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Chelsea A. Lonsdale

Eastern Michigan University, clonsdal@emich.edu

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A Craft-Based Composition: Expanding and Foregrounding Materiality in Writing

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First Advisor

Derek Mueller

Second Advisor

Bernard A. Miller

A CRAFT-BASED COMPOSITION: EXPANDING AND FOREGROUNDING
MATERIALITY IN WRITING

By

Chelsea A. Lonsdale

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Introduction

A friend asked me recently what craft had to do with composition. I responded with a question: have you ever made anything? As Composition Studies has moved towards the awareness, recognition, and integration of materiality, I wonder where the concept of craft is located in relation to that shift. Craftsmanship is intrinsically tied to materials and to the act of making something, and yet it is a term that has not yet taken hold in Composition Studies. Is this because craft is not present in the classroom, or have we failed to take notice, despite composition's craft-like practices and pedagogy? The process of making craft objects is materially apparent; that is to say that a craftsman has a direct relationship with their materials, the techniques needed to manipulate those materials, and a desired function that the craftsman expects as an outcome. By applying craft logic to the act of composing, the materiality of written communication is brought to life through inquiry based work and assembly. As both a form and function of education, craft logic facilitates a multifaceted approach to learning.¹

Two summers ago, I lived next door to my landlord. She is a quirky and eclectic woman, and well informed on the subject of craft. She has been carving stamps for many years, working with watercolor and various forms of printmaking and mixed media work. What interests me about her work is that it is accessible. That summer, I learned how to carve stamps in her backyard. She let me experiment with her own collection, trying out different stamps and noticing the textures and

¹ Craft logic is both a form and function of education in that it is both a way of learning, as well as an outcome of the educational system. Making something is both a heuristic method of acquiring experience-based knowledge, as well as a set of transferrable skills produced through practice.

details. Certain surfaces are easier to carve on than others, she told me, and materials aren't easy to find. She recommended a few carving blocks to try, and I placed an order online. My first stamp was carved on a Magic Eraser. I made a stamp of my daughter's name. This type of work may be qualified as fine art because of its primarily aesthetic purpose. However, I believe that stamp-carving is also craft: a material-based, creative process that is accessible, teachable, and usable. The Greek word *techné* embodies this understanding of craft: *techné*, or the act of making something, surpasses the distinction between a gallery painting and hobby, instead pointing to mindful, habitual, and practical theory as a foundation for success. Craft foregrounds materiality and the visibility of process in writing as heuristically driven. Craft logic, a term I will use throughout this paper, is to be used as a way of learning, knowing, and doing; a method that invites the maker to explore the process of creating, highlighting the relationships between materiality, function, and technique associated (in this case) with the composing process. There is not one single definition of craft offered here: craft is the act of making something; it embodies evaluative, generative, and inventive processes. Craft is skill put into action, learned through practice and performed through both the maker and the user's active participation, giving careful consideration to materials and intended outcomes as part of both the process and the completed piece.

An Important Note

What motivates this paper is a direct, localized experience in my undergraduate program of study. It is a small gesture that addresses a time when

composition felt flat; where craft was absent from the composing process and writing felt routine. It is also inspired by the desire to build my own pedagogical foundation, asking how craft might help me move into a new role as a graduate student and writing instructor. This is very much a writing-to-learn experience for me, and as a new student in Composition and Rhetoric, I recognize my limitations (this too is of material value). Therefore, I aim to create something that reflects a foundation of interest and intrigue, more so than expertise: something that will supply a theoretical framework by which to teach. I view myself as situated against an expansive background of Composition scholarship in which craft has seemingly gone unnoticed, and I hope to (re)establish craft as a useful term that connects material consciousness with pedagogy and writing studies. In this thesis, I argue for an understanding of composition that believes in writing as having depth that extends beyond the papers themselves. In limiting what counts as valuable material, process is cut short, thus restricting the expanse of written work. This is an attempt to work through how craft logic enriches current approaches to Composition.

Process, Inquiry, and Invention: Framework

The process of making something firsthand makes craft compelling. As we buy into invisible processes for most of what we use every day, the notion of being integrated into the actual making of something is, to a certain extent, unfamiliar. When I buy a scarf at the store instead of knitting one myself, the process by which that scarf was made is invisible to my eye. It is likely that the scarf was mass-produced on a machine. While students aren't producing writing in this same

manner, much of what we use on a daily basis is subject to the minimization of process in terms of how it was made. It is therefore important that composition makes a space for addressing the notion of the writer as maker: writing, a process based activity, is concerned with the author as a craftsman who oversees his or her work from beginning to end. The paper itself is not the point of origin for composition. Composing begins long before the printed, completed draft is turned in. Craft logic brings to composition a holistic approach, reminding us that the practice of making involves the whole writer, as well as an extensive list of plausible materials with numerous ends, all of which should be cared for throughout the process of composing.

Another key component of craft logic is inquiry: an investigation of available materials and their properties, and the skills used to combine these materials in order to create something of substance. For writing, these materials could be grammatical, they could be abstract influences, they could be the paper and pen, the computer, the room, research notes, a conversation, collected data, or physical artifacts. What is important here is that these materials are not flat; they all present a complex network of relationships that impact the composing process. Jody Shipka, in her book *Towards a Composition Made Whole*, explains how the inquiry-based approach asks students to “consider how communicative objectives might be accomplished in any number of ways, depending on how they decide to contextualize, frame, or situate their response to those objectives” (101). Craft brings these communicative objectives to the forefront of composition as being developed through inquiry: writers ask questions and consider possible outcomes

while exploring the material components of research and assembly. Most important is that the writer is an active participant in this process.

Inquiry, when coupled with invention, situates the writer as maker or innovator. Shipka infers that by positioning invention as an important segment of composing, “questions associated with materiality and the delivery, reception, and circulation of texts, objects, and events are less likely to be viewed as separate from or incidental to the means and methods of production, but more likely as integral parts of the invention and production process” (101). By placing problem-solving alongside meaning-making, the act of production itself which notably operates within an open-knowledge system activates a more comprehensive model of composing. Richard Sennett, author of *The Craftsman*, describes the sustainability of this open-knowledge system. For both crafting and composing, skill is not born from a workmanship of certainty (Schwalbe), but rather from a rhythm of (re)solving and re-opening (Sennett 38) that involves continuous effort and care. Michael Schwalbe, through his research on the nature of skill in craft and trade, describes woodturning as having an element of risk. In contrast to the workmanship of certainty, which consistently produces the same result, a workmanship of risk depends on the craftsman’s applied skill and attention, or mindfulness, resulting in what he describes as “the habit of taking care in the work process” and “opportunities for surprise and invention” (110). Writing, when framed with craft logic, becomes a generative process with many possible ends.

Why Craft? Why Now?

This call for an expansion of materiality and process acknowledges the current invisibility and underdevelopment of craft logic in writing studies. What composition risks without incorporating craft is the disappearance of materiality in favor of routine: when the process of writing is under-addressed, limited to a single paper, a single assignment with a number of required sources, or as a final draft turned in for a grade, the writer's development is compromised through the minimization of acceptable or acknowledged influences, detached from its place in the context of the writer's reality. This thesis is a rescue effort, an attempt to re-open the doors for dialogue, to raise questions about what constitutes the materiality of writing and how those questions might reposition the writing process as craft-based.

Understanding Why We Write

It is necessary to consider the materiality of writing as it pertains to both the process and the end result, to approach composition through a craft logic approach. To ignore these material components, or to narrow composition's value as being located in only the finished product "suggests that the student's words alone are what count... thereby isolating an education in writing from the means of production and delivery" (Trimbur 189). Even in working through multiple drafts, notes, and outlines, these steps are eventually discarded in favor of a polished version that assumes an inspired moment, thereby displacing the process of composing. Judith Hadler-Sullivan in her essay "The Phenomenology of Process,"

inserts the notion of language as a point of reference rather than a point of origin: “Language is a gauge of students’ world-relatedness, their relation to Being” (51). Language is a way of knowing one’s self and one’s relationship to the world. Words alone do not adequately represent an idea; they do not accurately reflect the breadth of research.

Craftsmanship gives great value to the means by which something is produced, with crafted objects in their completed form containing evidence of the maker’s hands; craft is ultimately concerned with making as an *active process*. This leads me to a question that Ian Bogost asks in *Alien Phenomenology’s* chapter on “Carpentry”: why do we write? While the academic essay is designed to serve the academic community as the primary means of scholarship, John Trimbur offers a material definition of the writer “maker[s] of the means of producing meaning out of the available resources of representation” (Trimbur, qtd. in Shipka, 35). Trimbur points to a physical understanding of the writing process, which I think requires the reframing of expectation; in other words, what Bogost addresses is the notion of use: what do we expect from our writing? How might craft logic enable writers to compose more transparently, leaving evidence of their material trails within their work?

Materiality: Stretching the Boundaries of Composition

Anne Wysocki, in her introduction to *Writing New Media*, lays out an expansive “web” of relations that composition is stationed within: “writing, like all literature practices, only exists because it functions, circulates, shifts, and has

varying value and weight within complexly articulated social, cultural, political, educational, religious, economic, familial, ecological, political, artistic, affective, and technological webs” (2). This refers to both where composition is located and what is included within it. She later uses Bruce Horner’s list of “the materiality of writing” to illustrate what this can look like both in the composition classroom and for writers. I have shared excerpts from this list here:

[I]t might be understood more broadly to refer to a host of socioeconomic conditions contributing to writing production, such as the availability of certain kinds of schooling, number of students in writing classes, student financial aid (and the need for it), public health, access to time and quiet... the materiality of writing may be understood to include social relations – say, between students and teachers in the writing classroom; relations of race, gender, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, generation, and region, among others within the classroom and/or the larger social realm; “personal” (e.g., familial) relations – and the lived experience of the history of these relations to which any act of writing may be seen as responding. The materiality of the work of teaching composition can be understood to include physical classroom conditions (size, heating, furniture, lighting, number of students); the teacher’s physical health and office and library resources; clerical support, teaching load, salary and job security;... characteristics of the student population;... and teachers’ lived experience of the history of those relations to which any act of teaching may be seen as responding (Horner, qtd. in Wysocki, 4).

While this shortened list is by no means exhaustive, it brings light to the conceptual, or non-physical, materiality that contributes to writing. Like craft, we are able to see and recognize certain physical materials (paper, pen, computers, printed sources); however, the more abstract social and situational influences are less visible. Sennett suggests the need to redefine material culture more inclusively “by asking – though the answers are anything but simple – what the process of making concrete things reveals to us about ourselves” (8). This question acknowledges many of the items in Horner’s list, following Robert Johnson’s understanding of craft knowledge as including the making of products, processes, selves, and cultures, which Johnson associates with the outcomes of writing studies (684). The materials used in composing, as well as in craft, are not limited to tangible, physical matter.

Alongside Horner and Wysocki, Sennett points out the potential impact of social and economic conditions on creating: “[these] conditions... often stand in the way of the craftsman’s discipline and commitment: schools may fail to provide the tools to do good work, and workplaces may not truly value the aspiration for quality” (9). Similarly, when quality is measured by correct grammar usage, proper punctuation, or a print-based paper that meets page length requirements, that model of assessment fails to conceptualize writing for what it really is. It is important to understand what constitutes materiality in composition, as with craft it is somewhat easier to locate these elements because of craft’s physical qualities. Acknowledging the potential materials in composition also raises the question of what writing and the teaching of writing might look like so as to address these material elements. Shipka and Trimbур suggest that “locat[ing] the composer in the

labor process, in relation to the available means of production” (Trimbur, qtd. in Shipka, 35) is essential to understanding the writer as always situated amongst a thick backdrop of both abstract and concrete influences that both accommodate and resist the act of making anything.

Wysocki asks how the making of texts might be rethought so as to “highlight their materiality” (Wysocki 15), encouraging both writers and instructors of writing to ask questions, to participate directly in the process of making rather than speculating on what might be possible without making time to touch, to try, to think critically about the task at hand, why it has been assigned or why it should be pursued. This parallels an argument that Howard Risatti makes in *A Theory of Craft*, where he suggests that craft objects “individually and as a class, must be seen as a continuing reflection in the present of this ancient and timeless struggle that mankind has waged with nature for survival” (56). Like these craft objects, writing is reflective of social, cultural, historical, political, and personal influences, both in process and in the end result. These philosophical representations are manifest in physical form, namely through available materials, but also in the selection of materials by writers.

Looking to craft logic and its emphasis on materiality affords us the opportunity to reconsider the visibility of composition’s materials through participation, exploration, and innovation; the material sources in composition extend far beyond the printed page. I have included two photo collages as evidence of this expansion in my own work (see Photo Documentary).

Use

Craft is a process in which material knowledge and manual skill provide for exploration, invention, and the act of making, but more specifically, the act of making *something that is meant to be used*. The idea of use carries several definitions as well: is use conceptual or physical? What are the potential uses of what we make? Where is the maker located in relation to the finished piece? Why do we write instead of communicating through another medium? What does it mean for writing to be used, particularly within the constraints of a college classroom?

When I visualize what goes into the making of something, I imagine my friend who makes jewelry: she gets beads from her mother's jewelry shop in Grand Haven. She uses an in-home studio, which might consist of a desk in her living room placed in front of a long vertical window, or her farm-style dining table that allows for more space. She designs collections based on certain materials and styles, and sells her jewelry online and by partnering with local businesses for space in their brick and mortar stores. A large portion of her sales comes from word of mouth; several of her former coworkers wear her jewelry when they are at work. Because academic writing isn't usually experienced in the same way as jewelry, or something with a direct physical application (ie: jewelry can be worn), it is difficult to constitute a material idea of use for written work. Circulation may be a better term for what can be applied to text, as it acknowledges the often-overlooked part of student writing, as most writing ends in a paper submitted for a grade rather than publication or dissemination. What craft does for composition under the guise of use

is to raise the question of delivery within the classroom and beyond, and how understanding the potential uses of written work shapes the process of composing.

To craft is not a passive act; even when the craftsman creates only for himself, there is great care that goes into production, both aesthetically and functionally. Crawford describes craftsmanship as “consist[ing] simply in the desire to do something well, for its own sake” (14). While this definition of craftsmanship activates the maker’s approach, it does not directly address the role of the user, or audience. Both craft and composition can have an audience of one: imagine journal writing or knitting a blanket for one’s self to keep warm. In engaging with the notion of “use” as it pertains to craft and composition, a specific audience is not mandatory. However, there is generally a specific use, or function, in mind as one is making something. Shipka refers to these goals, concerned with outcome, as communicative objectives. This resembles Risatti’s taxonomy of craft that breaks craft objects down into categories based on physical function. Use, however, is not limited to what a made thing is *supposed* to do, it is also open to what something *can* do; this potential is not in possession of only the maker or the user and is therefore open-ended, though still dependent on the quality and properties of what has been made.

Johnson includes in his essay a quote from Joseph Dunne that describes *techné* as a “generative source (arche) of useful things” in which the maker can not only accomplish their objectives, but can also give an account of their procedures (Dunne, qtd. in Johnson, 678). Shipka outlines some examples of what these accounts might look like (see Chapter 3, “A Framework for Action”). Possible considerations include outlining or responding to the source of invention (what was

the motivation?), material constraints, distractions, unexpected encounters, concerns, or accomplishments. This method re-conceptualizes research as having many dimensions, giving depth to the writing process and consequently, the final product. Certainly there is the reality that published papers as a genre, for example, do not include an attached account of the process by which they were made.

Understanding the act of making as generating more than just a product demands the reconfiguring of composition at the instructional level, building a curriculum that viewed research and knowledge as having material properties. I imagine this taking shape through classroom dialogue that privileges goals and various means of accomplishing them, an assessment of accessible materials, and an emphasis on *use* which, given the limitations of undergraduate writing classes, requires a shift in where papers meet their end: opportunities for publication, research fairs, multigenre projects, portfolios, and web-based assignments are examples of putting student writing into action.

Genre and Craft: What Writing Does

In "Genre as Social Action," Carolyn R. Miller states, "that a rhetorical sound definition of genre must be centered not on the substance or the form of discourse but on the action it is used to accomplish" (151). This action "must involve situation and motive" (151). This is similar to craft in that the process of making something requires both motivation and formation on behalf of the maker. This can be broken down into two strands: the question of why something is being made, and the process it undergoes in order to be made. Johnson explains this motivation for making as having four parts: the efficient, or the reason for making; the material

(matter); the formal, or the source of change (the form it takes, the transformation), and the end. The focus is essentially always moving towards an end – the product itself and its uses – for composition this would be the essay or completed text, its delivery, and mode of circulation (Yancey). However, while composition is process-oriented, it is not process alone that determines genre. Following Miller's definition, it is process (where materiality is most visible), delivery (form) and *action* (use) that determines genre: this is evidence of mindful composing, understanding the applied function of an object (text), or what the text *does or could do*, that matters. Aligning itself with craft, then, composition is concerned with the function(s) of a text. This raises the question of what texts *do*, what sort of life they have both in and beyond their physical completion.

Miller's article positions genre as linked explicitly to the social sphere, thus acknowledging the social influences on all types of making, be it fine arts (intended to signify meaning through imagery), craft (objects made to have physical function), writing (to communicate), or other forms of media. I'm interested in how Miller appeals to the non-visible materials that contribute to the act of making, bringing these overlooked material influences to attention. Looking into motive and situation, Miller acknowledges the same web of relations that Wysocki, Horner, and Shipka speak to in their own respective work. Resembling craft, writing comprehension is found in experience, thus engaging the material sources as part of the making process. However, both craft and writing are also concerned with the experience of the user, or audience, and how that audience perceives the text. Miller speaks of an internal dynamic that binds several forces together, quoting Bitzer's

definition of a rhetorical situation as a “complex of persons, events, objects, and relations” (Bitzer, qtd. in Miller, 152). Miller explains, “The classification I am advocating is, in effect, ethnomethodological: it seeks to explicate the knowledge that practice creates” (155). Geoffrey Sirc also responds to the notion of life beyond completion for written work, in that use value is found in the idea something represents or the statement it makes rather than in its “fetishized status,” therefore grounding writing in a position of use (Sirc 22). Establishing composition as concerned with its use(s) and function(s) is craft logic.

Miller’s work in genre studies also points to the open ends that things, or texts, can have: while the ultimate identity-category of composition is found in the action associated with a specific end or objective, recognizing the material components of a composition as one would do with craft builds a knowledge that is transferable. The ability to recognize the material aspects of a thing and how they are linked, be it a physical object or a written work, is what enables the successful transition between genres, between disciplines, and between different composing situations. This skill fosters something unique to craft, which as Schwalbe speaks to, is freedom to control one’s own work. This same point is addressed by Jody Shipka in what she calls the writer’s “metacommunicative awareness,” which, like the craftsman, is a frame of mind that foregrounds conscious choice and flexibility based on material qualities and genre conventions, placing control in the hands of the writer to determine “the purposes of their work and how best to achieve them” (87). Craft is important in Miller’s theory because we as writers and literacy advocates need to think critically about what materials and designs are available, what could

be available, and what is possible, exploring new genres to satisfy academia and to truly engage the five canons of rhetoric to produce texts that are useful and heuristically valuable.

Knowledge

Composition can take from craft the division of knowledge into two parts: technical knowledge, and technical manual skill. The first of these could include grammar, syntax, citations, data collection, working knowledge of a word processing system, access to computer technology, classroom lessons, and academic discourse. The second type of knowledge, technical manual skill, comes from practice: understanding how these materials come together to form, in the case of composition, an essay. Risatti describes this as *techné*: “the knowledge of *how* to do or make things (as opposed to *why* things are the way they are)” (99). Technical knowledge is concerned with factual information, and technical manual skill is knowledge “acquired through practice or action, rather than theory or application” (100). In order to make something, one needs technical knowledge (concerning the characteristics of a material) combined with the manual skill of assembling with the selected materials. This involves a certain amount of risk and practice – learning by doing.

Craft works heuristically in that it teaches the writer, or maker, to pursue a level of material consciousness in every composing situation. This enables the writer, as Shipka says, to recognize the best ways to accomplish their

communicative objectives. Craft logic then becomes transferrable into any composing situation, be it an essay, ceramics, a lab report, sociological research, a painting, or a project portfolio (obviously just to name a few). Knowledge transfer works when the process of composing is made visible through craft logic: the material conditions, objectives, techniques, and the relationships between these points are recognized and valued as the threads of making. When the process of creating is kept hidden by the goal of a perfected end, the potential for knowledge transfer as a skill in itself is diminished. While the process itself is never concrete, its fluidity is still contained enough so that it foregrounds a procedural base: craft logic permits the exchange of ideas and (re)considerations within the natural boundaries of available materials; this relational network becomes a familiar system, or environment, that can be located and navigated like a map. That map provides access to several routes that go from point A to point B: once a writer has learned how to choose the best route through material assessment, that skill becomes relevant in any composing situation.

Shipka's "Mediated Activity-Based Multimodal Framework"

I want to return to the question in my introduction: have you ever made something? Moreover, have you ever told a story about something you've made? Have you ever had to account for external influences, the internal struggles with material limitations, or repeated failures as part of that process? I took a ceramics class in high school, and in Ceramics I, you do not get to use the pottery wheel

during regular class hours. I was determined to use the pottery wheel (much like I was determined to learn ballet as a child so I could have *pointe* shoes), and I stayed after school as often as I could, hoping for a chance to practice because throwing clay onto a wheel is much harder than it looks. While the clay we had access to at school was mostly leftovers, wetted, re-wetted, and re-formed into a new ball, it was mostly functional. However, I could never get it to go on the wheel. I tried for weeks, endlessly frustrated, until one day I finally got it going – and then someone in my class threw a piece of their clay at my wheel and knocked my piece off, completely destroying my feeble attempt. I share this story for several reasons: one, because there is an element of risk involved with manual work. Two, because it's impossible to throw a perfect clay bowl on the first try (or the second, third, tenth, hundredth...).

When Matthew Crawford speaks of manual disconnect in his book *Shop Class as Soulcraft*, I am reminded of a common assumption that good writing, or good craft objects, are made without mistake. This is an illusion, albeit one that I think disheartens students (I can attest to this through my own recent experience). Writing papers is sometimes hard. Writing papers with the expectation that eventually there will be no rough draft (or maybe only one or two drafts) is even harder. This thesis alone has been through *at least* ten revisions. Crawford's emphasis on manual work requires understanding the writing process as more concrete. Acknowledging that the conceptual elements of composition are intrinsically linked to the physical brings a greater stage upon which writing can be conceptualized and practiced.

Jody Shipka explains her pedagogical choices in *Toward A Composition Made Whole*, which exemplifies craft logic:

[B]y creating courses that increase the meditational means (or suite of tools) students are able to employ in their work we help to underscore for students the fundamentally multimodal aspects of all communicative practice.

Creating courses that provide students with a greater awareness of, *and ability to reflect on*, the ways in which writing intersects and interacts with other semiotic systems does not necessarily make for more work. (137)

Shipka calls this approach “an activity-based multimodal framework,” reminding both instructors of writing and writers themselves that language works alongside other activity systems to “mediate communicative practice” (88). Like Shipka, Hadler-Sullivan brings the classroom into play as “the ideal place to gauge and appreciate students’ openness, uncovering, and saying” (Hadler-Sullivan 56), reminding us that “Language, in making manifest the being of their world, gives students both possession of that world and possibilities for their own being in a world beyond the barriers of their secure but closed thicket of experience – a place that they, even by their own exclusion, do relate to and are immersed in” (56). What is happening, here, is a (re)vision of composition through the lens of craft, reminding us of the interplay in the writing process that involves repetition, failure, experimentation, and physical activity.

Taking this concept all the way to the point of delivery, Shipka asserts that the way texts are received will depend on how these other activity systems are

treated in the process of making (137). This pedagogical shift, focusing on analysis of context, purpose, and properties of a text in relation to the writer, is exactly what Risatti's definition of *techné* calls for. Using craft logic to study and produce text emphasizes the *how* ahead of the *why*, addressing what Shipka asserts to be the true nature of communication: "communicative practices are multimodal and that people are rarely, if ever, just writing or making meaning with words on a page" (138).

Shipka focuses on multigenre, multidimensional assignments as an alternative to texts that fail to represent their material qualities in print form. She also employs extensive reflection so as to hold student writers accountable for their decisions throughout the composing process. Shipka appears to be working towards an idea of rhetorical thought that expands beyond a "double-spaced, alphabetic text composed with a twelve-point font, printed on white 8 ½ x 11" paper" (140). This isn't to displace the academic essay as insufficient, but rather to see how rhetoric functions in other modes of activity, and to address how that might be applied to the academic essay as *one* form of writing.

Moving Towards Multimodality

Geoffrey Sirc, in response to an aura of dissatisfaction that he observes in writing studies scholarship, notes that academic writing appears to be static in that "we haven't really evolved an idea of writing that fully reflects the splendor of the medium" (*English Composition as a Happening* 9). The dissatisfaction that Sirc observes stems from the limitations caused by linear, print-based writing and how it

is integrated into the classroom. Writing, and writing instruction, that fails to consider a full understanding of materiality creates an inaccessible world: if what Matthew Crawford says is true, that “real knowledge arises through confrontations with real things,” writing needs to be grounded in something more than word-based representations of research that flatten the context from which they are built.

Process itself needs to be understood as a course of action, rather than a series of isolated steps (see Shipka 106). As in craft, while there may be a pattern or a set of instructions to follow for a writing assignment, reducing process to a list of simple steps results in routinized practice, a lack of connection between hand and mind, and the ignorance of how experience (and consequently, knowledge) is actually procured. Shipka explains what “a composition made whole” looks like: “students may still be afforded opportunities to consider how they are continually positioned in ways that require them to read, respond to, align with – in short, to negotiate – a steaming interplay of words, images, sounds, scents, and movements” (21). This is what she calls the multimodality of everyday: “If we acknowledge that literacy and learning have always been multimodal... the challenge becomes one of finding ways to attend more fully – in our scholarship, research, as well as our teaching – to the material, multimodal aspects of all communicative practice” (21). In essence, writing – in both process and product – is always, already multimodal.

The Separation of Thinking from Doing

As I look at Crawford’s *Shop Class as Soulcraft* sitting next to Shipka’s book, I see overlap between Shipka’s call to rethink composition as less conservative and

more liberal in terms of what we treat as “writing,” and Crawford’s chapter titled “The Separation of Thinking from Doing.” What both Shipka and Crawford suggest is that isolating writing from its process is what degrades the value of work, what makes work feel monotonous, and what undermines practice-based skill development. What craft logic enables is the reuniting of the mental and the manual, merging the cognitive process with material consciousness in order to form a more complete model of composition, one that truly reflects the writer as an individual working within the context of his or her work.

Shipka suggests that the absence of an analysis of classroom experience is one contributing factor to the separation of thinking from doing that Crawford speaks of. While students learn writing in a classroom space, there is not adequate evaluation of that space and how it contributes to the writing process. Returning to an undergraduate course that she took, Shipka points out that “members of that 1995 course never received assignments that asked us to analyze the multimodal dimensions of classroom interactions or to reflect on the specific role that talk, text, scents, visuals, gestures, and movements played in the texts we read. Yet I would argue that these were all viable communicative modes” (20). When assignments are given without substantial attention to context and function, we have what Crawford labels as a fragmentation of the post-industrial economy “in which everyone will deal only in abstractions” (Crawford 44). What Crawford illustrates is the assembly line model in which workers are given specific, concentrated tasks instead of viewing the product (or skill) as a whole; as Crawford says on the nature of this fracture, “trafficking in abstractions is not the same as thinking” (44). Crawford’s

illustrated criticism of the separation of thinking from doing illuminates Shipka's desire to rebuild composition more holistically, allowing for the writer to exist as an individual that maintains complex relationships with his or her world.

One consequence of the separation of thinking from doing is the struggle to locate one's objectives within the composing process. By including the classroom influences as well as items from Horner's list of what constitutes materiality in writing, thinking and doing become complementary, using cognition and manual work to acknowledge the small goals and decisions that take place within the writing process. Enabling writers to locate and respond to the communicative objectives that Shipka addresses is essential.

Accessibility Through Transparency

Craft logic isn't shop class, or a fine arts studio. It is active participation and engagement at every phase of the making process, so as to carry a sense of materiality and workmanship from the earliest stage (motive or essence) through delivery (the dual-ended *telos*).² Craft makes learning accessible; as Crawford says, "We want to feel that our world is intelligible, so we can be responsible for it" (8). Rather than polished ends that conceal the notion of *work*, craft calls for access, for human and practice-based theory: something that is knowable, do-able, work-able; something grounded instead of abstract. Craft logic is "focused engagement with our

² Robert Johnson, in "Craft Knowledge: Of Disciplinarity in Writing Studies," outlines Aristotle's four causes of making: the efficient (motive or essence), material (what it is), formal (the form or source of change) and the end(s) (the product and its uses).

material things" (Crawford 7), in which work is meaningful because it is genuinely useful. Craft takes pieces that are already part of a system and puts them into conversation with one another. By making transparent the process of composing, writing becomes praxis. Craft necessitates the visibility of how writing happens.

While craft logic is primarily a tool for writers, it is also in the hands of writing instructors to facilitate craft logic as part of the writing studies curriculum. When Shipka suggests that student writers maintain responsibility for choosing their "purposes, potentials, and contexts of their work (88), these writers need a system that supports and enables them to explore, engage, and invent. Craft logic provides a heuristic parallel for writing; through the lens of craftsmanship, a curriculum like Shipka's is accessible. Student writers, especially those learning academic writing as a new genre, need guidance and support in asking questions and exploring materials. Craft provides a hands-on, practice-based approach to facilitating innovation, and consequently stronger writing.

The difficulty in recognizing and discussing goals, functions, and purposes in writing, I would imagine, is common in both First-Year Writing as well as for experienced writers who are composing in unfamiliar genres. Composition shares this challenge with craft; the craftsman needs to be able to plan according to his objectives, but when those objectives are unclear or the writer lacks the necessary skills to describe them, the composing process comes to a halt. When I say that craft is concerned with accessibility, I mean that craft foregrounds participation and adaptability. By emphasizing "brick-laying" rather than "decision-making" (Taylor qtd. in Crawford, 46), the writer's process is fractured into tangible parts, of which

the writer assumes responsibility for arranging. By placing the bricks, so to speak, in the hands of the writer and providing adequate space for inquiry, risk, and reflection, the writer is then able to practice, with support, finding and discussing their objectives *prior* to composing. Without knowing what to do with one's materials, how they work, what functions they can perform, and what tools are needed to use them, the functional and rhetorical objectives remain abstract, thus displacing the writer's agency. Craft-logic acknowledges this gap, takes the known parts and asks how they might fit together through guided determination of objectives.

Assembly: Remediating Research

Matthew Crawford's first chapter, "A Brief Case for the Useful Arts," brings up an interesting point: "The moral significance of work that grapples with material things may lie in the simple fact that such things lie outside the self" (16). While composition is largely concerned with the writer-as-author, many of the materials in composition involve the writer as a meeting place or vehicle, rather than locating their origins *within* the individual. Crawford's illustrates this concept using a washing machine: we use it to wash our clothes. However, when it breaks, the diagnostic question is not what *we* need (clean clothes!) and rather what *it* needs (a new part?). This raises an important question: what happens when writers view themselves as vehicles for communication; when writers are situated as processors, or users, of materials (research, data, socio-cultural influences, physical matter)? If the materials involved in composition exist independently of the writer, the writer

is a conscious medium, building something with these materials through language and arrangement, or remediation: taking pieces and creating something new from them. In carving stamps, knitting a scarf, or writing this essay, most of what I have to work with exists independently – out of my own will – but as a craftsman I am concerned with collecting materials, the properties of those materials, and how to work with them, which refers to technique – Risatti’s technical knowledge, and technical manual skill. Remember that craft is generative. Writing is generative. This requires a certain degree of exploration and investigation that moves us toward the act of invention as response to what our materials need: this is assembly.

Returning to Risatti’s idea of *techné* that places the question of *how* in front of *why* things are made, craft logic has to be connected with the physical: the hand and mind. When the writing process is reduced to purely mental activity, in our heads rather than within our worlds, a large portion of what composition is concerned with, is ignored. As I’ve been writing, I’ve been asked for concrete examples in order to better ground my reader. I have learned that I don’t always feel safe including personal writing in a research paper. Better yet, I haven’t quite figured out how this material could be included most effectively. However, I feel that this exact situation weighs on the future of writing studies, particularly in terms of understanding the implications of Bogost’s question: why do we write instead of using some other mode of communication?

What do we stand to gain through writing, if writing does not give a full understanding of materiality its dues? Why am I writing instead of handing in a knit scarf, or using a collection of published blog entries where I am more comfortable

writing-to-learn? Bogost makes clear that academic scholarship is exemplified through writing. But what does academic writing look like that embraces rather than conceals evidence of process? How do we avoid the “increasing manual disengagement” that Crawford warns of (4)? I can easily respond to Risatti’s question of *why* this paper was written: because it is my Honors Thesis, and because I think craft logic is a worthwhile perspective to explore, especially as it relates to writing and the teaching of writing. There is also, however, Risatti’s question of *how*: how did I write this paper? This question receives a more complex response: numerous overdue library fines, excessive use of the MelCat interlibrary loan system, a drawing pad, my daughter’s father’s knowledge of tea. A new fascination with zines, trips to the Detroit Institute of Arts with my daughter and her friend to make jewelry, and lessons in drinking a lot less coffee. Using the large computer screens in the library, forced distractions (non-school reading!), and a lot of (self-applied) pressure to *get it right*.

What I mean to say, is that there are questions about materiality that go unaddressed in composition because their uses aren’t as easily defined or located, or because the connection between one piece and another isn’t so explicit. I do not expect that completed essays should come with an attached account of the menial details, but rather that these details are already embedded in the process and thus are always part of the thing that was made. An important consideration when choosing or acknowledging materials is the issue of credibility: while material choice in craft is often based on function(s) and physical properties, the notion of credibility is treated differently in craft than in academic writing. Credibility in craft

might be based on physical capability, convenience, a relationship with the provider of raw materials (think wood, or wool), or financial constraints. In writing, credibility is measured by publication, peer-review, or professional association. My goal is to create a space within academia for conversation about credibility and materiality through the use of craft logic. This means that the scope of acceptable materials in composition may need to be expanded. That said, I also believe it is important to understand the value of credible sources, but would prefer a more complex reading of these sources in academic writing.

The Knowledge Box: Craft in the Classroom

As a novice instructor teaching my first course this fall in the First Year Writing Program, I plan to use Shipka's models in my class to connect craft logic with writing. In doing craft (as most of my friends and colleagues would point out that I'm almost always making something), I've found that craft has an evaluative element that diverges from the assessment model I've seen used in academic writing. While revision applies to both crafted objects and written works, my experience with the evaluation process in writing is generally less concerned with material assembly (beyond the required number of sources) and more concerned with grammatical aptitude and coherent thought. I don't intend to challenge grammar and content as important; however, material consciousness and what it lends to the lives of texts is an important part of the creating process as well. What

craft lends to composition is an expanded conception of what should, or could, be valued as part of the writing process.

I envision this expansion of research, materials, and tools taking shape through what I call the Knowledge Box. This box, which is a compartmentalized, actual three dimensional unit (a shoebox would be useful), contains some form of the writer's already existing knowledge, information gained through observation or "noticing," material representations of the composing process, the completed assignment, and an assessment or reflection that addresses the writer's communicative objectives. This three dimensional box provides space for materials that wouldn't be visible in a print-based portfolio; for example, a student could include crumpled up sheets of paper as evidence of their many "failed" attempts at writing, a frequently used mug for coffee, or play-dough that helped them to visualize their writing as a conceptual *and* physical process. Because the course I will be teaching focuses on genre analysis, I plan to use zines as one genre to explore. Zines are part of the DIY/Arts and Crafts Movement³, they are small enough to discuss and compare several at a time, and they represent a wide range of interests. More so, zines are inexpensive and are created to be shared; they circulate through zine conventions, among friends or communities, and are easily purchased online through what are called "distros." Zine authors are interested in collaboration, trading publications, and interacting with their readers. Put simply, zines have a substantial life cycle. For this unit, students will begin by reading zines,

³ The DIY/Arts and Crafts movement represents an alternative to mass-produced goods and culture; it is a response to consumerism, and values the capacity of the individual to make and create something of value with his or her own resources.

by sharing in class discussion what they already know about zines and genre, what they notice about what they've read, and what questions they may have. The discussion will be focused heavily on materials, noticing how zines are assembled and why the authors may have made certain choices; essentially, evaluating how the arrangement of certain materials accomplishes specific goals. All of this information will be put inside the Knowledge Box, and then students will create their own zines along with a reflective essay that addresses their material choices and their objectives, and any difficulties and successes they had along the way. The box will also include evidence of materials used and artifactual representations of the students' experience, with an emphasis on using physical objects and images. Students will present their work to the class to encourage further discussion about what materiality looks like in writing and how it is used to communicate.

Zines are intriguing to me because they represent small, flexible, and accessible writing while embracing creativity, visual elements, and a broad range of subject matter relevant to its audience. What I want students to gain from studying zines, first and foremost, is the confidence to write and create based on what they are already doing and what they already know. I expect that the observations done as a class with my support will foster the ability to practice this same model of evaluation in other composing situations. While more formal aspects of college writing will be included in my curriculum, I am working to develop a creative pedagogy that teaches writing as an act of making, in which the writer is taught to recognize the value of his or her choices in assembling an essay. I believe that learning happens in an activity-based framework, much like Shipka's: by using craft

logic in the classroom, a way of learning and doing that embraces participation alongside material consideration, we help writers develop confident voices.

Understanding craft as privileging materiality and the ability to locate and assess a task's objectives, this model, through practice, should become transferrable into new composing situations.

Shipka outlines in her book what I imagine as craft logic in action. This embodies what I hope to accomplish using the Knowledge Box and zine assignments:

By sharing with others descriptions of the variety of tools composers employ and by highlighting how, when, and to what end those tools are employed, we are provided with opportunities to imagine still other ways of making and negotiating meaning in the world. Further, by sharing with others descriptions of the processes by which texts are produced, consumed, and ultimately valued, we are given opportunities to consider how and why certain meditational means and certain actions are deemed best or at least more appropriate in a given context than are others. (53)

Shipka's approach makes essential the question of materiality as it pertains to rhetorical choices, thus strengthening the connection between elements of process and the writer's communicative objectives or goals. She carries this out through the circulation process by including meaning-making and consumption as part of her teaching, resulting in a widened understanding of where writing is situated as part of a larger context.

Teaching Writing, Not Writing: Conclusion

The concept of craft has many distinctive threads. Craft is a noun, it is an action, it is a community, it is a practice. Building on the notion of genre and texts as complete(d) units, I believe what craft logic asks is that we consider the teaching of writing as a verb, an act of making and working towards specific outcomes, rather than the teaching writing as embodied primarily within a completed unit. Following the “Connective Writing” collection under the Art/Craft category of the National Writing Project’s Digital IS, the framing of craft within composition requires an action-based understanding of writing. Bud Hunt, in “Teaching Blogging Not Blogs,” shapes the act of blogging as a set of skills, or a “powerful way of learning” (para. 3). This links us back to craft logic as both a form and function of education: Hunt’s notion of blogging is both a way of knowing, as well as something produced. Hunt states that blogging allows him to “write, link, think, re-write, re-think, link anew,” (para. 3), which is what I aim to expand within writing by using craft logic. My experience with composition thus far has been this: composition is generally concerned with the production of texts as singular units, or entities. Even process-based pedagogy, which focuses on the means by which a text is produced, is still concerned with the completed text as an end unit that cedes to exist outside or beyond its final form. By re-visioning writing (noun) as writing (verb), composition stands to benefit by incorporating *techné* into its toolbox.

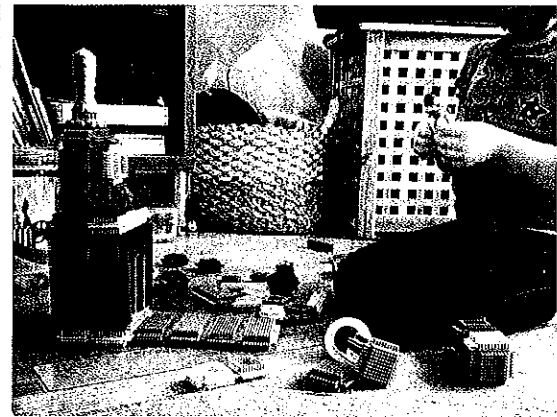
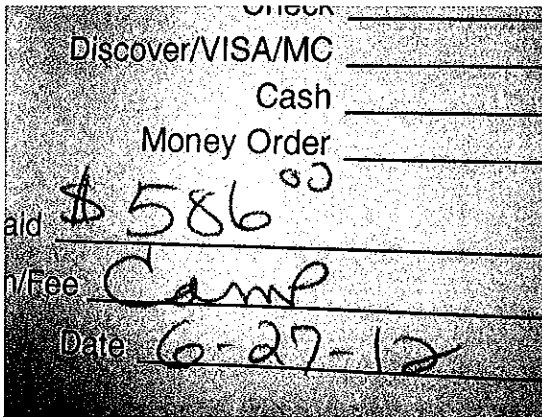
Because *techné* is concerned with the act of making, or the action and participatory activity of composing, a craft-based composition responds to Sirc’s criticism of composition’s failure to reflect its “true splendor;” that a writer’s desire

to do interesting work is thwarted by constraints of materials, spaces, and conventional forms (Sirc, 5). Sirc discusses the curated museum-space in which writing is often taught as a self-contained model that features “good writing” for students to reproduce rather than teaching composition as an opportunity to reflect on textuality, its craft, wonder, and problems (Sirc, 8). When writing (noun) is taught, the multimodality of knowledge is overlooked and critical thinking is undermined by reduced participation and a narrowed understanding of what writing is. Imitating and reproducing texts that have been labeled as “good writing,” restricts the potential of student writing. Craft, on the other hand, is experimental. It makes room for failure, and prevents a fixed state therefore opening other modes of learning through a critical framework. Composition is lacking if more radical practices are ignored in favor of teaching privileged, two-dimensional texts. Teaching writing (verb) eliminates the disconnection that teaching writing (noun) creates, by positioning the writer as maker, and the process of composing as an act of learning and doing (both action words).

As I have previously mentioned, I am relying on the examples of others to support craft logic in the classroom due to my position as a new instructor. Bud Hunt’s outline for teaching blogging by questioning purpose and potential (actually, all of the National Writing Project’s Digital IS resources are useful), Jody Shipka’s numerous process-based mapping and reflection assignments, and Matthew Crawford’s narrative that describes the benefits of hands-on work in his own life, all exemplify craft; these cases each model the connection between action and writing that I hope to create in my own classroom. These action-based practices emphasize

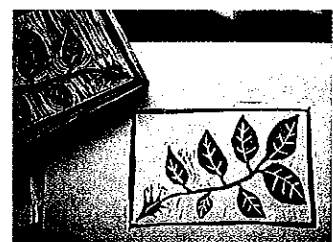
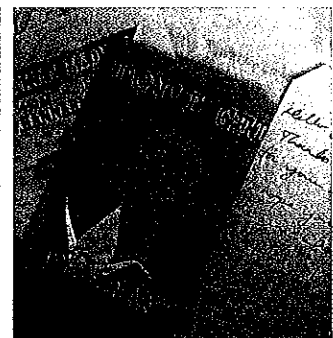
the materiality of making anything, including writing, and I find that by making space for exploring a wider range of materials and their inter-connectivity as well as their connection to finished papers and the lives thereof, composition stands to benefit a great deal.

Photo Documentary

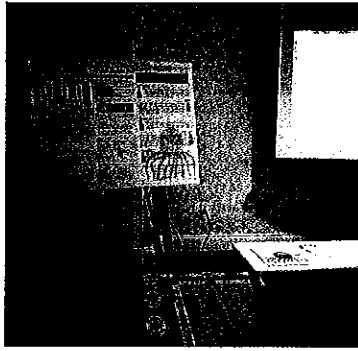


OMG.

How is creating related to questioning? How are the forms of notation related to one another? Is there a relationship between the sketch and a painting comparable to that between a draft and a finished composition? What are the different ways in which an artist chooses what is "right"? What does he mean when he says it "feels right"? How does a dancer revise a dance? How does a musician correct an interpretation? How does a poet revise his poem? Is "what comes first?" a question all creators recognize as a really tough one? How do they pose the question? When do they discover that they've decided it? How do artists get started on a work? One scientist has said that he "gets a hunch" and then goes about collecting facts that support it, discarding those that don't fit: how is this comparable to what we do when we compose?

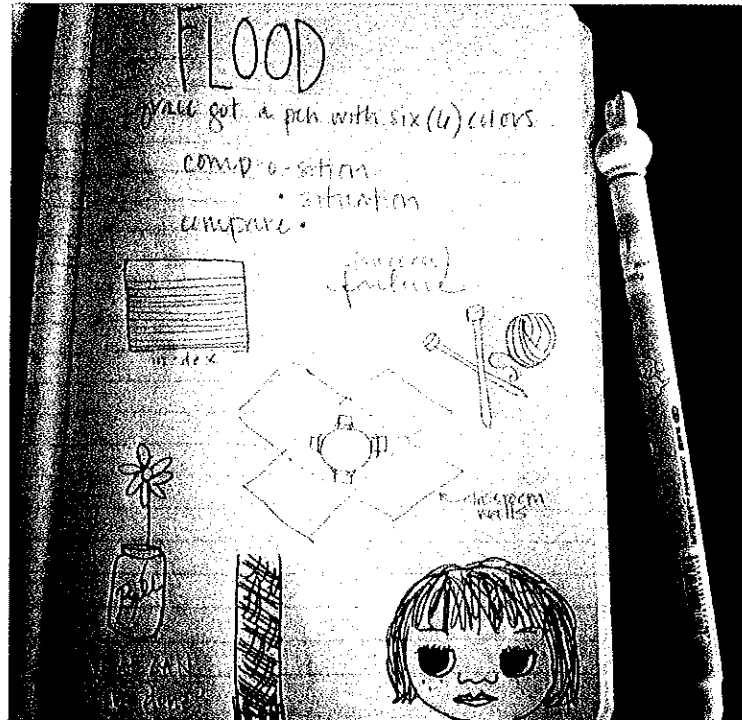


Clockwise from top left: 1. A summer camp childcare bill. 2. Manipulatives. 3. A knit cowl that I made. 4. A zine I ordered titled "Don't Get Pregnant." 5. A stamp I carved. 6. A sign at a local yarn shop. 7. Margin note from Ann Berthoff's response to Janice Lauer, "Counterstatement."



THE BARBER

Jane's brush-cut looked like a Marine recruit's as she sat skinny and pale at the table, interrupting our chore to vomit in a China bowl. We picked through jumbles of medical supplies, filling two garbage bags with leukemia's detritus. When I lifted up left-over disinfectant or Dunderon, she shook her head no, and I tossed it away, as I did with the Zip-Loc of her messy hair cut off the year before when it started to shed. The young girl trembled.



The uses of a mug or calders milk bottle
 What do we NOTICE
 How does this lens inform how we
 see other artifacts/objects/people/space?

craft asks what can be done w/ tools
 points to my number of possibilities
 which directly challenges the
 unexamined reader or privilege of
 academic writing - by saying it
 can't be done - the museum is built
 into it and not the only space of value



Clockwise from top left: 1. Our poster from a presentation at the Conference for College Composition and Communication, "Lessons in Generative Design, Publishing, and Circulation: What *EM-Journal's* First Year Has Taught Us," March 2012. 2. A page from my notebook. 3. "The uses of a mug or calders milk bottle," notes. 4. Crocheted arm warmers that I made. 5. Stamps that I carved. 6. "The Barber," by Donald Hall.

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