted in and inspired by the physical: as Angela M. Haas (2007) notes, "digital" does not only refer to computer technologies but also "to our fingers, our digits, one of the primary ways (along with our ears and eyes) through which we make sense of the world and with which we write into the world" (84). Just look to the language of computing to see evidence of its material, woven roots: "Terms such as texture, pattern, layering, links, nodes, sampling, net,

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network, web, web weaver, and threads belong to a lexicon employed in both weaving and computing" (Gabriel and Wagmister 1997, 335). Although the increasing ubiquity of digital technologies might indicate that the material is less and less relevant, Lovelace's story suggests otherwise: The physical bleeds into the digital and vice versa, to the point where any distinctions between them erode entirely. Thus, to fully understand *how* we make, both online and offline, we must look to what we make with (and what, in turn, makes us).

That making happens not as the result of a single, independent actor but through the entanglements of actors (both human and other-than-human) is made plain by the work of the weaver at the loom (or the programmer at the keyboard), says Sadie Plant (1997). In both scenarios, she observes, "the user and the used are merely the perceptible elements, the identifiable components which are thrown up by—and serve also to contain—far more complex processes. The weaver and the loom, the surfer and the Net: none of them are anything without the engineerings which they both capture and perpetuate" (77). That is, individuals only become recognizable as such through the relationships they enter, and the larger outcomes they serve: the punch card, for example, is useless on its own, and only becomes significant as it encounters the loom, or the computer. Making, in other words, is just as relational as it is material.

For rhetoricians, then, the story of Ada Lovelace might serve as the perfect illustration of how other-than-human *things* become rhetorical in concert with humans as well with other nonhumans. Indeed, this has become an ever-more pressing question for the field. Though this material turn goes by many names—"object-oriented rhetoric" (Barnett 2015; Reid 2012), "posthuman rhetoric" (Boyle 2016; Dobrin, 2015), and "new materialism/ist" (Gries 2015; Micciche 2014) appear most often—it results from a fundamental interest in the question of rhetoric's materiality. This scholarship, which I refer to as *new materialist rhetorics*, argues that rhetoric is not an exclusively human product; rather, it emerges from the entanglements of actors, human or otherwise. Through its foregrounding of the material, this work has expanded the purview of rhetorical studies, producing important and provocative scholarship attuning us to "the non discursive (or not exclusively discursive) things that occasion rhetoric's emergence" (Barnett and Boyle 2016, 3). Considering rhetoric in these terms—that is, as neither entirely discursive nor entirely human—raises crucial questions about who or what counts as a rhetorical agent. Agency, in new materialist rhetorics, is not limited to humans alone but also extends to nonhumans, as rhetoric

emerges from their complex and varied encounters. New materialist rhetorics thus productively orient the field toward an understanding of agency as distributed among assemblages of human and nonhuman actors, offering particularly valuable insights as the interdependencies between humans and nonhuman writing technologies become increasingly visible. Just as Lovelace's machine demonstrated almost two hundred years ago, materiality matters.

There is another lesson rhetoricians might take away from Lovelace's story, however: While her innovative approach to computing suggests that making is a relational, material practice, it also points to the ways that power can structure, infuse, and inform that making. Lovelace's accomplishments are remarkable given the narrow role of women in nineteenth-century England. While Lovelace was no doubt a very privileged woman—her race, socioeconomic background, and high level of education certainly afforded her many resources—she also faced challenges. Most notably, she suffered from poor health throughout her life, "walking with crutches until the age of seventeen, and endlessly subject to the fits, swellings, faints, asthmatic attacks, and paralyses which were supposed to characterize hysteria," as Plant (1997) describes it (29).[1] She also chafed against her role as mother, dismissing her three children as "irksome *duties* & nothing more" (quoted in Plant 1997, 28; emphasis original). Navigating the world through her ill, female body and the expectations that followed it, Lovelace faced the intersection of power and materiality every day.

The same power dynamics that shaped Lovelace's life also, inevitably, shaped the machines Lovelace was inspired by and the machines her innovations made possible. Who gets to use these machines—the looms, the smartphones, the laptops—and for what reasons? Who, or what, do these machines serve, and who or what do they exclude? What do these machines make possible? These are important questions that new materialist rhetorics are well positioned to grapple with, even if this scholarship has yet to fully explore how power is interwoven within the material entanglements that make rhetoric possible. New materialist rhetorics foreground the complex of human and nonhuman agents that undergird any rhetorical act, but its current formulations tend to overlook the power inequities that persist within many of the assemblages that make rhetoric possible, even though power—like rhetoric itself—is complex, networked, and emergent.

The stakes are as high now as they were for Lovelace: While new composing technologies make the material, ecological nature of rhetorical agency ever more apparent, they also raise important questions about

how to theorize the political implications of such a radically reconfigured rhetorical agency. How, for example, do we account for power relations when agency is distributed between and emerges from affinities and ecologies? How do material things participate in inequitable relations and rhetorical outcomes? What are our ethical obligations as co-actors in an agentic assemblage? How, from a new materialist perspective, does political change occur? These are not mere hypotheticals: even a small sampling of recent cases suggests that the increasingly visible co-constituency of humans and nonhumans presents weighty ethical questions. Consider, for example, the political implications of an insurance company making use of wearable technology like Fitbit to gather health data from policyholders, rewarding "good" bodies with reduced premiums (Barlyn 2018); or of algorithmically authored bots spreading "fake news" and, arguably, shaping election results (Guilbeault and Woolley 2016; Mayer 2018); or of Google's search results for phrases like "black girls" returning racist, sexist, and even pornographic content (Noble 2018). New materialist rhetorics might see these instances as evidence of rhetoric's fluidity, a demonstration of how rhetorical agency results from human-machine encounters. But these examples also starkly demonstrate how these encounters are interlaced with, and sometimes work in service of, power relationships that can further marginalize already-marginalized people and communities.

It is essential, then, that new materialist rhetorics take up the difficult task of accounting for how power structures the material entanglements that make rhetoric possible, and to articulate what ethical rhetorical practice might look like in the face of such a radical reframing of rhetoric. To begin this work, I propose we begin exactly where Lovelace did: by looking to craft. Defined broadly as material practices of making, craft easily accepts the new materialist claim that rhetoric is fundamentally material. Like new materialist rhetorics, craft also understands that rhetorical action is not the product of a singular, human actor but rather a result of assemblages of varied human and nonhuman actors. Importantly, however, craft also calls attention to the emplaced, embodied qualities of rhetorical actors and the power relationships they must navigate. Craft's ability to illuminate the interdependence of materiality, power, and rhetorical action is thus significant for new materialist rhetorics.

Throughout this book, I explore how craft and new materialist rhetorics might inform one another in order to better account for the power relationships to which rhetoric is inextricably bound, and to recognize their ethical implications. While it shares new materialism's interest in

the rhetoricity of nonhuman things, craft recognizes the way that power is located in, produced by, and may be upended through materiality, and thus centers the ethical and political significance of the building, reordering, or disruption of assemblages. Even in its digital manifestations, craft foregrounds the material conditions from which rhetoric emerges. Accordingly, I suggest, we might imagine new materialist rhetorics as inherently *crafty*. Recasting new materialist rhetorics as craft recognizes rhetoric as a material practice that is both structured by power and carries significant ethical weight. This argument centers on what I am calling *craft agency*, which accepts the new materialist position that rhetorical agency results from the material intra-actions of diverse agents, human and otherwise. Craft agency, however, sees the assemblages that make rhetoric possible as intensely political, and thus locates ethical practice in the cultivation of reciprocal entanglements between agents that are both co-constitutive and materially specific. A means of grounding new materialism in the ethical and political considerations that are so central to craft, craft agency clarifies how power circulates and sometimes stagnates within assemblages of actors and provides tools to rectify that uneven distribution.

This book, then, explores how craft agency might articulate a clearer ethical and political framework for new materialist rhetorics. To better understand how new materialist rhetorics might be imagined as craft, I historicize and locate the concept of craft both within rhetorical history (chapter 2) and in the field of writing studies, specifically (chapter 6), so that we might have a clearer basis from which to integrate craft into our disciplinary frameworks and activities. I center my investigation around specific case studies: craftivism, the fibercraft website Ravelry, and the 2017 Women's March. These instances all highlight how a material, ecological understanding of rhetorical agency can still enact political change. The craft agency at work in these locations offers a model of how to create more equitable relationships through and with the embodied people and the material things that we interact with every day, specifically by modeling craft agency's ethics of entanglement. The pages that follow are my attempt to demonstrate how we humans work with and alongside things—nonhuman, sometimes digital, sometimes material—to enact change and craft our world.

Chapter 1, "Craft Agency: An Ethics for New Materialist Rhetorics," explores in depth the theoretical framing on which the rest of the book relies and more thoroughly details the concept of craft agency. I begin by outlining the current state of new materialist scholarship, noting particularly its implications for refiguring rhetorical agency. Because new

materialist rhetorics insist that agency is an emergent, fluid happening, many have criticized it as being ill-equipped to support political action or ethical practice. Yet, feminist scholarship (both in rhetorical studies and new materialism more widely) has a deep body of scholarship that has productively highlighted how materiality is bound to power relations. To reconcile the capacious sense of rhetorical agency articulated by new materialist rhetorics with the robust theories of power central to feminist scholarship, I propose relying on craft. Craft—like new materialist rhetorics—sees rhetoric as material and questions the viability of the traditionally bounded, causal rhetorical agent. Craft, however, understands the political significance of such an approach to agency, and can thus provide the robust ethical framework that new materialist rhetorics have yet to fully articulate.

From there, chapter 1 turns to the book's key argument and introduces craft agency. Craft agency describes how agency emerges from the material intra-actions of human and nonhuman, digital and material, entities. While craft agency recognizes the agency of nonhuman things, thus decentering humans, it also does not absolve humans of agentic responsibilities; it instead locates that responsibility in practices that foster reciprocal, equitable entanglements. By imagining new materialist rhetorical agency as craft agency, then, we are better equipped to locate an ethics of new materialism as well as imagine its political potentials.

Chapter 2, "Crafting History, Crafting Rhetoric: Locating Craft Agency," historicizes my attempts to recast new materialist rhetorics as craft. This chapter builds on the foundational concepts presented in the introduction and chapter 1, offering a detailed examination of the historical and theoretical origins of craft. Craft has always been politically significant, despite the tendency to dismiss it as domestic, amateurish frivolity. Craft foregrounds the relationships that make *making* possible, and, importantly, it recognizes those relationships as both human and nonhuman. For craft, the (re)arranging of material relationships often results in meaningful change. New materialist rhetorics, then, are craft, and reframing them as such only further emphasizes their political potential and ethical significance.

This relationship alone is not my sole reason for situating new materialist rhetorics as craft, however: Craft has notable and persistent ties to rhetorical theory. I thus devote the second half of chapter 2 to exploring how the interrelated concepts of *techne*, *mêtis*, and *kairos* all frame rhetoric as a situated, contingent craft that depends on a rich awareness of materiality, including and exceeding individual (human) bodies. Foundational to the earliest formulations of rhetoric, techne, mêtis, and

kairos are all grounded in responsivity, openness, and relationality, and value materiality while recognizing the body as a site of political resistance and ethical action. These terms thus inform an understanding of rhetoric's inherent craftiness and further suggest the need for new materialist rhetorics to adopt the ethics of craft agency.

I begin my in-depth exploration of specific instances of craft agency with chapter 3, "Craftivism and the Material Specificity of Rhetorical Action," which investigates craftivism, a recently coined term that describes the convergence of craft and activism. Through the deliberate cultivation of embodied, emplaced relationships with specific (nonhuman) composing tools and technologies, craftivists from the nineteenth century through today demonstrate the political potentials of craft agency. Often emerging from the lived experiences and practices of marginalized peoples, craftivism draws attention to the material intra-actions that can both create power inequities and the conditions for their reversal. Craftivism sees power as the result of entanglements between human and nonhuman actors and demonstrates how attention to assemblages can create meaningful political changes. In short, craftivism is fundamentally interested in the development, maintenance, and even refusal of material alliances for political goals.

Craftivism, I suggest, is a useful starting point for addressing criticisms of new materialist rhetorics because it not only functions from the position that rhetorical action is a product of complex intra-actions between a network of human and nonhuman actors, but also does so with an explicitly activist agenda that positions the body itself as a material interface. Through its insistence on dismantling the strict divisions between material agents, craftivism practices what I call an ethics of entanglement, which helps articulate how new materialist rhetorics might adopt coalitional politics. Through analysis of specific craftivist acts, I demonstrate how we might retheorize new materialist rhetorics as a means of restructuring power in productive and ethical ways.

I build from this focus on embodied materiality in chapter 4, "Manifesting Material Relationships Online through Ravelry," and explore what a politically attuned new materialist rhetoric might look like in spaces that, ostensibly, don't appear to be material at all: internet communities. Here, I turn to Ravelry, a digital crafting community for knitters, crocheters, and other fiber artists. With nearly eight million members—the vast majority of whom are women—Ravelry is both a social network and database, where users write, share, and edit patterns. Ravelry and its users are notable for their sophisticated awareness of materiality, as digital practices reflect and are reflected in "real life."

Drawing on surveys and interviews with users as well as an analysis of the site's interface, I argue that Ravelry demonstrates digital materiality in action, where the intra-actions between bodies, objects, and locations are made visible and are the condition for rhetorical agency.

Ravelry's radical digital materiality, I argue, can serve as a basis for theorizing what a politically aware, ethical new materialist rhetoric might look like online. While Ravelry is by no means a feminist utopia (users are overwhelming white, for example), the kind of relationships that emerge on Ravelry serve as a starting point for imagining craft agency online and challenge traditional understandings of what counts as political. Like craftivism, Ravelry highlights the necessity of craft agency's ethics of entanglement, but also demonstrates how that ethics depends on a reciprocity that dismantles boundaries between self and other, human and nonhuman, digital and material.

In chapter 5, "The Women's March, Digital-Material Assemblages, and Embodied Difference," I examine the worldwide Women's March protests that followed the inauguration of Donald Trump as US president in January 2017. The Women's March serves as an example of how an assemblage of co-constructed digital and material actors can perform political work. Organized through digital tools, the Women's March led to physical demonstrations worldwide, and its associated digital and physical artifacts (such as signs, pussyhats, social media posts, and bodies) make visible how craft agency's ethics of entanglement collapses agential boundaries. What's more, the Women's March demonstrates how the construction, maintenance, and disruption of these boundaries is intensely political. As such, the 2017 Women's March illustrates how the orchestration of physical and digital space, as well human and nonhuman actors, can make a significant political intervention.

The Women's March, however, did face criticism: Many trans women and women of color argued the march failed to listen to and include their voices and thus reproduced an exclusionary version of cis white feminist activism that ignores embodied difference. In this chapter, then, I argue that both the successes and failures of the Women's March signal the significance materiality holds for ethical, politically focused rhetoric. While the Women's March demonstrates the promise of a richly conceived materiality that values both digital and physical artifacts, it also serves as a warning that overlooking material differences will endanger any attempt at political action and the reciprocal ethics of entanglement it is grounded in.

I conclude with chapter 6, "Rescuing Craft for Writing Studies." In this final chapter, I turn to the discipline as a whole, exploring how

craft and craft agency might inform the work of the field, including our pedagogical, administrative, and scholarly activities. While craft was once a central term for the field, particularly during its maturation in the 1970s, writing studies has largely abandoned craft, casting it as a rhetorical artifact of process and expressivist pedagogies. Yet craft remains a productive metaphor for highlighting how composing is a material practice that results from the commingling of various human and nonhuman agents. I argue that a reclamation of craft, one that imagines it in these robustly rhetorical terms, can help secure an intellectual and disciplinary agenda for writing studies, one that redirects the field away from the focus on subjectivity that has for too long relegated writing studies (and writing itself) to its merely managerial or skills-based position within the university. An embrace of craft, and craft agency, instead moves us toward the interrogation of the agential intra-actions that make rhetoric possible and can thus ensure our disciplinary practices are attuned to the immediacies of the material constraints that structure educational and political life.

These chapters offer what I hope is a compelling reimagining of both new materialist rhetorics and craft that highlights their ethical and political possibilities. Grounded in craft's insistence that ethics lies in the material entanglements that enable rhetorical action, I believe that new materialism can productively interrogate and dismantle the powerful rhetorical assemblages that result in the continued marginalization of historically disenfranchised groups. The intentional structuring of affinities that is visible in craft practices and communities models a new materialist approach that gives materiality its due while also remaining vigilant to its political possibilities. Likewise, new materialist rhetorics offer craft the theoretical positioning to directly articulate the role of nonhumans as well the complex account of ecological agency that is always implicit in craft and can accordingly help to dismantle some of the craft community's more persistent problems; namely, its gendered, raced, and classed dimensions. Together, then, craft and new materialist rhetorics can generate an approach to rhetorical agency that recognizes the ethical and political consequences of forming, dissolving, or rearranging assemblages of various human and nonhuman actors.

Ada Lovelace might thus offer one final lesson to rhetoricians: When we acknowledge that making is not just material but also relational, and thus ethical, we create the conditions for new ways of being. Teshome Gabriel and Fabian Wagmister note that "weaving, as a practice, is a matter of linkage—a connectedness that extends the boundaries of the individual. . . . Computer technology also opens up the possibility of a

digital weaving that acknowledges this sense of connection" (Gabriel and Wagmister 1997, 337), but I would argue that the interrelatedness they describe is inherent to all making. Making, that is, "connects and reconnects bodies, tools, and surroundings in ways that create new ways of moving and being" (Burgess, Gollihue, and Pigg 2018, sec 3.2, para. 3). 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. Understanding how these relationships develop, change, and discontinue offers a way toward the creation of more equitable conditions for rhetorical action.