A SHARPER POINT: A FEMINIST, MULTIMODAL HEURISTIC FOR ANALYZING KNITTED RHETORIC

Heather Elizabeth Pristash

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Committee:

Sue Carter Wood, Advisor
Vibha Bhalla
Graduate Faculty Representative
Kristine L. Blair
Radhika Gajjala
ABSTRACT

Sue Carter Wood, Advisor

This dissertation explores needlework and its use as a rhetorically significant meaning-making tool. A term for this phenomenon—“rhetorical needlework”—is proposed and defined through the application of work from several authors, most particularly Robert Herrick. While rhetorical needlework has been the subject of study by many scholars in rhetoric, it has most often been studied as a historical phenomenon. However, there is a great deal of modern craft that fits this definition of rhetorical needlework; thus far, however, it has not had the depth of scholarly attention given to historical work. This dissertation seeks to help remedy this problem.

In analyzing this modern rhetorical needlework, this dissertation argues that several areas of knowledge must be combined, including craft, multimodality, and feminist rhetoric. These areas of knowledge are combined through the generation of a heuristic, with which modern rhetorical needlework can then be analyzed. In creating that heuristic, several areas of work are reviewed and synthesized into four main categories: rhetorical, craft, feminist, and multimodal. Pieces consulted in this literature review come from Macdonald, Berners-Lee, Humphreys, Royster and Kirsch, Goggin, Parker, Dasler Johnson, Bratich and Brush, Shipka, Bateman, Glenn, Cixous, Greer, Mattingly, Palmeri, and others. The resulting heuristic consists of thirteen questions that help in reaching a deeper, multifaceted understanding of specific pieces of rhetorical needlework.

After it has been generated, the heuristic is then applied to a case study: the RedSweaters project, which sought to memorialize each fallen United States serviceperson in Iraq with a miniature red sweater. Using the heuristic helps reveal both why this work succeeds and,
potentially, some of the reasons that it went unfinished. Conversely, this application also helps suggest further ways that the heuristic might be developed and applied in future work.
DEDICATION

This is for Ellie, Jennie Ann, Edna, Lada Jane, Katherine, Ann, Kathy, Julieann, Tina, and all the many other crafty women of the heritage of making that I’m blessed to come from.

This is for Lindy, Debbie, Amy, Jillian, Annie, Cat, Elizabeth, Meg, Annie, Barbara, Sally, Iris, Maggie, Ann, Norah, Anna, Lucy, and all the many others who have taught me something about knitting, my chosen form of needlework.

This is for Andi, Elizabeth, Adrienne, Em, Brittany, Sarah, Susan, Lora, Christine, and all the many others who have shared friendship, good fellowship, knowledge, tears, laughter, and joy with me as we’ve stitched (and bitched) together.

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Finally, this is for all my fellow crafters. If you’ve ever known the satisfaction and the power of making something meaningful with your own hands, this is for you.
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The flaws of this manuscript are my own, but I owe any virtues it may have to a cast of hundreds.

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My husband, family, and friends have been crucial sources of motivation and support through the years in which this project came to fruition. If I were to list all of them and give them the acknowledgement that they each truly deserve, this section would be larger than the rest of the manuscript. To every one of them, my love and thanks.

I do have to give specific thanks to my parents, however. My father, Joe, who likes to think of himself as “the designated bad example,” has been a phenomenally good example for me in many ways. He’s taught me to find humor in almost any situation, no matter how difficult, and to be willing to make mistakes…lessons easily as vital to the completion of a project such as this as any I’ve ever learned in school. His unconditional love and support, even at times when we don’t see eye-to-eye, is a crucial part of this and every project.

Finally, this project would not exist without my mother, Ellie. All three major identities that inform this work—feminism, craft, and teaching—originated from her. Further, she equipped me with tenacity, intellectual curiosity, and a real sense of joy in learning and sharing. Her love for and belief in me have been bedrocks of my existence, and they have served as the energy that kept this project moving when I was close to giving up on it. I’m lucky to know her and to count her as a friend, and I’m blessed to be her daughter.
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CHAPTER ONE. CASTING ON: UNDERSTANDING NEEDLEWORK AS RHETORICAL

In the introduction to her book *Craftivism: The Art of Craft and Activism*, knitter Betsy Greer discusses the juxtaposition of an encounter with political puppetry and her own personal knitting that spurred her on to thinking about craft as political act:

I had always thought that activism had to be loud and in-your-face. Maybe the quietness of the puppets resonated with the quietness of the knitting, but it made me think about *quiet* activism and wonder how craft could be a part of it.

[...Later], in a research proposal, I explained that, “the creation of things by hand leads us to a better understanding of democracy, because it reminds us that we have power.” I felt that artists needed a term for crafting that was motivated by social or political activism, and “craftivism” fit the bill. (7-8)

Although many had used craft in this manner before Greer’s adoption of the term in the early 2000s, the clarified concept of craftivism struck a chord for many, especially (but not exclusively) needleworkers. Much needlework has since been created with activist intent, some of it deliberately under the craftivist name, but all of it arguably in the craftivist spirit Greer gives name to. Some of that activist work has taken the form of utilitarian pieces done for donation or fundraising, but a significant portion has taken the form of public art on a small or large scale. It has been work meant to convey meaning, to (in Greer’s words) “foment dialogue” while “helping to breathe life into artistic practices that some people may think are obsolete by showing their relevancy and poignancy” (8). In short, activist needlework is meaning-rich work that is rhetorically significant. However, it is also work that has arguably been underengaged by rhetoricians, because analyzing this type of needlework in the depth its rich content deserves has
called for a challenging synthesis of a variety of theories and areas of rhetorical expertise. I have worked to contribute to that synthesis within this dissertation.

The case study that I provide in Chapter 4 in order to help make my contribution is one that brings together a craftivist impulse and large-scale public needlework. The project has been variously known as the RedSweaters project\(^1\), RedSweaters.org, the Red Sweater Project, or the Red Sweater Deployment. Whatever its name, it was conceived of in 2005—two years after the start of the Second Iraq War—by a San Francisco knitter, Nina Rosenberg, but it was co-created by a number of knitters around the US, with a few even contributing from other nations. The goal—one that was, poignantly, never quite reached, as the war outlasted the active stage of the project—was to create one miniature red sweater for each US soldier who died in the Second Iraq War. This project seems simple on the surface, but it combines many challenges unique to this sort of rhetorical needlework, making it an ideal case study and challenging test run for my heuristic.

As a feminist, knitter, rhetorician, and scholar, I cannot help but be fascinated by women’s craft traditions, particularly in the realm of textiles. However, when I share this curiosity with others, they are sometimes confused as to why anyone, much less an avowed feminist, would spend time studying needlework and similar craft media, especially in the modern era. Craft is a vital feminist issue\(^2\) for a wide variety of reasons; however, one of the most urgent is its rhetorical usage throughout history, as well as the unique meaning-making opportunities that it affords today. Without a basic understanding of the importance of craft, I

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\(^1\) This is the formulation of the name that I generally use throughout, as it seems to be the most common and easily distinguishable from other projects. However, one may easily find all of the alternative names I have mentioned—and surely many others—used for the project online and in print.

\(^2\) This is not to say, however, that all craft is feminist. There are multitudes of issues with unrecognized labor, oppression, and privilege that can also be wrapped up in craft practices, and I by no means deny this. I am merely stating that an understanding of craft is vital for feminists, whether or not the craft in question is feminist in and of itself.
would venture to say that any understanding of feminism or rhetoric would be, at best, somewhat incomplete. I am thrilled that so many of us in either area—or both of them—understand why craft matters. However, I still think that knowledge about craft and its importance needs to be spread further, both inside and outside academia.

When looking at areas of tradition, it may only be a slight overstatement to say that any history of craft is a history of femininity. In a variety of ways, craft (particularly textile craft) and femininity have been inextricably linked for hundreds, if not thousands of years (Barber 29). In fact, the very notion of craft itself is one rife with tension about sex and gender. Debates about the difference between art and craft have raged for years, and show no signs of being resolved today. However, many theorists and historians have noticed the odd coincidence that, for many, art (often generically typified as nonutilitarian, informed by formal education, and conceptual) is seen as simultaneously more respectable and more “inherently masculine” than craft (typified as utilitarian, naïve/unschooled, and practical). Even in a post-Dinner Party world, biases based on these ill-informed notions of the difference between art and craft still have an impact on museums, academics, and public opinion. This bias of art over craft, then, can limit the perspectives that are allowed to reach the public. Such a bias cannot fail to be significant, as it helps define, as Glenn puts it, “who may speak, who may listen or who will agree to listen, and what can be said” (1-2) within museums, galleries, and other prestigious venues. Even more concretely, it limits the amount of money that can be made through craft, placing financial limitations on the lives of artists and artisans (often women) around the globe. Therefore, just in

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3 Unfortunately, it’s not easy to be more specific at this point, since we’re not yet discussing a specific crafting tradition…and even when it comes to specific crafting traditions, it’s hard to pinpoint their origins cleanly.

4 The second-wave feminist piece by Judy Chicago, which used gendered techniques (the making and decorating of china, as well as embroidery) to create a large-scale feminist art installation that is a major document of women’s history, which is still on display today.
the naming of craft as an entity separate from art, we are automatically dealing with assumptions of value based on gender bias.

Also—not to state an overly obvious point—when crafts have been completed by those in the domestic sphere, particularly in the Western world, they have often traditionally been done by women. Even though many crafts, such as knitting, are believed to have had some of their best-known expression through prestigious, male-driven guilds at some points in history (Parker 67), most are now seen as practical, repetitive, “chore-like” acts at this point, driving them directly into the realm of the feminine. This gendering of craft activity has been further amplified by the fact that ability at these sorts of “domestic chores” has been an essential part of feminine gender performance, as many scholars, including Rozsika Parker, document. Some cultures have used delicate embroideries to attest to a young woman’s refinement, while others have used hardy, practical goods in a trousseau in order to prove a woman’s readiness to marry and care for her family. For many women, craft has been a requirement of daily life.

This requirement is sometimes financial as well as gender-performative. On many occasions, the production and selling of craft has been the only “ladylike” way in which a woman could make money. This is memorably dramatized in the novel Gone with the Wind, when Confederate widows are shown selling their embroidery to Union soldiers as one of the acceptable ways to survive in post-war Atlanta. Outside of fiction, however, some women’s financial reliance on craft continues to the present day through the vendors around the world who sell on Etsy, global crafters selling through NOVICA or other sites specifically focused on non-Western work, and Amish quilting, to name a few venues.

\[\text{footnote}{\text{Also, the image of Scarlett O’Hara using the curtains to sew a new dress in order to regain control of her fate is a fantastic example of rhetorically purposed craft.}}\]
It’s easy, then, to make the link between women and craft; for some, though, the link between craft and rhetoric may be less obvious. Granted, the concept of needlework as rhetoric is hardly a new one, and there are many people within our field who have successfully focused on legitimizing its study within our field as a whole. A substantial amount of scholarship in rhetoric and writing has looked at the various mediating roles that needlework and textiles can play, both as their own statements in concert with women’s bodies and as rhetorical devices that support an overall message. Some of the previous scholarship has looked at costume and craft as feminine visual coding. Examples include Carter’s writing on the use of needlework on WCTU speaking stages and Mattingly’s work on the ways in which costume created and supported the ethos of female rhetors in the nineteenth century. Items of sewn clothing, such as corsets, have also been shown as simultaneously coding and constraining a body in a socially acceptable, gendered manner in the work of Dasler Johnson. Foss has taken a different approach, looking at the sewing of clothing as ritualized re-sourcing that can provide, she argues, a form of emancipation from patriarchy and patriarchal structures.

Other scholarship has looked at needlework on its own, as opposed to considering it as a mediating device on or around the female form. Rohan has examined quilts as a mnemonic device. Goggin has, among other work, considered needlework as visual rhetoric that blurs the boundaries between word and image within sampler embroidery. Even those not in our field have looked at needlework serving what is arguably a rhetorical purpose as performance of femininity (Parker) or as norming and social interaction (MacDonald).

Several of these works form a deliberate scholarly conversation that I think of as “rhetorical needlework.” I initially define this as “needlework which can be read as meaning-making through either its process, its product, or both.” Granted, the more that I work in this area
of research, the more often I find that most needlework can be read in this manner on some level; however, this initial project focuses on that material where some portion of the process of creation or the end product itself is an intentional act of meaning-making. This is the material that Gesa Kirsch and Jacqueline Jones Royster would associate with their definition of rhetorical: “associated with deliberate action” (102). It makes sense to start here; to put it somewhat poetically, in order to study rhetorical needlework, we need to understand the artifacts that are speaking to us before we can start eavesdropping on the ones that are speaking only to others or themselves.

Given a scope limited to these objects, can the definition of rhetorical needlework be developed further for this project in order to gain more depth and utility? In beginning such development, I find it useful to start with Robert Herrick’s six distinguishing features of rhetorical discourse:

Rhetorical discourse characteristically is (1) planned, (2) adapted to an audience, (3) shaped by human motives, (4) responsive to a situation, (5) persuasion-seeking, and (6) concerned with contingent issues. Not all writing or speaking that might meaningfully be termed rhetoric satisfies all of these criteria[…](8-9).

Even though Herrick’s discussion is based on traditional conceptions of rhetoric as oral or written discourse, it can be expanded to encompass rhetorical discourse in other modes, such as needlework. In fact, the first three of the features he points out might be said to exist with almost any needlework, rhetorical or otherwise: even improvisational needlework can only happen if some degree of planning has occurred, said needlework is typically created for an audience (wearer/viewer/user), and there is a motive of some kind (practical/decorative/demonstrative) behind its creation.
With the second half of the list, however, considerations get a bit more complex. Herrick’s fourth criterion is, as stated above, that rhetoric is “responsive to a situation” (8). He further clarifies that there are two parts to this. The first is that rhetoric is situated: “rhetoric is crafted in response to a set of circumstances, including a particular time, location, problem, and audience” (11). Ignoring for a moment the delicious synchronicity of his word choice when considered in this context, it might be possible to say that most needlework fits this definition as well. After all, a woman’s shawl—sturdy or ornamental, made for fun or as part of a demonstration of skill—is certainly responding to a very specific cultural and practical set of circumstances and requirements. The second part of this criterion is that rhetoric is dialogic: “Rhetoric is response-making. But, rhetoric is also response-inviting” (11). This aspect of rhetorical discourse may be harder to see with utilitarian or decorative needlework, but it can certainly be seen in many of the art and protest pieces that I seek to focus on here as deliberately rhetorical needlework, such as my case study. In fact, many have embraced craftivist rhetorical work specifically because it can enable subtle statements that invite a wider range of responses than a verbal statement (which often simply invites agreement or disagreement) might.

Herrick’s fifth criterion is that rhetoric is “persuasion-seeking” (8). Again, this is more difficult to see with utilitarian and decorative needlework, but is clearly a part of deliberately meaning-making work. Herrick goes further to detail four specific methods through which this persuasion can occur: “arguments, appeals, arrangement, and aesthetics” (12). Considering the wordless artistry of craftivist projects such as knitted tank cozies, for example, the specific arguments might be harder to read than the other
three methods, but all four of the methods of seeking persuasion that Herrick details could potentially be present in rhetorical needlework.

The final criterion Herrick provides is that rhetoric is “concerned with contingent issues” (9); he clarifies this further by quoting Aristotle at length and then summing up the main point he sees being made:

Aristotle apparently thought that rhetoric comes into play when we are faced with practical questions about matters that confront everyone, and about which there are no definite and unavoidable answers. Such contingent questions require deliberation or the weighing of options [...] When there are alternatives to be weighed and matters are neither inevitable nor impossible, we are facing contingent issues that invite the use of rhetoric (15).

Arguably, a strength of the artistic expressions produced in rhetorical needlework is their potential to stimulate complex thought. Visual and material pieces themselves require deliberation and interpretation, making them an ideal format to force the kind of contemplative activity Herrick alludes to. Such pieces are not easy to read; the challenge that such reading poses can make them challenging, true, but it also makes them ideal for the work Herrick describes here.

After examining Herrick’s six distinguishing features, I have included them in my more detailed definition of rhetorical needlework. Therefore, I see rhetorical needlework as needlework which can be read as meaning-making (through its process, its product, or both) and which can be seen to have most, if not all, of the distinguishing features above.

With a provisional definition of rhetorical needlework established, the rest of this chapter provides an overview of my project. I have broken said overview into several
sections. The first explains my focus on modern needlework. Next, my research questions are stated, as a way to establish the aims of this research; this is followed with an explanation of this specific project’s scope. After that, as a feminist scholar, I believe it crucial to provide some background on myself and my position in relation to this work, as well as to discuss limitations of the project. Finally, I close with further information on my case study and an outline of the other four chapters of this dissertation.

The Case for Contemporary Needlework

I find analysis of rhetorical needlework to be especially interesting when it applies to the needlework of the past twenty years, an area where there are definite opportunities in the scholarship, particularly within our field. The last fifteen years have seen a huge explosion of craft. Many needleworkers have recently embraced craft that deliberately makes a statement of protest, praise, or other persuasion.

However, more women are more able to participate in traditional rhetorical forms such as public speaking and writing now than in much of Western history. With all of the other rhetorical options that are now available to women, why would so many use this specific form of material and visual rhetoric? Needlework is highly gendered, leading to its dismissal by some. However, it is that gendering, that initial dismissal, that makes it so ripe for use. Any deliberate statement made through needlework has a rich tradition that is immediately read into its use; modern users can then choose to either work with or subvert such meanings. Additionally, through social media on the internet, contemporary women can share their work and their activism in varied ways, adding a modern layer of complexity to these rich pre-existing traditions. Various analytical principles have been used in scholarly examinations of past work, but they must be
brought to bear on the present as well, as connecting the two can enrich the study of both. It is this work that I have started in this dissertation.

With the massive popularity of the needlework revival, particularly online, there are millions of interactions around it taking place every day. There are dozens of significant artists—a word I use deliberately, as anyone who works in traditional craft-based media has to struggle to earn such a descriptor, and few have—whose works can potentially shed useful light on how rhetoric functions as part of craft and craftivism, thereby leading to a keener appreciation of how rhetoric functions in the lives, and hands, of people today. This is truly an area that can reward deeper study, and there are countless subjects out there to be looked at; there is an embarrassment of riches to be found here for the researcher.

I believe, though, that a vital first step is to develop a tool to help analyze these modern pieces of rhetorical needlework. Many aspects of feminist rhetorical theory can be applied to them, but—just like Herrick’s and other traditional definitions—these bodies of theory weren’t always built to deal with objects that are material and multimodal. There is plentiful material seeking to deal with the analysis of multimodal artifacts, but only some of it brings discussions of identity and gender into play. Thus, I have examined both of these areas and synthesized them to provide a clearer method for analyzing rhetorical needlework. The heuristic I have created through this synthesis can be employed as the starting point for rhetorical analysis of this demanding, multifaceted type of rhetoric.

This sort of analysis of contemporary rhetorical needlework could help the growing number of us in rhetoric and composition who are fascinated with this particular, often peculiar, form of genre-crossing text. One of the large obstacles that I see for this specific area of concern is that, as of yet, we often lack shared vocabulary with which to discuss rhetorical needlework as
well as useful theories with which to examine it. The contributions that this study has made to understanding needlework as rhetorical, and to the ability to analyze it as such, may also spark the interest of scholars who are not yet interested in this area by providing them a way to engage it. Further, since this is a visually and materially focused project, I think it has the potential to serve as a model and a source of theory-building for those who are interested in specific areas of study within those flowering areas of rhetorical inquiry.

All of these previously mentioned aims are worthy ones that are worth accomplishing on their own. I believe as well that there is a need for everyone in our field, particularly those of us with feminist leanings, to keep engaging with the investigation of women’s visual and material rhetorics as a part of continuing to create the new map of rhetorical history spoken about by Cheryl Glenn in *Rhetoric Retold*:

The writing of women into history ‘necessarily involves redefining and enlarging traditional notions of historical significance, to encompass personal, subjective experience as well as public and political activities’ (Gordon, Buhle, and Dye 89). Such a methodology implies not only a new history of women but also a new rhetorical history, in short, an entirely new map of rhetoric (3).

Throughout her work, Glenn uses a variety of methods to analyze written texts and historical documentation. She takes incredibly important steps in the recovery of women’s place in the rhetorical canon, steps that are carried further by others such as Royster and Kirsch. A vital next step—which is in progress—is the deliberate inclusion of explicitly material and/or visual work as modes of expression and persuasion that are of equal importance to written texts. There are many, both within our field and within such diverse other fields as art history, sociology, and material culture studies who have
been moving towards a similar goal. I believe that Glenn would laud this sort of work as exactly what the focus of such exploratory projects should be; it is working with material that is “off the map,” yet rich in meaning. Also, the study of rhetorical needlework that I do here has strong historical roots, but it is focusing on current practices, which have gone underexplored in favor of the study of needlework from a historical perspective. Considering Glenn’s concerns, as well as the need for looking at non-historical work pointed out by Royster and Kirsch, this work becomes even more crucial. In summary, a rhetorical view on needlework and a framework with which to analyze crafted rhetoric is worth academic consideration…and it could also be a powerful tool for better understanding the intersection of feminism, rhetoric, activism and needlework in everyday life both inside and outside the academic realm.

Research Questions

1. How can current rhetorical theory in the areas of feminist rhetoric and multimodality inform a framework and heuristic for understanding modern needlework?

2. How can this framework and heuristic be usefully applied to a complex piece of knitted rhetoric?

3. What implications does this area of research have for the study of feminist rhetoric?

4. What implications does this area of research have for the study of multimodal rhetoric?

The first question will be answered through the review of scholarship in these areas shared in Chapter 2, as well as through the development of the heuristic I share in Chapter 3. The
second question will be addressed through my case study in Chapter 4. Questions 3 and 4 will be addressed through the evaluation of the case study findings in Chapter 4 and the evaluation of the heuristic in Chapter 5.

Scope

It has been difficult to define the scope of this project, given that there are hundreds of types of craft. For this project, though, I have chosen to limit my scope to one specific craft. As needlework is so vitally popular at the current moment, I restrict my inquiries to this area.

However, within the realm of needlework alone there are easily dozens, if not hundreds, of specific craft practices: quilting, sewing, crochet, knitting, cross-stitch, embroidery, tatting, applique…the list goes on. For this project, it was important for me to select an extremely popular craft, one with global reach and specifically delineated feminist ties. Also, as a feminist scholar, I think that it was crucial for me to write about a crafting community that I’m part of, so that I could bring my located experiences to bear on this work. These reasons, among others, led me to focus this work on knitting. As I show, there are an abundance of explicitly rhetorical knitted works; there are even more that have clear meaning throughout their process and within the finished product. As someone who has knitted for nearly fifteen years, I’m well-positioned to understand the production and intent of these works in a way that a non-knitter could not.

Positioning

This leads me to some discussion and disclosure of my reasoning behind this project and the position I’m coming to it from. For me, there are three important identities that come into play in my current work. If I am to understand my relationship to the work, which is clearly necessary before anyone else can do so, these are the points which must be located and understood: I am a third-wave feminist, I am a crafter, and I am a teacher in the small-town
North American West. These identities, which drive and inform this project, build on each other in some ways, but each stands alone as a specific area of my life as well.

Feminism

The identity I should start with—though not necessarily the first to influence me—is my identity as a feminist. Born in 1976, I’ve never known a world without feminism. Like many other people my age, I was aware from a young age that feminism existed, even when I didn’t know yet what it had to do with me.

How I came to specific third-wave beliefs, however, is infinitely easier to figure out. As a queer teenager in the early nineties, the time I spent on the campus of Oberlin College—which was then aggressively, if not humorlessly, politically correct—shaped my view of many things, not least gender and sexuality. At that point, I was consciously playing with my gender expression, particularly though over-the-top femme fashion, hair, and makeup. This routinely got me odd looks on the very gender-neutral\(^6\) college campus.

One day, a student stopped me and lectured me, angrily, about the way that I was giving into the patriarchy by wearing what I wore, by looking how I looked. She told me in no uncertain terms that I was being anti-feminist and betraying other women. I thought about what she had said for some time, and I kept coming up against a wall: wasn’t feminism about choice? If I felt like I could do anything I wanted to do regardless of my sex or gender, if I felt like playing with the way I expressed my gender, why was that a problem? Why were traditionally female things inherently bad? These questions—which would wind up being key for many third-wave feminists—would come back to me in ways I never expected.

\(^6\) One of the running jokes at the time was that Oberlin College was where the women all looked like men and the men all looked like Jesus.
**Craft**

I don’t have too many memories of my early childhood, but I know it was filled with crafts, thanks to the influence of my mother. Every evening after she got home from work, I greeted her with one question: “What are we going to make tonight, Mommy?” And really, when it comes to my mother and crafts, the sky was (and still is) the limit.

As I got older, though, I felt a little uncomfortable about this crafting heritage. Even though I instinctively understood that something was wrong with the idea of being a feminist but being ashamed to do things women had historically done, I never applied this concept to craft. By the time I reached my late teens, I thought that sex appeal could be reclaimed and/or queered…but craft? Never.

As the third wave gained in strength, many of us started to wonder about the feminist potential in traditionally “feminine” activities, and these questions got more and more representation in third-wave zines like *BUST*. In my specific case, however, there were some other influences. Shortly after I left for college, my mom caught the quilting bug in a serious way, with a focus on art quilting, which is creative, expressive, quilted work usually meant for display, not use. Through her, in the years that followed, I encountered a wide variety of these striking, individual pieces of art that often made a direct and deliberate point. They were unique and sometimes clearly feminist.

However, quilting was Mom’s turf; the money, space, and skill it required meant that—once I was in a job that gave me at least a bit of disposable income—I wanted to explore other crafting options. Around this time, the much-lauded “knitting renaissance” of the late nineties and early noughts was just starting. I knew that knitting was a portable craft (which was ideal for someone who used public transportation) that didn’t require much initial investment in time or books as well, but that’s another dissertation.
money. Luckily for me, there was a small yarn shop that was just opening in my city. I met its proprietress, a stunning redheaded fashionista in her thirties, and was instantly reassured about the variety of knitters and knitting that there were out there\(^8\). I got hooked quickly, taking a part-time job at the yarn shop.

The more time that I spent knitting, the more I saw how much more than a simple piece of fabric was being created. I realized how important it was for many people to actually make the time to do something as hands-on and low-tech as knit, even though I soon saw that knitting could be high-tech, particularly with the rise of knitblogs. I learned that knitting could either fill practical needs that no commercial product ever would...or it could be the most impractical use of time and money ever, conveying a great deal of meaning with its personal, handmade stitches. In short, I was coming to the conclusion that knitting meant something, both as a process and in the products it created. This led me to realize the same thing about other crafts.

I was immediately interested in this as an academic…but that’s far from my only interest. As someone who is a part of crafting communities, I see how devalued crafting work can be, occasionally even by those who are doing it. If a crafter understands the heritage and the meaning-making potential in a craft tradition, my experience tells me that they will value that tradition, and their own part in it, more deeply. Even for non-crafters, this same principle can also lead to a richer appreciation of crafts and crafters...which then, often, leads to a richer appreciation of women and their rhetorical practices.

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\(^8\) Yes, I’m ashamed to admit, I was one of those women who was more interested in knitting once she found out that women who weren’t grandmothers did it too. I think that I was even shallow enough to think that this made it cooler. (However, long-term involvement in knitting, including spending time with some grandmothers who are the smartest, raunchiest, and coolest people I’ve ever met got me over that attitude. Even better, it finally erased the last dregs of me caring about things being cool!)
Teaching

For the last four-and-a-half years, I have been an assistant professor at Western Wyoming Community College (WWCC). The geographical area served by WWCC is huge, and it incorporates many small towns, rural areas, and ranches, which is hardly a surprise in this state. There are two small cities in this area, and the largest of them has a population of under twenty-five thousand.

As a teacher, particularly in this geographic area, I have a unique perspective on why this research is of relevance. I teach a course in women’s literature that looks at a wide variety of women’s work, and I have mentioned needlework in that scope. Students in this course have been profoundly affected by the juxtaposition between formal academic writing, creative writing, and needlework. In particular, the historical instances of quilts as protest (Carter) and the recent use of knitting in protest pieces by Auerbach, Mazza, and others have been fascinating to many.

Formal academic work is unfamiliar to many of my first-generation college students. Quilts and knitwear, however, often hearken back to practices that their mothers and grandmothers have engaged in. Often, in rhetoric, one of the things we question is who is, in a given situation, empowered to be a rhetor, empowered to speak. When those crafted forms of meaning-making are put up against more traditionally “academic” forms, students sometimes come to new realizations about the rhetorical potential of their families…and thus, of the possibility for their own significant utterances.

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9 Based on the US census, Wyoming is second only to Alaska when it comes to low population density in the US, and it is the least populated state in the union. While no one can be entirely sure of this, common wisdom is that the humans in Wyoming are outnumbered by the pronghorn.

10 That said, I am reasonably sure that the same kinds of connections to crafting heritage would be made by many students in other geographic areas. While in this case, these connections are powered by specific cultural, religious, and other socioeconomic conditions, it would be fascinating to work with a wider range of students on this topic and see what unique connections, if any, they make to ideas of craft.
Case Study

The project I have used for the case study is the RedSweaters project. The online presence of this project can be found at www.redsweaters.org. It began in February 2005 in response to the Second Gulf War. Project founder Nina Rosenberg wanted to use her knitting in a war-related way, but knitting items that would be sent to soldiers—a traditional way for female crafters to support war efforts—didn’t appeal to her.

Instead, I felt a need to make other people more aware of what is going on so far away; to compel people to listen to the news, ask questions, form opinions, or to simply take a moment to stop and consider the realities of war and how it is affecting their life, even if they are not directly involved. I wanted to come up with a way to use knitting as a vehicle to raise public awareness.

I thought about the posters from the world wars and I thought about activists. I realized that the best way to raise public awareness is through some kind of public display. “The Gates” had just opened in New York. It was an art display, thousands of metal frames with thousands of yellow-orange curtains. Thousands. Thousands of people have died in the war. I thought about knitting, I thought about death, I thought about repetition. Knitting is repetitious. I thought about knitting sweaters. I thought about death. I put the two together, and decided to represent death with knitting. (“Inspiration”)

Deliberately choosing sweaters in order to use their shape as a “direct representation of human form” (“Inspiration”), she decided that the sweaters should be red to represent blood and that
they should all be made of the same material, as are human beings. She planned to display them in a tree in her yard, as it evoked camouflage.

Originally, Rosenberg briefly considered knitting one mini-sweater herself for each soldier that died in Iraq, but she decided quickly to involve others. The project is on an extended hiatus at the moment, but Rosenberg has said that she will continue to accept and store project contributions; knitters around the globe have participated by making one or more sweaters, although the majority of contributions have come from US knitters. Based on the information Rosenberg gives on the project website—which Chapter 4 will examine—these knitters come from a variety of backgrounds and perspectives, although there is no formal database tracking project participant data. As of October 21, 2014, according to the website, 4488 American soldiers have died and 2546 sweaters have been knit. According to the site’s “Runway” page, which gives information on most sweaters knitted until mid-2007, only ten of those were done by Rosenberg herself. Clearly, there’s a great deal of involvement from others in this single rhetorical needlework project.

The page gives no demographic information about the knitters themselves, past their locations. According to this source, many of the knitters were from California, especially at first, but involvement quickly spread around the US. In looking through the list, thirty-eight states are represented, as well as the District of Columbia. Participation is spread around the nation pretty evenly; there’s no one geographic section of the country where people failed to contribute. Even less populated states such as Wyoming and Alaska are represented. The first international contributions arrived fairly early on, with Beth Freerksen of Dublin, Ireland, sending in sixteen sweaters in May 2005, which was only the third month of the project. Many of the other international knitters whose contributions are recorded were Canadian; the only recorded
participants who were not in North America were Freerksen and one contributor located on the US Army base in Wiesbaden, Germany. Considering that Rosenberg definitely received submissions for years after this list stopped, project participation may have spread to other countries, but I have not been able to document the extent of its global reach. Based on the information I do have, and what can be reasonably surmised about the project participants, there’s strong reason to believe that this project remained a largely North American endeavor.

Many factors led to my decision to select the RedSweaters project for my case study. First, it deliberately makes a statement. (Granted, Rosenberg wants that statement to be somewhat open to interpretation, but the basic thoughts about death and loss she shares above are straightforward and rhetorically charged.) Second, it is clearly based in traditional craft and knitting practices. After all, the displays don’t consist of sculptural pieces that are unfamiliar; they are made of sweaters, one of the most familiar knitted objects out there. Third, it brings together work from multiple people, but it is predominantly driven by the vision of one central person. Fourth, as a further exploration of the project’s history will show, its very basis in craft has arguably left it open to responses that would not have been evoked by a traditional piece of public art. Fifth, its basis in the US knitting community helps me, as a US knitter, understand its context and participants. While I do not want my research to stay focused on US knitting and needlework practices—or even solely on Western practices, for that matter—my identity and experiences make this project a good place for this phase of my project to start. These four attributes make the RedSweaters project a challenging test case for my heuristic. Further, they’re tied to some of the basic challenges involved in working with multimodal and feminist rhetoric: separate objects that are joined to make a statement, a deliberate statement that can be read in multiple ways, gendered practices, and multiple points of view. While this might not be the
easiest test case, it has certainly helped to further the ultimate goal of this project: to develop an analytical tool to help demonstrate and examine the rhetorical dimensions—and potential—of needlework.

Project Overview and Chapter Outline

Chapter two contains a literature review; the literature review begins with works about craft culture and modern knitting, then expands to explicitly theoretical work with rhetorical implications in the areas of feminism and multimodality. This review of existing scholarship is used in order to identify ways of viewing needlework as feminist and rhetorical.

Chapter three opens with an examination of heuristics and their use. After this, the literature review is synthesized into a heuristic that can guide analysis of rhetorical needlework.

Chapter four then presents my case study, the RedSweaters project, in detail. It then applies the heuristic to this project. Focusing on this as a single case study gives me the opportunity to apply my heuristic and examine the results in some detail.

Chapter five concludes the dissertation. First, the effectiveness of the heuristic I created and applied in the case study is assessed. Implications of this work, for those who are interested in this specific field of study as well as related fields, are considered; ideas for further research and analysis are also explored.
CHAPTER TWO. “UNDER THE FENCE”: REVIEWING THE LITERATURE

Having proposed in the first chapter that needlework can productively be considered as rhetorical discourse, this chapter discusses in greater depth the bodies of scholarship that support this view. The scholarship surveyed in this chapter informs the heuristic I have developed as well as my general understandings of rhetorical needlework. The review is broken into three major sections. The first focuses on knitting culture and modern knitting. The second covers feminist rhetoric and feminist rhetorical practices. The third looks at multimodality, both as it is discussed in composition and in multimodal studies of needlework practices.

In the section on knitting culture and modern knitting, I first deal with material that is specifically about knitting and craft. Part of the crucial background here is to look at the modern craft culture from which the current US knitting movement has grown, as much—but certainly not all—of the current push towards rhetorical and craftivist knitting comes from the US. After that, I move to more specific material about practices, practitioners, and products. There are two different types of work that fit in this section. The first type is knitting-specific popular work that covers mass knitting culture. The second type is work that deals with the slightly more rarified “high art” side of knitting. Finally, I close this section with an overview of craftivism and some important works on the topic.

The second section’s focus is on feminist rhetoric and feminist rhetorical practices. The first portion of this section examines the identification and definition of such work, seeking to clarify how feminism and rhetoric interact. The second portion covers works that apply and

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11 There is also a great deal of craftivist and rhetorical knitting elsewhere, most particularly in the UK and in Canada. However, as a majority of the work that I’m looking at comes out of the US, a focus on American knitting history seems most vital here. Later expansion of this work could lead into further investigation of the craft elsewhere, but an American focus seems to dominate in knitting literature overall at this point as well.
provide examples of the concepts and ideas from the works in the first half of the section, most particularly in the realm of women’s rhetorical practices.

The third section includes work that examines, defines, and inquires into multimodality and the analysis of multimodal artifacts. As a part of that inquiry, the boundaries and concepts of multimodality are explored. There are two parts of this section; the first deals specifically with composition and rhetoric, while the second is focused on multimodality as it has been studied within the scope of needlework and needlework practices. While my final heuristic is the major contribution this project seeks to make, it is my hope that this literature review can also function as a valuable overview for those interested in rhetorical needlework and the theoretical components needed to study it.

Knitting Culture and Modern Knitting

*History and Overview*

American knitting has a long, rich history, and its practice and practitioners have changed over time. The definitive book on the topic is Anne L. Macdonald’s *No Idle Hands: The Social History of American Knitting*. The earliest documentation of American knitting Macdonald finds is a 1642 decree from the town of Andover, Massachusetts, which required shepherds to do productive labor just as “spinning upon the rock, knitting, & weaving tape &c [sic]” in order to keep them from idleness while they watched their flocks (4). This production of textiles has been important to the country since its birth…indeed, even as a part of that birth. One of the common protests after the Boston Tea Party was to wear homespun and handknit garments (31), thus simultaneously moving away from dependence on the British and providing a visual display of identity and solidarity as the colonies prepared to fight for their freedom.

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12 Up until the late 80s, that is…I can only dream of a revised version. There are a few books that are more modern, but none as solid or definitive.
The relationship of knitted goods to protest and war is one that can easily be traced forward from this point through the Civil War. There are many records of those left at home, predominantly women, crafting for soldiers on both sides. Volunteers were spurred on by personal letters, public requests, and even a popular song urging the needles along:

Knit! Knit! Knit!
For our Northern soldiers brave!
Knit! Knit! Knit! While the Stars and Stripes they wave!
While they the rebels in battle meet
Be yours to fashion with fingers fleet
The nice warm socks for the weary feet
Knit! Knit! Knit! (102)

Similar calls for knitting happened during both world wars. Propaganda posters, knitting books, and press coverage of actresses who knit all served to prompt people to contribute to the war effort through their needles. The radio also came into use for the cause, with another particularly catchy tune being released during World War II:

First I Knit 2, Purl 2, Then I stop and think of you
This token of my love must keep you warm
Again I Knit 2, Purl 2, One to drop then carry through,
While praying it will keep my love from harm (304).

Knitted gifts have certainly gone to soldiers in care packages since (although I’ve yet to see any organized calls to knit for soldiers in the modern era).

In contrast, many recent projects have used knitting to question or protest military action; some have even created protest while simultaneously providing for soldiers. Cat Mazza
organized “Stitch for Senate” in 2007; in this project, knitters from around the US made helmet liners that were sent (with a letter from the knitter about their concerns with then-current US military actions) to all Senators after President Obama’s inauguration in 2009 (Mazza, “At Long Last”). Material about the wider project was also enclosed (with links to all knitter letters), and many (if not most) of the liners were either sent to soldiers by recipients or returned to Mazza and then sent to soldiers.\textsuperscript{13}

Obviously, though, knitting has been important in America in many ways that are unrelated to war. Knitting and other needlecrafts have used to supply basic requirements of everyday life, particularly in the pre-industrial era. Even when the work being done was itself largely ornamental, it served many purposes: demonstrations of status, demonstrations of skill, and gender performance among them. These purposes didn’t only reflect on the knitter; historically, “[k]nitted […] clothing for men was a sign of social status—a man who was wealthy enough for his wife not to work displayed this leisured status through the intricate work she produced for him” (Turney 29). These demonstrations and status signals have historically made the knitter attractive to other men and women both, as it has often been believed that “an idle hand is not a pretty hand” (Macdonald 143) even during so-called leisure time. Also, knitting, particularly when done by women, carries a whiff of the reassuringly domestic about it that has served to soften the edges of otherwise potentially objectionable messages and speakers. Some of the most famous images of the powerfully built Sojourner Truth, such as the one shown here, have her holding knitting in one hand, serving to reinforce her gender identity in the face of her outspokenness.

\textsuperscript{13} In a spirit of full disclosure, I should mention that I was one of the knitters involved in the project, and that I provided a letter and helmet liner that was sent to then-US Senator George Voinovich.
Knitting’s varied uses continue to be important today. Many work with the craft in a very practical way to support themselves and their families, either through selling knitwear (in person or online) or teaching the craft to others. There are also many for whom the craft is purely a leisure activity that provides relaxation, self-expression, and social interaction. Some knitters—like myself—move back and forth between these groups over time.

More subtly, though, the process of knitting has arguably been—and continues to be—just as important as its products. Many, such as Parker, have argued that needlework has been a way to create social distance; Joann Turney argues similarly for the process of knitting itself “as a form of contemplation and/or escape” (155). One of her interviewees notes that “[w]hen you
are knitting you are left alone. You look busy; you are doing something. It’s not like reading when it looks like you are just filling time. Knitting gives you space” (154). Going even further into the importance of process, Turney looks at the meaning of craft as gesture of the body, quoting Julian Stair: “If body and hand gestures are regarded as the precursors of verbal language, then what are craft objects but material gestures of the body, operating as externalized, pre-linguistic expression [….]” (153). Thus, it may even be said that the products of craft are material recordings of physical gesture.

I place this discussion of process as bridge between the distant and recent past because it places both eras in a different light. While we often think about knitted goods and knitters, both currently and historically, the idea of process—of knitting as a verb—is worth bringing into our historical contemplation as well. Some of the most useful contemplation of craft may require us “to pay careful attention to how something is made so that we come to regard what something is by how it came to be [thus] the process of making becomes an essential part of the object’s identity” (Risatti, qtd in Russo 113). While it’s harder for researchers to see the process than to see the product, a comprehension and assessment of both is vital for any understanding of knitting, rhetorical or otherwise.

Moving into the late twentieth century and first decade of the twenty-first century, knitting—and indeed, craft culture in general—experienced another cycle of sharp growth in popularity and popular awareness. Jack Bratich and Heidi Brush coin the term “fabriculture” for this new surge, as they refer

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14 Russo’s text seems to imply that this is from Sennett, but I’m not finding that to be the case. Also, Russo is greatly critical of this quote, as she follows it with a scathing dismissal: “Such as statement tends to glorify and mystify both object and process [….]” (113), but I will simply register my respectful disagreement with her on this point here and move on.
to a whole range of practices usually defined as the “domestic arts”: knitting, crocheting, scrapbooking, quilting, embroidery, sewing, doll-making. More than the actual handicraft, we are referring to the recent popularization and resurgence of interest in these crafts, especially among young women (234).

Moving back to the knitting-specific part of fabriculture, in their 2004 research, The Craft Yarn Council of America found that “[s]ince 2002, participation in [knitting and crochet had] increased more than 150% in the 25-34 age category….The 18-years-and-under age group [had] increased 100%, growing from 8% to 16% or 5.7 million women.” Especially considering the stereotypes of knitting as an “older woman’s” activity, this growth was rather remarkable. (Many responded to the violation of these stereotypes with confusion or even mild hostility. In 2003, I was twenty-seven and working in a yarn store located within a city market; I remember several occasions when I was told—usually by non-customers—that I was too young to be working there or to know anything about knitting. A few of those people seemed almost upset that I was doing so.) However, given the reasons for this knitting boom postulated by Kerry Wills—third-wave feminism and the modern do-it-yourself (DIY) movement (30)—the shifts in age groups made sense. After all, both the third wave and DIY movement have strong youth focus and representation.

Of these younger knitters, many of us were self-described feminists or post-feminists when we first picked up the needles, seeing knitting as a deliberate reclamation of traditionally marginalized women’s work.\textsuperscript{15} This connection has been made previously, as in the “1970s and early 1980s feminist reclamation of craft as a potentially liberating pastime” (Robertson 184) that can be linked to works of feminist protest and high art, such as Judy Chicago’s “The Dinner

\textsuperscript{15} Certainly not all, however. While there is a certain strain of focus on knitting that has definite third-wave elements, there are plenty of other entry routes into modern knitting as well.
Party.” However, possibly because of greater interconnectivity through the Internet and social media, possibly because of a tie to a particular surge of interest in a specific craft (in this case, knitting), or possibly because of the unique congeniality of difference-based, personally identified third wave feminism to the idea of such reclamation, this earlier wave of feminist craft did not gain nearly the traction it would in the late 1990s and early 2000s. For example, Debbie Stoller initially struggled to reconcile her love of knitting with the staunch feminism that led her to co-found third-wave feminist publication *BUST*. Stoller wrote in her introduction to her first knitting book, *Stitch ’n Bitch: The Knitter’s Handbook*, of her eventual realization that knitting could be deeply feminist:

> [A]ll those people who looked down on knitting—and housework, and housewives—were not being feminist at all. In fact, they were being anti-feminist, since they seemed to think that only those things that men did, or had done, were worthwhile. Sure, feminism had changed the world, and young girls all across the country had formed soccer leagues, and were growing up to become doctors and astronauts and senators. But why weren’t boys learning to knit and sew? Why couldn’t we all—women and men alike—take the same kind of pride in the work our mothers had always done as we did in the work of our fathers? (7)

Stoller was one of the most vocal of the early third-wavers who picked up the needles. She helped start a knitting group in New York City, and she used the pages of *BUST* to promote the craft.

Along with third-wave feminist reclamation, the Do-It-Yourself (DIY) movement plays into knitting’s resurgence as well. While independence and creativity are sometimes a motivation
for people to become engaged in the DIY community, there is also much to be said for the simple process of making. As Bratich and Brush point out,

[c]rafting creates slow space, a speed at odds with the imperative toward hyperproduction. Crafting also ruptures the seamlessness of the technological present—watching someone knit reveals alternatives to mass production, introducing jarring anachronisms akin to the Amish buggy on a highway (236).

This shift in perspective—or indeed, in perception—is also a reason that some have embraced crafting and the DIY ethos in recent years.

As knitting has gained in popularity with younger, politically aware knitters, it has become more and more common for the knitters in this group to see their work as something that expresses their beliefs and their commitment to activism. One such knitter is Betsy Greer, the founder of the website www.craftivism.com, a site that blends feminist ethos with DIY concerns about consumer culture and honing the abilities to provide basic items for oneself. Coining the term “craftivism” to describe a melding of craft and activism to reflect her belief “[t]hat each time you participate in crafting you are making a difference, whether it's fighting against useless materialism or making items for charity or something betwixt and between,” Greer uses her website as a vehicle for discussing the ways in which craftivism can work, collecting the stories of those who craft, and strengthening community through craft. She holds an M.A. in Culture, Globalisation, and the City from Goldsmiths College; in her thesis, entitled “Taking Back the Knit: Creating Communities via Needlecraft,” she further explores her belief in craft as activism, with a particular focus on the need for community—which is, in this case, created through craft:

By creating social groups of our own devising, [...]we are reconnecting with others in a way that precedes technological inventions. Every time I meet other
women in a knitting circle, I am recreating the quilting bees of over a century ago. I am facilitating growth in my community. I am re-establishing a connection via my own channels, reclaiming something that was lost in the postmodern quest for more more more. We are no longer knitting together out of a necessity for basic clothing needs, we are creating together out of necessity for closeness. (5)

Thus, we see that an activist impulse tied to third-wave feminist values and a DIY impulse that values labor and rejects some of the values of consumer culture is strongly tied, for Greer and many others, to the social networks that have been built around knitting and other crafts. Some of this has taken place in person, and such participation has, according to Turney, been on the rise in recent years for many reasons:

- Knitting in groups highlights the social aspect of the craft: it offers a forum for conversation as well as for making friends. It also encourages—and to a certain extent revives—oral craft traditions, and whilst contributing to personal life narratives, contributes to the narratives of knitting (147).

Considering that knitting and other crafts have often been done in groups, the social aspects of crafting here are hardly a surprise. That said, in the modern era, that social interaction seems to be needed in new ways. Whether in-person or virtual, social interaction is another key part of modern knitting for many knitters.

That said, there are some unique characteristics of the online knitting world to be acknowledged. Many have discussed the boom of knitting groups and networking online in the form of blogs, lists, knitting-specific websites like Ravelry, and other resources. Arguably, the many opportunities for online social interaction of varying types have been part of the reason that this particular swell of interest in the craft has been so dramatic. When crafters are given the
opportunity to join together across physical or class boundaries that may have otherwise divided them, as can be seen online, the connections made through these groups have the potential to become even more important. Certainly, people can and do learn from each other and form social connections based on craft.

However, Sal Humphreys takes social connections to another level through the concept of intercreativity:

Tim Berners-Lee has espoused the idea of intercreativity as one of the characteristics of the Internet that extend it beyond the capacities of more conventional media (Berners-Lee 1999). Not only is there the possibility for creativity, and for interactivity, whereby the user can interact with pre-existent content, but there is also the possibility for collaborative content creation – for intercreativity (424).

In short, intercreativity goes further than interaction, resulting in the creation of something new. Humphreys uses the concept of intercreativity in a case study of a popular knitting blog, The Yarn Harlot, and the Knitting Olympics started by the blog’s creator, Stephanie Pearl-McPhee. Before the 2006 Olympics, Pearl-McPhee suggested in a blog entry that knitters cast on a project as the Olympic Flame was lit and finish it before the Flame was extinguished. In the first entry, she originally just called out to “[a]ny knitter who, embracing the ‘Citius, Alitius Fortius’ ideal, would like to challenge themselves while embracing the Olympic spirit, and [was] just whacked enough to play along with [her]” (“Citius”)16; in the end, 4,071 knitters participated (“2006”) and teams were formed so that knitters could support each other during the challenge. Some teams

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16 I was a reader of her blog at the time, but I didn’t participate…although I wish I had done so!
were scattered around the globe, while some physically gathered to work on a single project (Humphreys 430).

Humphreys seems to focus on online artifacts as evidence of intercreativity. I would expand that further, as both the online discussion/documentation and separate knitted artifacts from a project such as Pearl-McPhee’s are irrevocably stamped by the ideas, encouragement, and support of others. Pearl-McPhee and the other knitters who form a community around her blog, as well as the specific knitters who were part of the Knitting Olympic teams, arguably all have some intercreative role—whatever that role might be defined as in each case—in each of the separate projects created during the event.

This connection to the online world has an effect on craft, but it can also be argued that craft has an effect on perception and use of the online world in return. Bratich and Brush argue persuasively that our gendered perception of craft requires us to look at its presence online through the lens of cyberfeminism, which they define as “a movement that encourages woman–machine relations, especially digital relationships” (243); they then remind us of the positive possibilities that can come from a gendered space and the importance of such physical spaces to the history of feminism (243). Further, they extend the benefits of these online spaces to consider that these feminine spaces of fabriculture serve to disrupt the accepted gender binary that would assume cybertulture to be primarily masculine (244)\(^\text{17}\). Provocatively, after examining links between the online world and the world of craft, they look back at craft work and draw some fascinating conclusions:

\(^{17}\) Granted, they then clarify how many women have been integral parts of online culture and computing technologies in the past after that; they don’t oversimplify the binary, thankfully. I will admit that binaries like this occasionally give me pause…but I do know many, many women whose initial steps into the online world were wrapped up in craft, which is making something about their claims really resonate for me.
Once we take this aspect of craft seriously, we can no longer simply hold onto the notion that craft-work is “old” media. In fact it reconfigures our notions of old and new, even our notions of media itself. Its thoroughly mediated quality (especially with online spaces) blurs the line between old and new technology. To put it simply, cyberculture reconditions fabriculture (especially its origins), while fabriculture reengineers the “newness” of new media and the virtuality of digital culture (245).

The authors make points here that are critically important to consider when analyzing knitted artifacts with an online component…and in carrying out a simple overview of what the knitting world looks like today.

However, not all knitting touches the online world, and not all knitters are engaged with feminism (cyber or otherwise). There are also plenty of solo knitters for whom the (seemingly) uncomplicated impulse to create practical, usable objects is the crucial driving force in their knitting. As one of Wills’s interviewees points out, making things is no longer essential for many in the present day, making it an indulgence to do so (43). Knitting is a relatively portable, often practical, material activity. That said, practicality is no longer what drives the average knitter.

Given “the abundance of novelty and luxury yarns” (77) on the market, the amount of time taken in the knitting process, and the easy availability of inexpensive, mass-produced clothing, it is easy to see the craft as a “luxury hobby—one that requires a little extra money and time” (77). Many knitters consciously choose to purchase yarns from small businesses, economic cooperatives in the US and abroad, and companies that embrace social and ecological responsibility. However, some purely go for the most luxurious materials available; others purchase the cheapest easy-care yarns, regardless of any environmental impact said yarns may
have. Knitting isn’t always a green, sustainable hobby for the masses…but neither is it always an environmentally and socially problematic status symbol.

Section Summary

Knitting in the United States has a rich history, one that is clearly tied to issues of gender, class, and identity. The process and product of knitting has been important in this country since its beginnings, and many believe that importance continues today. If there’s one thing to be taken away from this overview in regards to the current state of knitting, it is that there are certainly a few important trends, but that there is no one correct or dominant type of knitter or type of knitting. Wills puts it perfectly; there is “a fundamental truth about knitting: it is stretchy. Knitting can accommodate all kinds of people and a breathtaking variety of agendas” (73).

Practices and Practitioners

The following sections of sources are those on specific knitting practices and practitioners that are a bit “off the beaten path”; they have been relevant to my project because of their demonstration of the diversity of needlework practices. Each practice and practitioner, quite arguably, has a unique type of rhetorical relevance. In these cases, I have provided more of a list and overview of each of these major works, rather than a more traditionally integrated literature review. My reasoning was that each one has a very separate focus worth acknowledging, but that going further into many of them would make this literature review overly long and disjointed.

A major section of sources on knitting is one that I call “high craft” or “art knitting” for knitters. While the authors of these books seem aware that they may have non-knitting readers, their language and content reveals that their primary audience is knitters of various levels. They are predominantly looking at the process of knitting, usually with the inclusion of some patterns or tips for those who would like to experiment with similar techniques.
Most of these books have a very specific focus; one of the most common is a focus on the creations of one person. One such example is Katherine Cobey’s book, *Horizontal Knitting*. Although the text provides instruction in knitting technique, it also occasionally discusses the (sometimes explicitly feminist) motivations behind her work. Additionally, it provides exquisite photography of her pieces, which are often large-scale installations. One example of these that I will discuss later is her installation “Ritual Against Homelessness” (30-31), which is a circular grouping of rustic wool coats. Another is the striking “Portrait of Alzheimers” (164-165), a huge white silk and wool shawl displayed on a wooden hanger. The shawl’s pattern is interrupted in several places, and it is dramatically unravelling at the ends. Debbie New is another knitter worth discussing here; her book, *Uncommon Knitting*, is similar to Cobey’s in content, but much larger in scale and scope, as it covers a more diverse array of works. A personal favorite of mine is “Granny Squares” (3-5), a ten-by-seven-foot piece of flat knitting made of simple, connected squares of undyed natural fibers. Up close, little pattern can be detected; from a distance, however, the piece is clearly a sepia-toned portrait of an older woman. Other striking pieces are “Labyrinth of Rebirth” (197-199), a twenty-foot-long series of panels depicting fetal development, which were then hung on frames to form a labyrinth through which viewers traveled, and “Lace Coracle” (66-69), a piece that merges delicate lace with fiberglass resin to create a one-person boat.

Some works cover specific project types that are particularly relevant for those seeking to convey messages in knitting. *Astounding Knits* by Lela Nargi deals with knits that are physically large, technically challenging, or otherwise remarkable. Much of the work included is explicitly rhetorical, conveying specific meaning. One such example is “The Knitted River,” a piece made

18 The curious reader might wonder whether this would actually work, but New makes sure to include several photos of the vessel in use.
to call attention to issues of safe water access around the globe; according to Nargi, the work was made of more than 100,000 separate squares, which is easy to believe after seeing the photo she includes of the piece draped over London’s National Theatre (27). Yarn Bombing, co-authored by Mandy Moore and Leanne Prain, covers the popular trend of using knit graffiti covertly (also known as yarn bombing) in public, often urban, environments. These installations may range in size from a small tree cozy or railing cover to a piece that can span a bridge or cover a tank. The technique of yarn bombing is gaining in popularity, making this an important text and type of work to recognize.

Other important books in this area share an art-based perspective. Knitting Art, by Karen Searle, provides profiles of and images of work from eighteen different knitters (including Cobey and New). The projects shown run the gamut insofar as size, type, and their balance of the practical versus the conceptual. This book is the most like a traditional “art book,” considering the focus on high-quality imagery and lack of patterns. Radical Lace and Subversive Knitting was released to accompany a 2007 exhibit of the same name at New York’s Museum of Art and Design. This exhibit included a variety of knitted work, but a large portion of it was made up of non-knitted and/or non-textile pieces, limiting its usefulness somewhat. Still, as there have been so few catalogs like this, and because the exhibit received a great deal of attention, it is a key text to mention. KnitKnit, derived from a highly influential zine of the same name, is another vital book to consider. In this text, Sabrina Gschwandtner gives a look at the scope of conceptual knitting that has truly impressive breadth and depth. It does include patterns, reinforcing that it is primarily intended for knitters, not art aficionados. The link between all of these—and my reason for mentioning them here—is that there are clearly people seeing knitting as art and as
meaningful utterance. These are key texts of which people entering into the study of rhetorical
needlework should be aware.

Section Summary

Clearly, there is staggering diversity currently out there in this portion of the knitting
world. (Granted, there is a great deal of modern knitting that is about things like quick gifts,
historical techniques, and customizing patterns to flatter one’s figure. I don’t think any of those
areas are without interest—or, indeed, without potential rhetorical significance; within the scope
of this project, though, they’re not entirely relevant at this time.) The deliberate meaning-making
that takes place in much of the work above makes it vital to consider; for purposes of creating
my heuristic, looking at these works together makes their complexity even more obvious,
meaning that the questions I pinpoint need to provide a non-knitter a way into these dense
utterances.

Craftivism

As previously discussed, craftivism is meaning-rich work of “social or political activism”
which is often intended to “foment dialogue” (Greer 8). I’ve mentioned several works that deal
with this area thus far elsewhere in this literature review. However, since craftivism is so key to
rhetorical needlework, particularly knitting\(^\text{19}\), three works focused on the topic deserve some
discussion on their own. The first is *Craft Activism: People, Ideas, and Projects from the New
Community of Handmade and How You Can Join In*. A great deal of this book is filled with
patterns and other material that’s very focused on practical application for crafters; this limits its
academic use somewhat. However, it’s worth mentioning, partially because it was one of the

\(^{19}\) Granted, I do believe that there is plenty of rhetorically-significant knitting that is not specifically craftivist, but
craftivist work forms a significant portion of rhetorical needlework as I am defining it at this time. To state it more
clearly, I would argue that all craftivist needlework is also rhetorical; the reverse is not always true, but it is so in
many cases.
earlier books specifically focused on this phenomenon, and partially because of the range of material it covers. The aims of those projects range from personal nostalgia and growth to succinctly literal political statements.

The second book is worth a much more detailed view for my purposes of understanding rhetorical needlework, knitted rhetoric, and modern craft practices. *Craftivism: The Art of Craft and Activism*, was edited by Betsy Greer (who, as I have previously mentioned, coined the term). This is Greer’s second book related to the area, as her earlier book *Knitting for Good!* also reached out to knitters with ideas and opportunities that would help them engage in craftivism. However, *Craftivism* provides a much more thorough, thoughtful overview of the area that is not crafter-focused or process-centered. There’s a variety of important material here: first, a great deal of focus on what it means to be “makers,” a frequently-used term coming from the DIY movement that has been expanded to cover those who create in a general sense. Greer, in one of her chapter introductions, emphasizes the crucial role that this identity plays and the effects that making has on the maker: “craftivism is about change from within as much as it is about creating work that makes the world a better place” (9). This comment, made relatively early in the book, ripples out through the rest of the text, with other authors mentioning craft as empowering (58), liberating (49), and healing (37). The frequency with which these kinds of statements are made, both in this book and elsewhere, fuels both my long-standing interest in process and my growing belief that analysis of rhetorical craft should ideally contain some consideration of the project’s effects on the creator as well as the audience.

There is also coverage of a vast array of projects and artists within the book. Some of the contributors come from formally schooled art backgrounds, while others don’t. Some are fairly radical in their beliefs and practices, while others clearly are not. Some create work that has
clearly political messages, while others focus on work with much more diffuse intent. Many of the projects and makers discussed within are coming from positions of at least some socioeconomic privilege in the English-speaking world, but other work covered in this text is coming from somewhere else entirely in terms of socioeconomics and/or location\textsuperscript{20}. In short, the practice and practitioners of craftivism and meaning-making craft are exceptionally diverse.

Although this book is worth reading for many other reasons—and I would wholeheartedly recommend it to others as a sampler of craftivist culture—the final portion of it that I’ll elaborate on here is from an insightful piece by L.J. Roberts, “Making Mirrors: Craft Tactics in the Age of Ongoing AIDS.” In this piece, Roberts uses the AIDS Memorial Quilt as a point of entry for discussion of queer identity and craftivism, making some particularly insightful links along the way:

Stereotypes associated with craft and AIDS are aligned and function in similar ways. In the early 2000s, the word craft was erased from the nomenclature of multiple institutions across the United States. This elision symbolized that craft carried negative connotations—such as femininity, queerness, and amateurism—as well as undesired associations with poor and working-class people, oppressed minority populations, people of color, and Third World populations. People living with HIV have been stereotyped in a similar fashion [….] When we use craft to make work about AIDS, we are fusing issues with materials, techniques, and traditions whose stigmatization mirrors each other. Craft therefore becomes a visual tool that helps render misogyny, homophobia, classism, and racism nameable through materiality (126).

\textsuperscript{20}One example would be Heather Strycharz’s discussion of Chilean arpilleristas and the Indian Adithi Collective. However, there are several others.
As someone who worked with HIV/AIDS patients in the mid-1990s, I personally find Roberts to be making some interesting points here. However, further broadening my scope past my own experiences, I find this to be a thought-provoking point about the diversity that can be carried by rhetorical craft simply because it is *craft*. While there’s far more to rhetorical craft than the medium in which it’s presented, that medium does allow specific opportunities and connections that other forms of rhetoric might not encourage\textsuperscript{21}.

Finally, it’s worth considering the “Craftivism” section of *Extra/Ordinary: Craft and Contemporary Art*, edited by Maria Elena Buszek. This work is coming to the topic from a more explicitly academic bent—specifically, one engaging feminist lenses to examine art history and modern craft. Within this section, two pieces offer fresh perspectives on craftivism that are very much worth exploring here.

The first, Kirsty Robertson’s “Rebellious Doilies and Subversive Stitches: Writing a Craftivist History,” provides a valuable counterpoint to many of the histories of craftivism that seem to start at the late 1990s. Robertson, however, points out the wide array of feminist, activist work done through craft in the 1970s and early 1980s\textsuperscript{22}. This context in and of itself is enough to make this piece valuable for those interested in craftivism. Granted, it does not give, or seek to give, a full history of the interactions of craft and activism, as doing so would go back hundreds of years; instead, it highlights a portion of that history so comparatively recent as to shock the reader with the idea that some of this work could have already been forgotten, or even simply discounted and not put into perspective with current craftivist efforts. This erasure does have the

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\textsuperscript{21} Also, the point made here connects perfectly to Royster and Kirsch, as I will show in my heuristic.

\textsuperscript{22} I’ve mentioned some of this earlier work in passing, but I find Robertson’s chapter compelling because of the context in which she places it; this is why I’ve devoted time to this piece instead of simply talking about the work myself.
benefit of making textile-based activism seem new, Robertson points out, but it can help cause some serious problems:

What occurs is an interpretation of radical knitting as radical only in its form—in its reversal of stereotype rather than in its content. Through radical or subversive knitting actions no regularly receive extensive coverage, seldom are the goals of the knitters within the wider frame of anticapitalist protest placed above the curiosity factor inherent in the event (188).

Part of the remedy for this, she suggests, is stronger historical perspective around craftivism.

However, Robertson also finds some other crucial connections that must be made. One of the most interesting is between the recent wave of craftivist efforts and economic shifts. She points out that at the start of the most recent wave of knitting “in North America and Europe, the textiles industry in those same countries was very visibly entering a sharp downturn, with hundreds of thousands laid off, and hundreds of mills silenced” (193). She credits globalization and World Trade Organization moves to “encourage the development of textile industries in the developing world” (193) with the shift of these industries away from North America and Europe through the 1990s and 2000s, which does overlap neatly with the latest knitting boom in those same areas, as well as the following wave of the anti-sweatshop movement in a great deal of the protest works therein (196). She also connects the ebb and flow of identity politics to the waxing and waning use of textiles as protest, wondering if the links between feminine identity, crafts, and domesticity made it impossible to use craft as protest between the two waves she discusses (186), positing that

[t]his also offers a possible explanation for the resurgence of craftivism as debates over identity politics have in turn been eclipsed by analyses of global capitalism,
neoliberalism, and the attendant shift of (some) scholarly attention away from difference and toward analysis of connection, flows, and networks (186-7).

Bringing these points together as she concludes, she wonders if the only way that the current wave of craftivism can avoid historical erasure is for more attention to be paid to the historical and economic contexts surrounding it.

The following chapter, “Craft Hard Die Free: Radical Curatorial Strategies for Craftivism” by Anthea Black and Nicole Burisch, seems a somewhat odd fit for my project. It is, after all, directed largely toward the art world with a focus on curation and display of craftivist works in a museum setting. However, there are two things here worth considering. The first is a survey of craftivist projects that range from the deliberately unsophisticated and participatory to the polished work of a single artist displayed in a museum. While I have seen many of these projects discussed elsewhere, highlighting several of them within this work, it’s interesting to see the juxtaposition the authors arrange to highlight the diversity of craftivist efforts in their intended audience and presentation.

The second point to consider is Black and Burisch’s insistence that “dialogue and participation should be a prominent component of any exhibition that includes craftivist or politically engaged craft work” (215), which they then tie to four curatorial strategies:

1. Provide unmediated opportunities for craftivists to speak about their practices and to disseminate information about the political context of their works.
2. Build opportunities for teaching/learning crafting skills, sharing knowledge, and participatory making in the exhibition.
3. Situate craftivist works within an organization that is truly committed to community-driven, structural changes.

4. Use printed matter, documentation, archiving, and diverse distribution networks as a means to preserve and distribute information. (215)

These strategies and their concerns are interesting to consider when one is analyzing these works. After all, the works of rhetorical craft that researchers encounter have been deliberately displayed. Whether or not those works have been placed on display by their creators, considering the curatorial component of those displays, not just the contents of the displays themselves, is a crucial component of the analysis. That sort of display is similar to the way that other craft might be displayed, but a craftivist angle does, as the authors point out here, require certain considerations.

Further, these strategies provide some interesting considerations for the analyst, and for the development of my heuristic, on its own, especially when it comes to the consideration of the rhetor’s point of view. The authors of this piece make it particularly clear that one of their main concerns is “institutional appropriation” (214) on the part of museums and galleries; they point out that “adapting the original context of the works” can lead to “the erasure of community identities or of the activist issues that these practices seek to address” (215). Researchers could also contribute to such erasure in their work; therefore, it is crucial that my heuristic and those who use it make every effort to bring the creator’s voice and concerns into any analysis done of crafted rhetoric.

Section Summary
As with so many other things related to craft, craftivism is crucially about both the process and the product. Understanding and giving time to each of them is key. Because of this, it is important to pay attention to the creators in this type of rhetoric, especially because the form of the rhetoric itself is often spectacular enough to tempt one to pay insufficient attention to the content. As Betsy Greer repeatedly points out, craftivism has a personal component. Therefore, trying to hear the craftivists on their own terms is crucial. At the same time, the wider historical context—about the issues, about the production, about the product, and about craftivism itself—must be considered in analysis as well.

Feminist Rhetoric and Feminist Rhetorical Practices

Identification and Definition

Moving to feminist rhetorical studies, there has long been a difficult, yet essential, question to ask: what does it really mean to analyze rhetoric from a feminist perspective? What, indeed, are feminist rhetorics and feminist rhetorical practices? What sorts of theoretical lenses can enable us to really see this work? Before any discussion of specific application in the form of feminist rhetoric or feminist rhetorical practices, I take a long look at feminist rhetoric that simply seeks to understand what the combination of those two words has meant, means now, and can mean in the future.

I start such a look in what some might think is an odd place: Hélène Cixous, *l’écriture féminine*, and “The Laugh of the Medusa.” In “The Laugh of the Medusa,” Cixous posits the existence of women’s texts that are nontraditional, non-phallogocentric, and in some way—a way, I’ll grant, that is only tenuously described—markedly different from men’s texts. Various sources tie this difference to various things, although embodiment (Perl, Fleckenstein) is one of the more commonly mentioned within our area; for my purposes here, it is most important
simply to note the difference itself. I believe that this kind of theoretical positioning of difference as something that could be inherently important for women’s texts is a crucial intellectual move to consider here.

The same kind of appreciation of difference is inherent in Glenn’s *Rhetoric Retold*, but she sharpens the focus about what that difference means in a practical way. In grappling with the reality that most of women’s historical rhetorical utterances were never recorded, and that the lives of female rhetors were often never acknowledged in the formalized, researchable, provable way that enables the study of so many of the great men of rhetoric, Glenn realizes that feminist work in rhetoric is going to have to work on redrawing the map of rhetoric. Feminist work in rhetorical history must also include finding “techniques for listening to [historical women’s] long-silenced voices” (175), as traditional methodologies simply will not work when studying those for whom traditional documentation does not exist.

Glenn’s work serves as foundational understanding for Royster and Kirsch as they acknowledge but “seek to move beyond the core agenda of rescuing, recovering, and re(inscribing) women into the history of rhetoric (the three Rs) to work that is more transformative for the field” (18). In their survey of current work in the field, they find four “thematic frameworks for feminist rhetorical inquiry” which are “symphonic and polylogical patterns of inquiry, textually and contextually grounded analyses, local analyses connected to global enterprises, [and] an ethics of hope and care linked to responsible rhetorical action” (148). They propose four “critical terms of engagement” be worked with: critical imagination, strategic contemplation, social circulation, and globalization (19); these are typified elsewhere as “strategies for enabling robust inquiry” (148), functioning as part of the aforementioned patterns of inquiry. Each of these terms of engagement deserves some consideration on its own.
Critical imagination is described in the Royster and Kirsch text in various ways, but it is most simply put here:

The idea is to account for what we “know” by gathering whatever evidence can be gathered and ordering it in a configuration that is reasonable and justifiable in accord with basic scholarly methodologies. The next step is to think between, above, around, and beyond this evidence to speculate methodically about probabilities, that is, what might likely be true based on what we have in hand (71).

This mode of inquiry, then, explicitly gives researchers the chance to combine what they can prove with what they can reasonably surmise. It gives permission—even encouragement—to those who are making nontraditional connections. Critical imagination further prompts us to make clear our own positions and work to differentiate them from the rhetors we study. We must try to approach them with an understanding of their goals and perspectives, rather than flattening them into the one particular aspect of their work that we would seek to engage.

Strategic contemplation is the next term of engagement the authors propose. It “asks us to take as much into account as possible but to withhold judgment for a time and resist coming to closure too soon in order to make the time to invite creativity, wonder, and inspiration into the research process” (85). It seeks to call attention to, among other things, the researcher’s own experience of researching. It rejects the idea of a neat, tidy research process that is easily contained and quickly carried out, calling instead for attention to contexts, unexpected directions, and the recursivity of the lived research process. This kind of work prompts researchers to take a singular perspective.

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23 This term necessarily intertwines with the previous one, of course; the authors explicitly acknowledge that all of these types of thinking are entangled with each other.
[It encourages] us to look for alternatives to first looks, first thoughts, and first impressions, or even second and third ones, in order to engage possibility as a generative, dynamic concept, rather than a static one. Quite fundamentally, they encourage us to leave both knowing and ways of knowing open to negotiation and interrogation (90).

These ways of knowing can include various nontraditional tools and knowledges, such as embodied knowledge and senses of place.

Social circulation is a way of “understanding complex rhetorical interactions across space and time” (98). This concept seeks to disrupt the previously prevailing dichotomies such as public/private, formal/informal, and men’s rhetorical domain/women’s rhetorical domain. Instead of looking at things on one side or the other of any of those lines, Royster and Kirsch propose that we use a more all-encompassing concept of rhetoric that crosses over those lines while focusing on connections forged on multiple levels:

[T]he concept of social circulation functions as a metaphor to indicate the social networks in which women connect and interact with others and use language with intention. These ever-vibrant, interlinking social circles connect women not just across sociopolitical and cultural contexts, settings, and communities—locally and globally—but also across generations, across time, and across space (101).

This enables us to see traditions and histories that would have been concealed if adhering to the dichotomies proposed earlier.

Globalization, the final term of engagement, is the easiest to understand; given how crucial the general concept is for everyday life, this is a term that is a secure part of the modern lexicon. However, there are some interesting refinements of the term—relevant to this project and specific to rhetoric—brought up by the authors. They point out that it is crucial to look
beyond Western boundaries for rhetorical acts of significance and interest, but it is also crucial to move beyond “the boundaries of locally defined assumptions, values, and expectations regarding how rhetorical performance is constituted and valued” (112). This is key for my project and those like it. After all, needlework has not been conceived of as rhetorically valuable or viable, partially because of the “elite, white, male, European-based habits and measures” (112) that the authors call into question here. Therefore, even beginning to work with non-traditional material rhetoric plays into the Royster and Kirsch conception of globalization.

Further, as part of this term, the authors highlight the necessity of conscious incorporation of both feminist and transnational perspectives, simultaneously, into the study of rhetoric. They then look at some ways in which these foci can converge within useful research frameworks, particularly insofar as they are able to lead to fruitful analyses of Western culture. In multiple ways, then, their concept of globalization as a term is relevant even with work that does not explicitly have a non-Western focus.

The framework that Kirsch and Royster establish in this text is a cornerstone of my heuristic. It carries with it major feminist ideas and concepts, but it does so with a wide focus that will allow it to work well with other material on multimodality and craft work. Out of what I’ve discussed here, I particularly like the way that their concept of critical imagination enables us to meet non-academics on a more equal footing, something sorely needed if we’re to work in this area. This framework, and several other components of the book it appears in, has been crucial for my dissertation.

Section Summary

Although the term “feminist rhetorical practice” is a challenging one, there are some crucial points of concern that scholars agree upon in the analysis of such work. First is the issue
of difference; Cixous has firmer understandings of and belief in this *écriture féminine* as a completely different type of text than others might, but her perspective is worth considering. Glenn and other scholars deal with the issue of difference largely as the different ways that women have had to speak and be heard, and urge future scholars to go further with what Royster and Kirsch call the “three Rs” or “the core agenda of rescuing, recovering, and re(inscribing)” women’s contributions (18). While Royster and Kirsch don’t deny the importance of the three Rs, they push the field to go further in its aims. Part of this move is to encourage scholars to deal with rhetoric that is not historical, but it has a much wider scope than that. They suggest four particular strategies in this next generation of work: critical imagination, strategic contemplation, social circulation, and globalization. All of these strategies have a crucial part to play in the analysis of rhetorical needlework and in my heuristic.

*Application and Examples*

Along with the pieces in the previous section that offer a wider perspective on what it means to work with rhetoric from a feminist perspective, it’s crucial to look briefly at a few works that are actively engaged in such labor. There are several such examples elsewhere in this literature review, as a great many of the specific works that I’m drawing from in other sections come from an implicitly or explicitly feminist perspective. These additional examples are relevant particularly because of their feminist and/or gender-centric perspective, but they don’t quite fit into any other section of this review. These books and articles have produced perspectives and insights that I have found useful to this wider project; although there are many others that could be brought in, I’m limiting my focus to a few especially significant works deliberately here…otherwise, it would be quite easy to overwhelm both the reader and myself.
One such piece, “The Speaker Respoken: Material Rhetoric as Feminist Methodology” by Vicki Tolar Collins, would seem, in its reference to material rhetoric in the title, to potentially fit elsewhere in this review. However, this elegantly written essay engages material rhetoric in the form of publication and editing of *The Account of Hester Ann Rogers*, “the spiritual journal of an early British Methodist leader” (147) and mystic. The concepts of materiality engaged here are all surrounding texts, their printing, and their transmission. However, there are two points that the author makes here that I find useful. First, she does make a strong case for the importance of the material world, particularly when considering issues of feminism and gender. She quotes Christina Haas in her assertion that “the material world matters; that is, that the material-based conduct of human activities has profound implications for the development of human culture and the shape of human consciousness” (Haas 4, qtd. in Collins 148). Even though Collins almost immediately tacks this understanding explicitly into the book format, it is also a useful understanding to tack out and take elsewhere into my own project.

Second, Collins coins the term “rhetorical accretion” to discuss the “process of layering additional texts over and around the original text” (148). This can be a useful concept when it comes to the analysis of rhetorical needlework—much of which is created asynchronously as a group effort, where such accretion might occur; it is even more useful, however, when tied to the considerations of Black and Burisch when it comes to the curation and display of rhetorical needlework. Potential rhetorical accretion makes it even more crucial for rhetoricians to consider the methods of display and curation carefully and separately from the original pieces before considering the effects of pieces as a displayed whole.

Another important text, *Appropriating Dress: Women’s Rhetorical Style in Nineteenth-Century America* by Carol Mattingly, examines the role that women’s clothing and presentation
played in the rhetorical strategies that enabled them to be heard. Her focus is clearly historical in this piece, but much of her content remains current today: “...[A]ll women speakers, because of the close relationship dress and appearance had with the construction of gendered identity and perceptions of character, were cognizant of its importance […]” (5). While she was talking about nineteenth-century women claiming a place on speaking stages, she could as easily have been talking about female candidates in the last US election. Within the rest of the work, however, she focuses on concerns tied to the nineteenth-century timeframe, such as Quaker garb and reform dress. These concerns relate to the work being done in this dissertation through their demonstration of the importance of the material, the importance of subtle rhetoric, and the long history of paying attention to both of these things, particularly when they collide with gender, that one can find throughout a wide array of women’s rhetorical practices.

In her piece “Cultural Rhetorics of Women’s Corsets,” Wendy Dasler Johnson does work that is similar in some ways to that done by Mattingly, but she makes a few additions that I find fascinating and fruitful for this work. First, she argues vigorously for the importance of the body in rhetoric, discussing perceptions of the feminine form, the importance of presentation, and sentimental rhetoric. In the case of corsets, it is the discipline of the body shaping rhetorical power; however, there is an interesting parallel to the disciplined form of the needleworker (which, as Parker points out, often blurs the line between demure performance and distanced rebellion) and the role that the discipline and skill of the body plays in knitted rhetoric.

The end of the piece is also particularly compelling, as Dasler Johnson considers what corsets for the modern era might be and the effects they might be having. She particularly focuses this question on the presentation of female academics and the ripple effects that such presentation might be having, particularly on women’s writing:
We have likewise so often presented ourselves on campus and at conferences in broad manly-shouldered jackets, tummies seeming flat in pleated pants, hair upswept to not distract from the work of a scholar […]. The persona constructed in this strand of academic convention has made particular sense for a woman in a time when the professor is coded as masculine; maybe she slips under the radar of colleagues and students who expect a man in her position. Or a woman can aim to subvert “male” discourse with female-identified writing strategies. She says, “I am a woman,” loud and proud. In this trend, some now dare quit the shoulder pads for bright curving, flowing skirts and tunics. Here, the author and authority’s position is perhaps not transformed so much as switched in gender (228).

Not only is there something provocative to think about here as we consider the roles that gender and gendering play in rhetoric, but I find the shifting of signifiers over time to be quite interesting here as well. At one point, the first dress option she discusses would have been unthinkable for a scholar or for any woman. Now, it has a very specific meaning in performing both gender and a societal role. Much the same can be said for other material rhetorical practices, such as needlework. It’s crucial to look at a material practice in its current context, but it’s also crucial to look at how that context shifts over time.

Section Summary

There are many, many other works that could also be brought into this conversation. I choose these, however, to highlight the continuing relevance of the material when considering feminist rhetorical practices and women’s rhetorical practices. Also, there is a continuing thread
in many of these pieces, pointing out that things that are dismissed as “typically feminine” and therefore powerless can be turned to any number of uses by a skilled rhetor. Also, those items may accrete different meanings and implications over time, based on such rhetorical usage. Finally, it’s important to look at the changes wrought by time and context in the way that we see many of these rhetorical practices. While previous contexts are always worth considering, the way that they change and the current contexts (such corsets as sexy near-fetish-wear in the modern day, as pointed out by Dasler Johnson) must be added in to the picture as well.

Multimodality

*Multimodal Composition and Rhetoric*

As we’ve seen, it seems as though we should readily know what feminist rhetorical analysis and practices are, but a deeper consideration of them reveals their complexity and our need to more clearly think through their many possibilities. It is the same with the idea of multimodality, which is just as necessary (if not more so) in any discussion of needlework and rhetoric as a clear understanding of feminist rhetorical analysis and practices. The term has certainly been current in rhetoric and composition in recent years. However, many arguably have hazy or partially incomplete understandings of what multimodal composition or rhetoric is, believing not just that it refers to work that encompasses modalities other than or in addition to print text\(^\text{24}\), but that such work is necessarily computer-mediated in some way. In the introduction of her *Toward a Composition Made Whole*, Jody Shipka shares her concern about this issue:

> [E]mphasis placed on ‘new’ (meaning digital) technologies has led to a tendency to equate terms like multimodal, intertextual, multimedia, or still more broadly speaking,

\(^{24}\) This definition, before we add the unnecessary requirement of computer mediation, is one I can get behind…and it certainly shows why work with multimodality is so crucial in a craft-based project like this.
composition with the production and consumption of computer-based, digitized, screen-mediated texts. I am concerned as well that this conflation could limit (provided that it has not already limited) the kinds of texts students produce in our courses (7-8).

She continues to provide many examples of this phenomenon occurring in various writing in our field. She even discusses a small survey reported at the 2006 Computers and Writing conference in which 85 percent of survey respondents specifically talked about digital texts (9) when asked to describe or define multimodality.

However, Shipka provides a more diverse array of work that she believes to be multimodal, memorably including the first example discussed and pictured in the text, an essay handwritten on a pair of ballet toe shoes (3). In bringing this material into consideration, she quotes Kathleen Yancey’s discussion of the many relationships involved in the modern text: “‘between parts and parts, between parts and whole, between the visual and verbal, between text and context, between reader and composer, between what is intended and what is unintended, between hope and realization’” then asserts that “such a definition is clearly robust enough to point to, if not explicitly include, expressions, relationships, texts, and contexts that are not wholly or even partially digital” (9). While few researchers have explicitly excluded partially digital or nondigital texts from consideration as multimodal, I share Shipka’s belief that the explicit inclusion of those texts in our consideration of multimodality is absolutely crucial.

Palmeri takes understandings of multimodality in another direction, bringing forth a historical perspective in Remaking Composition: A History of Multimodal Writing Pedagogy that compellingly asserts that composition has been simultaneously grappling with challenges

25 I’ve found this to match up to my experiences with many colleagues, particularly those without recent comp/rhet training. In fact, only three days before I wrote these words, I almost brought a department meeting to a screeching halt by simply suggesting that multimodality isn’t solely digital. It’s very attractive for those of us who’ve studied this material recently to think that no one would have this perception…but based on what I’ve seen, it’s far from true.
imposed by “new media” and happily incorporating less-threatening forms of multimodality since the 1960s, if not earlier. And, as he reminds us, scholars such as Gitelman and Pingree have asserted that “all media were once new” (89). (This, of course, calls back to work such as Baron’s “From Pencils to Pixels: The Stages of Literacy Technologies” and its matter-of-fact claim that “writing itself is always first and foremost a technology, a way of engineering materials in order to accomplish an end” (692).) Palmeri shows the multimodal ways of thinking implicit in many areas of composition, even those which aren’t explicitly aimed towards creating multi-modal projects. One such example is his discussion of the “multimodal thinking” (32) and methods of “problem finding” (30) that are embedded in the seemingly writing-driven process movement. He also looks at older technologies, such as audio, film, and Xerox, examining ways that previous compositionists sought to help students engage with those technologies, either as supplements to or replacements for traditional alphabetic texts. He provides notable examples like Ray Kytle’s Comp Box: A Writing Workshop Approach to Composition, an unbound compilation of materials meant for remixing accompanied with an author’s guide (103) and Richard Williamson’s 1971 essay “The Case for Filmmaking as English Composition,” which called for filmmaking “to replace much of the alphabetic writing in the composition class” (126).

Palmeri is important in this literature review, and this project as a whole, for a few reasons. First is the richness he adds to the definition of multimodality itself; he does not simply consider the modes with which writers handle composition challenges, he goes a step further and considers the ways that we think through the challenges themselves as multimodal. Second, I very much appreciate his simultaneous engagement with and critical thinking about new technologies. He sees the central point of his book as an argument “that we should value and build upon our multimodal heritage—that we should be wary of valorizing new technologies so
much that we forget the useful elements of our past” (111). Finally, he also questions
multimodality for multimodality’s sake, saying that “[t]oo often, advocates of digital pedagogy
(myself included) tend to position multimodal composing as inherently progressive” (109). His
willingness to examine what is being done when a multimodal artifact is being composed and
whether that multimodality is being put to productive use is something that makes a great deal of
sense to me, and that I will draw from later.

Another comparatively recent work that is worth inclusion comes from the field of
linguistics: Multimodality and Genre: A Foundation for the Systematic Analysis of Multimodal
Documents by John A. Bateman.26 As the title states, Bateman’s focus here is to find a way in
which to analyze multimodal documents. Despite his focus on text-based forms of rhetoric,
though, Bateman provides a few valuable concepts and components for understanding knitted
rhetoric as multimodal.

The first valuable idea is one that seems shockingly simple once stated. When we are
analyzing a multimodal artifact, we must recognize exactly what elements are present within that
artifact. Bateman clarifies the problem here:

Recognizing reliably just which elements are being used on a page and how they
are being related is by no means an easy or obvious step—although it is too often
treated as if it were. There are some significant methodological issues lurking
which need to be explicitly problematized: whenever an analyst is free to select,
invent or ignore elements on the page at will, with little more in the way of
justification than that they appear significant (or not), it remains difficult to move
beyond anecdotal interpretation. It is crucial that elements are brought to our

26 As this book was published in the United Kingdom, it uses British spellings, which I have left in place when
quoting this text.
analytic attention regardless of whether we as analysts thought, intuitively, those elements to be significant or not (21).

The single-page print artifacts that Bateman examines in his project may be a bit easier to carry this out with than the type of artifacts I’m examining. That said, I’m absolutely in agreement with his point: a key stage of analysis for multimodal artifacts must be a clear detailing of exactly what components are within those artifacts, whether or not we believe those components to be important at first glance.

Bateman also studies a number of other bodies of work in order to produce his own analytical system, and there are a few ideas from several of them that I find of potential use. The first is from Karen Schriver, who (like Bateman) works too explicitly with the design of single documents to be directly transferable to my project, but still sets out an interesting organizational concept, which I hope I can be forgiven for quoting at length:

Schriver suggests two kinds of text elements that we distinguish here as ‘simplex’ and ‘complex’. First, there are simplex elements that “often depend on their genre [...]” and which serve as individual, isolatable elements of page design (Schriver 1997, p343). Second, there are configurations of such elements on the page which Schriver terms rhetorical clusters. These are defined as follows:

By rhetorical cluster I mean a group of text elements designed to work together as a functional unit within a document. Rhetorical clusters act as reader-oriented modules of purposeful and related content. They are comprised of visual and/or verbal elements that need to be grouped (or put in proximal relation) because together
they help the reader interpret the content in a certain way.”

(Schriver 1997, p343)

Identifying such rhetorical clusters is then one of the basic steps proposed by Schriver for ‘seeing the text’, for describing and analysing what goes into a page design (33).

While the type of multimodal work that interests me isn’t contained by a page, this concept of clustering interests me very much\(^2\). Tying this to the earlier thoughts from Bateman, I decided that a crucial part of my heuristic should center around what simplex elements can be found in the piece, and then where any potential rhetorical clusters can be found. I do use the term “potential” here based on Bateman’s earlier caveats: if the analyst cannot decide what elements to see in a document based on their presumed importance, it must be equally important for the analyst not to immediately decide which rhetorical clusters are or are not contained therein. Bateman agrees, cautioning that the identification of a cluster “presupposes that we have interpreted the contributing elements to stand together in some particular functional relationship” (34), and noting that said interpretation might be flawed. However, Bateman and I seem to agree that trying to find potential clusters might be a good move for an analyst to make, as long as the above problems are kept in mind.

The other major school of thought engaged by Bateman is that of multimodal linguistics. He brings particular focus to Kress and Van Leeuwen and their “grammar of visual design” (39). However, this is done in, again, a very page-based way that doesn’t work for my project. After all, if a multimodal artifact consists of separate knitted works, Bateman also references Baldry and Thibault as others who have used the term “cluster” in this way; the term that Baldry and Thibault add to the discussion is “mini-genre” or “reusable fragments for fulfilling particular discourse purposes” (53), a term that I don’t think I’ll use but one that I find conceptually interesting.
a larger knitted creation made by joining them, and a written artists’ statement, what could possibly be determined to be a page? However, Bateman does give a passing mention to Halliday’s concept of systemic-functional linguistics (SFL), an idea that underlies many of those that follow it, such as the work of Kress and Van Leeuwen:

SFL captures the appropriateness of texts to context in terms of three interacting but distinct functional domains: the representational domain, the interactional domain, and the ‘text-organizational’ domain. These domains are referred to as metafunctions because they are essentially ‘generalised’ functions that hold whenever a linguistic unit is constructed: any linguistic unit, such as a clause, can be analysed simultaneously according to the work it does to represent the world, the work it does to enact social relationships […], and the work it does to contribute to an unfolding text or dialogue (39).

Bateman continues to give the example of a photograph, which “may present simultaneously a representation of something occurring, an interpersonal appeal to the viewer […], and a textual organization whereby some things are made more salient in the composition […] and others less so” (39). He then suggests the potential combination of analyses from these differing perspectives. I definitely find the structuring of these three metafunctions interesting, and I believe that I may find myself returning to it as I continue to work with my heuristic at a later stage, particularly as I expand it to include less explicitly meaning-making work.

Section Summary

Multimodality is a far more basic and pervasive part of rhetoric and composition both than many think. As Palmeri says, we were always already multimodal. As Shipka
illustrates, there’s far more to multimodality than many think; more information about non-digital multimodality and how to work with it may be helpful to many. As we see from Bateman, though, providing such clear information may be easier said than done, particularly when it comes to analysis, although he proposes many possibilities. His one very definite point, though, is to convincingly show that analysis of multimodal rhetoric has to clearly break out the component parts and modes in the work, then work with them separately and in combination.

**Multimodal Studies of Needlework Practices**

To return to my earliest definition, positing multimodality as simply (and self-explanatorily) the employment of multiple modes, whether or not any of those modes are computer-mediated, it is important to consider how some of those modes might function in regards to this specific project. This section seeks to bring that back into focus through a needlework-specific lens, considering some of those works that have specifically engaged needle crafts on the basis of their multimodality⁴⁸.

In “I Remember Mamma: Material Rhetoric, Mnemonic Activity, and One Woman’s Turn-of-the-Twentieth-Century Quilt,” Liz Rohan examines “memory as craft” (370), through consideration of multimodal objects such as diaries, keepsakes, and quilts. Her main focus, though, is the quilt made by Janette Miller, in memory of her mother, which was completed somewhere around 1902. In this piece, Rohan discusses the recovery of women’s rhetorical practices, the function and importance of the multimodal, the coded significance that can be within craft—all concepts that are certainly familiar by this point in this literature review. What I find most interesting in this piece, though, are two other specific points. First, Rohan makes it

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⁴⁸ Granted, some of the works I mention here may not use the term “multimodal” explicitly, but I would argue that all of them are looking at needlework as something that uses multiple modes to create meaning.
very clear that, in this timeframe, craft was seen as a meaning-making practice with rhetorical significance. She points to ties between needlework and writing and discusses friendship and mourning quilts as popular genres that conveyed information and had specific meaning (374-5).

She presents ample evidence here of needlework’s accepted status at the turn of the century as a meaning-making tool, a status which is no longer so easily afforded to it by many today. Second, she examines ideas of remediation and translation in insightful, exciting ways (which I hope to be forgiven for quoting at length) with definite application to my work. This begins as she further examines links between quilting and writing:

   Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin might deem this use of two respective mediums for memory-making—quilting and writing—as an example of remediation whereby new and old mediums reinforce and interact with one another—in this case clothing scraps and letter scraps. As they explain it, “The very act of remediation [. . .] ensures that the older medium cannot be entirely effaced; the new medium remains dependent on the older one in acknowledged and unacknowledged ways” (47). However, [Bruno] Latour’s concept of “translation” might also explain the relationship among mediums among Janette’s mnemonic materials. Translation, according to Latour, is the relationship among material objects, people, and experience that results thereby in “the creation of a link that did not exist before and that to some degree modifies the two” (179).

Janette, and presumably her nineteenth-century counterparts, has in effect emphasized a link between two otherwise mutually exclusive mediums for design—writing and sewing. Bolter and Grusin’s concept of remediation suggests a linear relationship between media—one medium might for instance replace the
other once the second gains cache. Translation allows an understanding of several mediums being used and understood simultaneously by rhetoricians, and nonhierarchically. The concept of clothing scraps as “data” for creating a new artifact such as a quilt might be regarded as a form of translation because letter scraps can be understood as performing the same function as quilt pieces—the letter scraps act as “pieces” that can be arranged in a meaningful pattern as with fabric pieces in quilts. Each medium can be understood in relation to one another. Fabric pieces are thus “modified” in their relationship to letter scraps. Readers might understand these otherwise semiotic artifacts as performing the same function as print texts—creating and maintaining memories (376).

The notion of translation and mutual effect appeals to me, and makes sense when applied to crafted rhetoric, in a way that the idea of remediation doesn’t quite achieve for me. After all, once a connection has been formed between two objects, don’t viewers see both of them a bit differently? And doesn’t that altered view necessarily affect how those objects will be read thereafter? Also, there’s something fascinating going on here in the relationships between artifacts, or even between parts of/materials used to make artifacts. Understanding the translated shifts in this area is not unlike the shifts in signification over time pointed out by Dasler Johnson. Words can tell us what they mean, but we have to bring a heightened level of awareness to objects in order to figure that out.

Another important consideration comes from Maureen Daly Goggin’s “Visual Rhetoric in Pens of Steel and Inks of Silk: Challenging the Great Visual/Verbal Divide” in which she complicates two of the main components of multimodality, the verbal and the visual, by ably making the case that they are inextricably entangled with each other through, on the most basic
level, the practice of writing itself. She continues, making clear that once we have those two elements, the material must come into play:

All discursive practices may be best understood as material practices. That is, for visual rhetoric, material surfaces (paper, stone, clay, canvas, metal, digital space) are marked with a tool of some sort that releases a physical substance such as ink or lead or scratches, etches, carves or molds signs, or translates keystrokes into electronic impulses and so on. (89)

In other words, any written text without any ornamentation or added image can be argued to have three modes operating within it that help construct its meaning: the visual, the verbal, and the material. This is a provocative statement on its own, as it makes everyday documents more complex by highlighting how multimodal composition has always been, as Palmeri argues. However, Goggin travels in a different direction than Palmeri, using this as a link to point out similarities between traditional written documents and other less traditional forms. She moves further into this by considering the affordances of different material practices:

The technologies of each vary in permitting some possibilities for representation while constraining others. [...] Moreover, the cultural, social, and political expectations for how particular kinds of meaning may be represented (and thus “seen” or made visible) shapes what kinds of representations are permitted. That is to say, the materiality of semiotic practices and artifacts is socially, culturally, and politically constructed (Street 170). The question is, if all discursive practices are material practices, what is the range from all available material practices that may be understood as meaning-making? Is it the case that all material practices hold the potential to serve as semiotic resources? (89)
These questions are challenging at best to answer outright, but they serve, I feel, to both reinforce Shipka’s assertions about the possibilities of multimodality and push us to see the texts of the world around us in a different way. Goggin turns to needlework as a place to tease out some answers to her questions, or at least to add new ones to the list. Through doing so, she also begins to bring the performance of skills into the discussion, ending by encouraging those following her “to use as a starting point […] not the artifact itself but the means of production, and to trace this through the performance of the semiotic work” (106).

Roszika Parker deals with some of the same questions, but from a different disciplinary angle that illuminates different parts of the issue. Parker, primarily an art historian by training, focuses on embroidery in her often-cited book *The Subversive Stitch*. She argues as clearly as Goggin that the practice of needlework is one that makes meaning, although she shares the same frustration that these meanings are sometimes ignored:

That embroiderers do transform materials to produce sense—whole ranges of meanings—is invariably entirely overlooked. Instead embroidery and a stereotype of femininity have become collapsed into one another, characterized as mindless, decorative, and delicate; like the icing on the cake, good to look at, adding taste and status, but devoid of significant content (6).

She continues throughout this work to unpack that significant content as it appears in historical needlework. Her many examples range from sampler lines stitched by a daughter in praise of her mother’s instruction in needlework during the eighteenth century (131) to protest works of the 1960s and 1970s that deliberately subvert the form of needlework in order to make verbal and visual statements against the domestic (205).
A great deal of what Parker discusses, however, is not the product of the needlework, but the meaning of the act of embroidery, of process itself:

The manner in which embroidery signifies both self-containment and submission is the key to understanding women’s relation to the art. Embroidery has provided a source of pleasure and power for women, while being indissolubly linked to their powerlessness. Paradoxically, while embroidery was employed to inculcate femininity in women, it also enabled them to negotiate the constraints of femininity (11).

These expressions of self-containment and submission Parker mentions are, as she discusses them further, most concretely a product of the physical demands of this form of multimodality. Here, it seems to be implied, process has a similar importance to product, and it is crucial to consider both. This relationship between process and product echoes many of the principles of Royster and Kirsch, as well as Shipka’s attention to both the end product in multimodal composition and the process itself. It also hearkens back to Dasler Johnson’s thoughts about form and discipline. Given this process focus, Parker calls upon scholars and teachers to examine final products in relation to the highly distributed and complexly mediated processes involved in the creation, reception, and use of those products. They must […] illumine the fundamentally multimodal aspects of all communicative practice. In addition to treating the various materials and supports people employ while producing texts, our theoretical frameworks must help us trace the multiple spaces in which and times at which composing occurs, and attend as well to embodied activity and co-practice (39).
Even though Parker comes from a very different field, she would clearly agree with the primary point Shipka makes about process; putting scholars such as this into context is definitely one of the benefits—and the joys—of doing work such as this that seeks to bring together very different areas of scholarship.

Section Summary

In short, all four of these authors combine to create a rich, complex image of multimodality as it may be practiced through and around the needle. First, they all clarify that a deep consideration of process is vital in rhetorical needlework. While there is much to be teased out when it comes to the specific relationship of process to the other modes of meaning, it’s clear that consideration of process will be key when it comes to the analysis and understanding of these complicated, important means of meaning-making. Second, these scholars point to some of the ways that objects make meaning of the world around them and each other. As Royster and Kirsch might put it, tacking in then tacking out is key to seeing the different interconnections and relationships.

It is my strong belief that combining some of these understandings of multimodality with the feminist rhetorical principles previously mentioned helps to illuminate both. When material on craft practices is brought in, key points to be addressed from each area in a heuristic become apparent. Such a combination is key to the real understanding of these ongoing modern practices and products that I help to foster in my heuristic.

Chapter Summary

In review, this chapter has looked at three areas of scholarship. Major ideas from each inform my heuristic. When looking at knitting, I’ve found that the area is staggeringly diverse, but with a rich history in the United States. It, along with other needlework practices, is clearly
tied to issues of gender, class, and identity. Another main point is that both process and product are key when studying craftivism and other forms of rhetorical needlework, and both must be considered, as must any display of the work itself (whether curated by the maker or not). Part of such consideration comes from paying attention to the creators and their experiences, instead of being seduced into solely considering the items they create. Because of all the component parts and subtleties of rhetorical needlework, such as this process/product split, pieces of rhetorical needlework can be hard to read; any heuristic needs to help make this type of work accessible for crafters and non-crafters alike.

When it comes to the consideration of works about feminist rhetoric, there are a few key points to note. First is the issue of difference, and the different ways that women have had to speak and be heard. Next are the specific strategies proposed by Royster and Kirsch: critical imagination, strategic contemplation, social circulation, and globalization. Pieces that focus more specifically on feminist rhetorical practices seem to share a few crucial ideas as well. The first is that things dismissed as “typically feminine” and therefore powerless can be turned to any number of uses by a skilled rhetor. Also, those items may accrete different meanings and implications over time, based on such rhetorical usage. Thus, it’s important to look at the changes wrought by time and context in the way that we see many of these rhetorical practices, bringing both historical and modern context into play.

Multimodality is a far more basic and pervasive part of rhetoric and composition both than many think; beyond the acknowledgement of that fact, there are three other important ideas that feed into my heuristic. First, analysis of multimodal rhetoric has to clearly break out the component parts and modes in a piece, then engage with them separately and in combination. Further, concepts of translation and connection are key;
connections made between objects can change how we read or translate each of them.

Finally, studies that take an applied approach to multimodality support other works in this review: a deep consideration of process is vital in rhetorical needlework.
CHAPTER THREE. “CATCH THE SHEEP”: A HEURISTIC FOR ANALYZING KNITTED RHETORIC

Having surveyed relevant bodies of scholarship in the previous chapter, in this chapter I synthesize them in the form of a heuristic to be used to analyze knitted rhetoric and other rhetorical needlework. In order to do so, I’ve broken the chapter into two sections. First, I briefly clarify why I’ve chosen to create a heuristic. While doing so, I give some background information on heuristics in general, specifically focusing on the work of Janice Lauer on heuristics in composition. I then look back to my literature review, and my findings on the works included, in order to create my initial heuristic.

The Usefulness of Heuristics

In her book *Invention in Rhetoric and Composition*, Janet Lauer defines heuristics as “modifiable strategies or plans that serve as guides in creative processes,” further clarifying that heuristics used in writing “try to prompt thinking, intuition, memory, inquiry, and imagination without controlling the writer’s writing process” (154). In an earlier work, Lauer spoke in more detail about the function of heuristics, saying that their role was to guide writers' inquiries, helping them to retrieve past meanings and to symbolize new associations. These models are series of questions or operations which guide writers to examine their subjects from multiple perspectives. Neither a set of mechanical steps nor trial-and-error searches, they are conscious operations that are useful in open-ended inquiry which seeks new meanings (“Toward a Metatheory” 268).

While Lauer and other compositionists have examined heuristics in more detail and proposed much more specific types and models of heuristics, this statement of their purposes remains key.
Heuristics are not meant to simply be mechanical steps, and they are not meant to be immutable rules. Indeed, Rose discusses the danger of such rules in composition, pointing out the limitations in hard and fast algorithms when applied to “a world where tasks and problems are rarely mathematically precise” (536) and the role that such algorithmically structured rules can play in causing writer’s block.

Certainly, as the “tasks and problems” posed to us by analyzing something as multidimensional as most pieces of rhetorical needlework are far from being “mathematically precise,” it then makes sense that we would turn to an analytical tool with some flexibility, like a heuristic. The very precise systems that Bateman and other analysts have tried to construct are more suitable to other products and processes. Rhetoric is itself a complex thing to analyze and understand; while Kirsch and Royster don’t quite create a heuristic in their work, what they produce does come very close in its flexibility and complexity, and their inquiry system works in a nearly heuristic fashion. This complexity only increases when it comes to rhetorical needlework and knitted rhetoric. After all, there are a wide range of types of knitted rhetoric, varying widely in size, complexity, number of separate elements, number of creators, and such.

A heuristic for analyzing knitted rhetoric still has to provide some guidance and specificity, though. If one is not adept at the particular craft being examined, one will simply not know the kinds of questions to ask about it, yet a good heuristic can prompt questions to be addressed through research. Especially notable here, I feel, is the consideration of process. Any knitter, for example, knows that it can take a long time to knit a project. Non-knitters often don’t understand the time involved in knitting, though, and they also wouldn’t see the impact.

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29 Having been paid hourly at one point to knit shop samples, I’ve paid more specific attention to the exact amount of time spent than most, and it can be pretty stunning, even for someone who does the craft! As to the frequency with which non-knitters don’t understand this, I can only point to the common experience had by many knitters of being asked to make something for someone who clearly doesn’t understand that what they’re asking for.
that particular techniques and yarn weights\textsuperscript{30} have on the time outlay for a project. A very simple scarf in garter stitch, the easiest knitting stitch there is, will still take several hours to create in all but the chunkiest of yarns. Some forms of very simple lace might be quicker, but others would take far longer. Cables of any kind would add significant time to the work. If one’s never done any of these things, though, it would be easy for a garter stitch scarf and a scarf with intricate cables to seem almost equally time-intensive. Part of my aim in creating this heuristic, then, is to help non-needleworkers find the right questions to ask. The same goes for feminist rhetoric and multimodal rhetoric. If one does not have an understanding of these areas, critical questions may go unasked.

The Heuristic

As implied above, I have split this heuristic into four areas: rhetorical, craft, multimodal rhetoric, and feminist rhetoric. I am aware that the division between these areas can be a thin one on occasion, and that there is sometimes overlap; however, I feel that the organization I have selected makes this heuristic more understandable and useful for a broader audience. I recognize that this heuristic, and indeed any heuristic, necessarily presents a seemingly simple tool for analysis of phenomena that are by their very nature complex, messy, and nuanced. Nonetheless, heuristics such as the one I have developed provide useful starting points for understanding complex phenomena that are a part of daily life.

*Rhetorical Concerns*

1. **Who is the rhetor?** If there are multiple rhetors, is there an originating or main one?

2. **Who or what has an intercreative role in this work?**

\textsuperscript{30} Essentially, how thick the yarn is.
3. What is known or can be surmised about the rhetor’s intended message? Does the intended message vary between multiple rhetors?

These questions do not fit into one of the other three categories, largely because they’re common to so much of rhetorical analysis in general. However, these issues of authorship and message can be complicated in very specific ways based on the process and product of rhetorical needlework.

1. Who is the rhetor? If there are multiple rhetors, is there an originating or main one?

A great many of those who use needlework rhetorically are solo creators. As mentioned earlier, Katherine Cobey is one of these. In her “Ritual Against Homelessness,” she was originally inspired by some remarkable fleeces she was sent, then “the women living on the streets in Washington D.C., and what I had read about American trade blankets coalesced with the character of the unspun wool” (Cobey 31), leading her to create “a circle of coats protesting homelessness” (31). There is clearly a personal vision at work here, leading to specific connections unique to this artist.

On the other hand, Cat Mazza’s Nike Blanket Petition enlisted “over 500 knitters from the USA and twenty other countries to produce a blanket featuring the Nike ‘swoosh’ logo, constructed from donated 10 cm (4 in) knitted squares” (Turney 175). Instead of doing a traditional written petition, Mazza felt knitting to be “a more hands-on, genuine way of creating a signature” (Gschwandtner 122). Mazza was certainly the project originator, and she assembled the piece, but the other participants are worth noting as rhetors, as they are making statements through their participation and products as well. Mazza deliberately used this fact in the project (and in others, such as the Stitch for Senate project discussed in Chapter Two).
Neither of these examples is atypical; therefore, those using this heuristic need to ask questions about the number of rhetors. In cases of multiple rhetors, this can lead to more questions later on.

2. **Who or what has an intercreative role in this work?**

   This is certainly related to authorship, but with a slightly different angle. Humphreys refers to intercreativity as “collaborative content creation” (424). In her work, she looks at the Yarn Harlot blog as a site of intercreative work with both the blog’s creator and the readership, building community around the blog and forming a portion of its content. This sort of intercreative work can occasionally be seen in the websites of large-scale, multi-person projects, particularly those that generate some ongoing dialogue.

   However, the concept of intercreativity is also a fruitful one when applied to the production of material work itself. The most obvious application is in the consideration of a group project. In some cases, one might argue that a multi-person work is not intercreative; for example, a project could have a very strong leader with a specific vision who does not seek or consider input from others. That said, though, when a group of people are working together on a piece of rhetorical needlework, it would take a great deal of control on the part of a leader for that vision to be uniformly maintained by all participants. Also, there could be cases where a person working on a solo project has a connection with other people or organizations that allows for some intercreativity to take place as well.

3. **What is known or can be surmised about the rhetor’s intended message? Does the intended message vary between multiple rhetors?**

   There are a number of factors to consider here. The obvious consideration is to look at any statements from the rhetor about their intent behind the project. However, some projects may
not have any accompanying materials, either through simple inaccessibility of such material or through a deliberate choice by their creators. After all, like any artist, the creator of a project may wish to force the viewer to contemplate a piece of rhetorical needlework on its own terms, rather than imposing a particular meaning to the art work. Regardless of the reason, these sorts of situations especially invoke Kirsch and Royster’s sense of critical imagination, as reasonable guesses and informed surmising can sometimes be the only ways to construct or ascertain a rhetor’s intended message.

Should multiple rhetors be involved, consideration of these issues for each of them is important. Further, in the case of projects with one originator and many participants, it’s crucial to consider whose intent is allowed to speak the loudest. Whose statements appear with exhibits or on websites, should those exist? Who curates or controls the display of those statements?

Craft Concerns

4. What techniques were used in the making of this piece, or of its individual components?

5. How much time did it take for the piece (and any individual components) to be created?

6. What materials were used? What was the materials cost for the piece (and any individual components)? Were any of these materials purpose-made for the project?

Who provided those materials and where could they be found?

This section will largely be focused around the process of making, and the understanding of it necessary to analyze a piece. While research on composing processes is rich in many creative fields, as well as in rhetoric and writing, I have found little that specifically addresses the processes of composing rhetorical needlework. Many of those, like myself, who study this
material identify as crafters; in fact, it is often most appealing to people to analyze pieces that use specific crafts that they themselves take part in, much as I’m doing here. However, it shouldn’t be the case that interest in rhetorical needlework is only limited to needleworkers themselves, as there’s a great deal of interest in this area for those studying rhetoric, women’s and gender studies, and a wide variety of other areas. Hopefully, this heuristic can help in making this area of work more accessible to crafters and noncrafters alike.

4. What techniques were used in the making of this piece, or of its individual components?

Identifying the general technique (such as knitting, crochet, or embroidery) used in a piece can certainly help one understand the level of complexity and material constraints (and affordances) in the piece. For instance, the multidirectional nature of crochet means that a reasonably skilled crocheter can make a circular piece, like a hat, very quickly. A knitted hat takes longer to make, but the fabric is frequently stretchier and more dense, just based on the nature of the craft. Going past the level of simply identifying the craft, however, it is also important to understand particular stitch patterns or other techniques being employed. In knitting, colorwork, cables, and lace are all examples of specific advanced techniques that can come into play. Each of these can drastically change the time, knowledge, and materials needed to finish an object.

5. How much time did it take for the piece (and any individual components) to be created?

Answering the previous question about techniques should lead here fairly intuitively. With modern work, it may be possible to simply ask the project’s creator(s) about this, but that’s not always the case. In addition to searching online for this information, I would recommend that
experienced practitioners of the craft in question be asked or other research be done in order to create an informed estimate. While something that takes a great deal of time to make is not necessarily more rhetorically meaningful or effective, understanding the time and effort that went into the creation of an item can provide valuable perspective on both the artifact and the rhetor’s connection with that artifact.

Further, process itself is seen as critical by some craftivists. In their discussion of their series of suffragette banners, Sian Lile-Pastore and Sara Huws make it clear that the physical act of craft is key to their craftivist practice: “In keeping with the craftivist ideology, the act of stitching itself becomes intrinsic to the project, allowing for the time to meditate on the women we love and why” (in Greer 173). While not all craftivists might feel this way about their practice, Lile-Pastore and Huws make an important point about the material realities of rhetorical needlework. Sarah Corbett of the Craftivist Collective approaches the importance of process from a slightly different angle:

Craft helped me to stop and think. […] You are not going to take the time to stitch a text that you don’t believe in, and by stitching it you really take ownership of the words you are creating in fabric. Craft connects your hands, heart, and head, and when you connect that to social justice issues, it can be world-changing both personally and politically (in Greer 204-5).

She doesn’t speak of meditating on the material; instead, she considers the process to be a way of physically taking ownership of the project and the ideas within it. In analyzing these pieces, understanding the physical conditions of creating a project helps us understand the creator’s perspective on the work itself, as well as the thought that went into it. Further, since many crafters find that the time taken in a project changes them, understanding the dimension of time
in the crafting process can even lead us to better understand the creators’ identities, rhetorical and otherwise.

6. **What materials were used?** What was the materials cost for the piece (and any individual components)? Were any of these materials purpose-made for the project? Who provided those materials and where could they be found?

Materials for needlework can vary wildly in cost and accessibility. Understanding what materials a rhetor chose for a project can give valuable information about the product’s audience and accessibility to co-creators. For instance, in “Ritual Against Homelessness,” referenced earlier, Cobey was inspired by specific fleeces that she had purchased; she created at least a large portion\(^{31}\) of the materials for the project from them, carefully crafting those materials for effect: “[i]nstead of carding and spinning everything together, [she] pulled the long guard hairs out of each lock of wool so that they could be knit in exactly where [she] wanted them” (31). This is potentially quite a costly choice, both in materials and time. It also makes it all but impossible for others to co-create the project with her. On the other hand, the border of Cat Mazza’s Nike Blanket Petition is made up of wildly different squares, as there were no constraints put on knitters insofar as colors or materials. This enabled a wider variety of people to contribute, while also visually highlighting the collective nature of the piece.

**Multimodal Concerns**

7. **What specific components can be identified within this project?** What are the simplex units and rhetorical clusters?

8. **How does multimodality impact this piece?** Is significant content being expressed through multiple modes?

\(^{31}\) I strongly suspect that all of the yarns for the project were handspun from these fleeces, but I can’t find sources to confirm my suspicion.
9. How has the piece been displayed? Is there one specific way that the creator/rhetor intended the piece to be displayed? If the piece has been displayed in multiple ways, what differences and similarities are there?

These questions are intended to guide the users of this heuristic towards deeper consideration of multimodality. When first analyzing a multimodal work, I sometimes find it easy to become overly focused on one aspect of that work or, alternately, to be so distracted by the number of things going on that I don’t consider each component as deeply as I should. Further, rhetorical needlework often involves both textual and material multimodality, each of which brings specific concerns and considerations.

7. What specific components can be identified within this project? What are the simplex units and rhetorical clusters?

This question returns to Bateman, and his insistence on identifying the specific components of multimodal rhetoric before seeking to analyze it; as he insists, “It is crucial that elements are brought to our analytic attention regardless of whether we as analysts thought, intuitively, those elements to be significant or not” (21). While the identification of units and clusters may be challenging in some rhetorical needlework, at least attempting their identification will provide a much stronger foundation for any following analysis. This step of the heuristic assists in the avoidance of the tendency he mentions for individual analysts to skew their work by simply ignoring parts of the project that they don’t believe to be meaningful.

This question also connects to Kirsch and Royster’s notions of critical imagination, particularly the notion of tacking out to gain a broader perspective that enables seeing past the original analytic aims. In clarifying this challenge, Kirsch and Royster speak of the lesson taught us by previous feminist rhetoricians “to attend the twofold challenge of being aware, not only of
what enters our field of vision—what we see and recognize—but attuned also to our blind spots in order to consider with critical intensity what may be more in shadow, muted, and not immediately obvious (76). They continue to encourage scholars “to exercise a direct and specific commitment to look and look again, listen and listen again, [and] think and think again recursively (77). Kirsch and Royster speak of Carol Mattingly using this approach “in order to see larger vistas in the newly emerging landscapes of rhetorical inquiry” (75), and I can think of few better goals in the kind of analysis I’m encouraging here. There are certainly other ways that this feminist commitment to “these reflective and reflexive practices” (76-77) play out in this heuristic, and some of those ways may seem to have more depth, but I believe that a deep commitment to noting and noticing all of the parts of a work—not just the ones that seem to be of interest—is not only key to this heuristic, it is key for both multimodal and feminist practice.

So what exactly does this question in the heuristic ask analysts to do? Most simply, it means identifying all the separate parts of the multimodal piece, whether or not those are immediately judged to be significant. Inversely, this means drawing some lines about what is or is not part of the multimodal piece. For the type of material Bateman works with, that’s fairly easy. For rhetorical needlework with online presence, the task gets much more difficult. However, an attempt must at least be made to make such a determination.

Next, simplex units and rhetorical clusters must be identified. For this, I will again turn to Bateman’s borrowing of terms from Karen Schriver. Schriver and Bateman look at simplex units as the pieces of a multimodal piece that are “isolatable elements” which can stand on their own; they are often related to the genre of a piece, as an executive summary is an expected part of the genre of a business report (33). Granted, the way that Bateman deals with this is very page-based, but I believe there to be some equivalents when it comes to rhetorical needlework, such as
patterns and FAQ pages/handouts. Materials, such as yarn or buttons, could potentially function as simplex units at the stage that they are used in a project, although less so once they have become part of a unified work\textsuperscript{32}. Further, craft has its own genres, such as single-person knitted pieces and group projects, which are also isolatable.

Rhetorical clusters are more conceptually complex…and, to my mind, more interesting in the discussion of rhetorical needlework. In Schriver’s text-based definition, they are “a group of text elements designed to work together as a functional unit within a document,” and some of the examples provided are “illustrations with annotations and explanations” and “body text with footnotes” (33). This concept translates readily to rhetorical needlework. Take, for example, the Nike Blanket petition. The center of the blanket is made up of orange and white squares, each knitted by an individual person. Those squares have some limited meaning when each is taken on its own, but Mazza’s assembly of them into the Nike logo transforms them utterly. This concept of rhetorical clusters is quite useful for rhetorical needlework, as it allows us to notice to the separate objects in the cluster (the squares) while still analyzing the way those objects function together (the logo). Otherwise, it could be far too easy to ignore the individual pieces or not seek relationships on the large scale.

8. **How does multimodality impact this piece? Is significant content being expressed through multiple modes?**

As Palmeri says, it happens too frequently that scholars “tend to position multimodal composing as inherently progressive” (109). He ties this explicitly to composition pedagogy, imploring readers to “remember that new technologies and new forms of composing will not in

\textsuperscript{32} An argument could also potentially be made for stitch patterns and knitted features as simplex elements in some cases, but that would be dependent enough on a specific work that I don’t want to make that case here in general terms.
and of themselves transform or improve our teaching of composition” (109). However, Palmeri’s caution is worth thinking through when it comes to the analysis of multimodal compositions as well. It may be tempting to assume that a text is interesting and innovative simply because it’s multimodal, but that’s not the case.

Further, it’s worth questioning what exactly multimodality brings to a project, particularly in the case of rhetorical needlework. In a print example, Palmeri discusses bird guides, and the real needs satisfied through both the images and the text; he further discusses what more an iPhone app that adds sound to that material can do (36-37). This is obviously a case where different modes have useful functions and are not just included for the sake of inclusion. In the world of rhetorical needlework, I again turn to the Nike Blanket petition as an example. It uses the material object, the website identifying who made each square, and the text of the petition itself in different but mutually supportive ways. This is clearly a case where multimodality is being used and used well; examining all these aspects of the project gives valuable information for analysis.

9. How has the piece been displayed? Is there one specific way that the creator/rhetor intended the piece to be displayed? If the piece has been displayed in multiple ways, what differences and similarities are there?

I place questions about display under multimodality, as physical display can be seen as a mode in itself. However, it’s a mode of meaning-making that is established most often after the construction of the project has been completed. Further, any project’s display or installation can change from place to place, causing new levels of complexity in analysis; in her analysis of the Eyes Wide Open exhibit, Ekaterina V. Haskins referred to that piece as an “ephemeral spectacle”
Clearly, changes in setting must be discussed as well, should they exist. I do believe that it’s important to note which (if any) method of display we know to be originally intended by a project’s creator(s), although that method should not have our exclusive attention in analysis.

The importance of these questions is underpinned by general ideas about multimodality expressed by Bateman and others. However, it’s worth noting that these questions also draw from ideas in feminist rhetoric—most particularly, the concepts of critical imagination and strategic contemplation espoused by Kirsch and Royster. This is an area that can be particularly challenging to think through, even for modern pieces that we have documentation for, and their ideas about imagining and pondering are very helpful here.

**Feminist Concerns**

10. What are the effects of both the product and process of this project on the person(s) creating it? What can consideration of their perspective provide us?

11. How does this project and/or its process engage concepts of gender or related areas? (What, if any, dichotomies does it play with and/or call into question?)

12. Does study of this piece fit into the “core agenda” as delineated by Royster and Kirsch of “rescuing, recovering, or (re)inscribing women into the history of rhetoric”? If so, how?

13. How does this project foster connections? First, what connections does it foster between individuals? Second, what sorts of connections can we see between it and other works, either historically or currently?

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33 A great deal of the work Haskins does in this piece, however, deals with the ways in which the public could add to and interact with the pieces of this exhibit. As that doesn’t apply here or to most organized works of rhetorical needlework, I have chosen to simply mention this piece in passing.
These questions are intended to guide the users of this heuristic to consider feminist rhetorical principles. Some of these questions do center around the more obvious ideas in this area, such as consideration of gender and the agenda of rescue, recovery, and reinscription. Some of the other questions, though, are designed to lead users to think about some of the more subtly feminist principles and ideas given by Royster and Kirsch, whose work is foundational here.

10. What are the effects of both the product and process of this project on the person(s) creating it? What can consideration of their perspective provide us?

It’s the strong belief of Betsy Greer, who coined the term craftivism, that craftivist work is powerful not just because it can change the world, but because it can change those who participate in it, giving them an opportunity to “make in order to nourish [them]selves” (8). Her further words on this are worth revisiting and expanding upon: “…[C]raftivism is about change from within as much as it is about creating work that makes the world a better place. In order to inspire the best, most lasting change, we need to create from a place of determination and love within ourselves” (9). Clearly, she feels that the effect of the piece on the audience is crucial, but also that the effect of the piece on the rhetor is important as well.

This call to reverse our perspective and look at rhetorical needlework from the perspective of those who made it as well as our own point of view certainly resonates with several statements from Kirsch and Royster as well. Throughout their work, they emphasize such engagement with rhetors, as opposed to merely pushing our agenda as researchers on them. They call for researchers to “embrace a set of values and perspectives, first of all, that honors the particular traditions of the subjects of study, respects their communities, amplifies their voices, and clarifies their visions […]” (14). While other questions in this heuristic are also seeking to carry out this challenging mission, looking at the effects of a piece of rhetoric on those who
made it is certainly part of doing so, especially in concert with Greer’s claims about the crafting/craftivist community.

11. How does this project and/or its process engage concepts of gender or related areas? (What, if any, dichotomies does it play with and/or call into question?)

While many would agree that there is more to feminism and feminist rhetorical practices than a focus on gender and women’s issues, those are certainly core concerns in the history and modern practice of feminism. Particularly given that the process and products of needlework are read as gendered in modern Western culture, it would be remiss not to explicitly ask questions about the ways in which gender and/or sex play into any pieces of rhetorical needlework that this heuristic is used to examine. Whether or not those pieces have something specific to say about sex or gender, the way in which the needlework medium is read means that there is quite probably some engagement with the topics within most pieces of rhetorical needlework, whether such engagement is brought to the piece by the creator or the viewer.

An excellent example to consider here is that of Mark Newport, who is profiled in Karen Searle’s *Knitting Art: 150 Innovative Works From 18 Contemporary Artists*. According to Searle,

Mark Newport uses textile processes such as embroidery and knitting to examine traditional male and female roles. His knitted superhero suits embody the hyper-masculine stereotype of the comic book superhero—sort of. Hanging limply on a gallery wall, the knitted suits may invite one viewer to try on this role, but they also suggest the suit’s futility, since the knitting would cover the “hero” with a softness that contradicts the macho image (119).
As a male, Newport’s use of needlecraft takes on additional resonance. The juxtaposition of his gender and the masculinity embodied in popular male superheroes with the feminine activity of knitting gives these pieces added meaning which would not work the same way if these pieces were created by a woman. Even though his work is not created by a woman and does not include images of women, it is crucial to consider it through a feminist, gender-aware lens, partially because of the dichotomies its subject matter and construction method play with.

12. Does study of this piece fit into the “core agenda” as delineated by Royster and Kirsch of “rescuing, recovering, or (re)inscribing women into the history of rhetoric”? If so, how?

In reading Royster and Kirsch, it is clear that they seek in their text to help the study of feminist rhetoric gain depth and complexity through giving it crucial tools for self-examination. They do repeatedly speak of the “core agenda of rescuing, recovering, and re(inscribing) women into the history of rhetoric” as where the field has been, and they seek to move toward “work that is more transformative for the field” (18). They argue quite convincingly that feminist rhetorical practices need to move beyond these practices…but it’s important to note that they never argue that these practices should be abandoned as we do so. Instead, they explicitly caution against the discontinuation of such work:

In fact, if we were to stop with rescue, recovery, and (re)inscription, in effect, we would be placing historical women’s lives mainly in service to our lives and work, our curiosities, imperatives, and agenda, rather than placing them in symbiotic partnership with women over time and across our variable standpoints and perspectives [...] (75).
Even in this relatively recent work, earlier calls made by Glenn and others to recover our rhetorical foremothers are still deemed relevant.

However, Royster and Kirsch also bring up an interesting point: not all the work that needs to be discovered is historical. They do bring up this potential problem with the focus on what they often call “the three Rs”:

[T]his focus tends to keep us gazing habitually toward the past, without directing adequate attention to a second part to this work. We must also be vigilant about preventing what may become missing in recognizing that historical work on women must inevitably include ongoing attention or the problem continues. […] We need to pay attention also to living women, which includes women whose lives and experiences may not be visible when the departure points for analyses are white, elite, Western women, whether the time frame is historical or contemporary (58).

They originally make these comments in the context of rhetoric that poses geographic, linguistic, and cultural challenges, but it is valid for consideration elsewhere. Both as context for historical work and as the new material that will keep growing the feminist study of rhetoric as the area continues, it is vital to pay ongoing attention to what is going on now. This is surely a more acute issue to consider when we’re looking at the work of women who may be hidden from any individual researcher by boundaries such as race, class, or geography[^34], but the same concerns apply in either case. Some of the pieces of rhetoric that we desperately need to subject to the three Rs have recently been created, or are just being created now; a purely historical focus (as much of the work on rhetorical

[^34]: This definitely applies to those who use rhetorical needlework as well, as it is a diverse practice in all its forms.
needlework has had) must be supplemented. To that end, this question seeks to connect work analyzed with this heuristic to that ongoing mission.

13. How does this project foster connections? First, what connections does it foster between individuals? Second, what sorts of connections can we see between it and other works, either historically or currently?

Both crafters and feminist rhetoricians speak of the importance of connection and community frequently; thus, wrapping up this heuristic in a way that helps make those connections clear is key to strong analysis of rhetorical needlework. Greer, for one, speaks of community and connection building as part of the power of craft and craftivism quite frequently. In the final chapter of her book on the topic, she talks about community as “the key to the meaning of craftivism” (55), for example.

Further, connections—both between ideas and between people—are key to Royster and Kirsch’s concepts of social circulation and globalism. The AIDS quilt, for example, makes literal the connections between those who have been lost by juxtaposing squares that memorialize them. It also makes connections between the ones who those people have left behind by bringing together their memorials; it also brings people together through the support and continuation of the project. Connections that juxtapose ideas of private and public are made through the (public) memorial form that displays (private) memories and grief from individuals. Further, the quilt itself is arguably a private form, since it is typically one of household utility. Insofar as globalism, as Royster and Kirsch conceive it, Roberts speaks ably in “Making Mirrors: Craft Tactics in the Age of Ongoing AIDS” about how the AIDS quilt violates the “elite, white, male, European-based habits and measures” (112) pointed out by Royster and Kirsch:
Stereotypes associated with craft and AIDS are aligned and function in similar ways. In the early 2000s, the word craft was erased from the nomenclature of multiple institutions across the United States. This elision symbolized that craft carried negative connotations—such as femininity, queerness, and amateurism—as well as undesired associations with poor and working-class people, oppressed minority populations, people of color, and Third World populations. People living with HIV have been stereotyped in a similar fashion [...] When we use craft to make work about AIDS, we are fusing issues with materials, techniques, and traditions whose stigmatization mirrors each other. Craft therefore becomes a visual tool that helps render misogyny, homophobia, classism, and racism nameable through materiality (126).

I repeat such a large quote from Chapter 2 because of how ably Roberts illustrates the Royster and Kirsch concept of globalism here in connection to craft, as well as the need of accounting for such a concept within my heuristic. Considering the broad concepts thus tied to globalism, it is absolutely a crucial piece of the analysis of rhetorical needlework.

Chapter Summary

With all of these elements together, I believe that I have created a heuristic that seeks to elicit detail and connections from the user while avoiding unneeded complexity and rigidity. To be sure, my intent overall is to enable analyses—and, thus, greater understanding of and appreciation for—rhetorical endeavors that are complex and multidimensional. For the purposes of this project, I have limited the scope of this heuristic to concepts drawn from the literature of these three areas—craft, multimodality,
and feminist rhetoric—to create a tool that can be useful for researchers and analysts, regardless of whether or not they have a background in any of these three specific areas. Next, I will apply it to my case study, the RedSweaters project.
CHAPTER FOUR. “BACK WE COME”: ANALYZING THE REDSWEATERS PROJECT AS RHETORICAL NEEDLEWORK

In my previous chapter, I created a heuristic to guide in the creation of rhetorical analyses of rhetorical needlework, particularly knitted rhetoric. In this chapter, I apply that heuristic to my case study. First, though, I provide an in-depth overview of the subject of my case study, the RedSweaters project. After the various components of this complex craftivist project have been detailed, I clarify how it meets my definition of rhetorical needlework from Chapter 1. Finally, I apply my heuristic to create a deeper, more thoughtful analysis of it as a significant piece of rhetoric.

The Case Study: The RedSweaters Project

In this section, I provide background on the RedSweaters project. First, I begin with the project’s early history and beginnings. I then examine the materials and techniques used in the production of the sweaters themselves. After this, my overview moves into the project’s transition into public view and wider public participation, including the major exhibitions of the sweaters. I conclude the discussion of the material objects themselves with a section on the project’s current hiatus, and I wrap up this section with a look at the project’s continuing existence at RedSweaters.org.

This overview of the project is informed by a wide variety of sources. The most frequently used are directly connected to the project itself: its website (RedSweaters.org), the blog linked off of its website, and its Yahoo! Group (RedSweaters). Other important sources are

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35 As mentioned earlier, the project is alternately known by a number of different names: RedSweaters.org, the RedSweaters project, The Red Sweater Project (although it has no connection to the children’s aid organization), The Red Sweater Deployment, and others. I use this title formation as the generic throughout, but it may be found a number of ways elsewhere, particularly online.
news coverage, blog mentions (particularly from project participants), and the Ravelry \(^{36}\) page about Rosenberg’s pattern. Insofar as images, there is a photo gallery linked off of the project’s site; public access to it is limited at this point (based on some technical difficulties that will likely never be fixed), but I’ve found my way to those materials with the help of the Internet Archive, one of the greatest assets out there for online research. The photographs that are not from that gallery were largely found through Flickr and online image searches.

**Early Project History**

This rhetorically rich project began with one person’s inspiration and then moved to individual knitters for its execution; its main web presence can be found at [www.redsweaters.org](http://www.redsweaters.org). Nina Rosenberg, the originator of the project, discusses the project’s beginning—which occurred in 2005, during the start of the war in Iraq—on the main site’s “Inspiration” page\(^{37}\). As with many complex projects, it started with some interesting serendipity:

There was a story in the news about an American soldier held hostage in Iraq. A video of the hostage circulated, but the army reported no soldiers missing. They soon discovered that the video of the hostage was actually the image of a 12” action figure dressed in fatigues. This inspired me to knit sweaters that would fit on a 12” action figure.

\(^{36}\) Ravelry has been compared to Facebook for those who knit and crochet. However, it also includes many other things, including massive databases on yarns and patterns. If a knitting pattern can be found online, the chances that it has a Ravelry page is excellent. These pages typically include information about the pattern, contact information for its designer, yarn suggestions for it, and comments about it. Most crucially, these pages link to project pages showing individual Ravelry users’ use of the pattern, potentially including comments, photographs, and/or details about yarn usage, difficulty, and measurements.

\(^{37}\) This page is actually the second page under the “About” tab; on the first page, Rosenberg links to it with a warning that the next page will share her perspective and could skew viewer perception. I’ll discuss this further in my discussion of the website, but I thought it was worth mentioning here as well.
On the same page, she says that she originally “wanted to knit a mini-sweater for everyone who died in the war” but research revealed that there were too many fatalities among soldiers of all nations, plus civilians, for this to be feasible; this led her to decide on knitting sweaters only for American soldiers who had been killed in the conflict. She further discusses her choice of the sweater on the same page as “a direct representation of human form,” which is visually and rhetorically key to this project. Although she doesn’t use these terms, the sweaters go further than simply representing the human form; they are empty spaces where bodies are supposed to go. If she had knitted dolls to represent bodies, those would have been a more literal representation of human form. Instead, she—consciously or serendipitously—chose to knit an item that simultaneously represents both the human form and its lack.

As there had already been approximately 1,500 American soldiers killed at the time Rosenberg conceived of this project, she knew that displaying the sweaters would be a major enterprise. Her initial decision was to hang the sweaters in a tree outside her home. This decision was partially informed by aesthetics, but Rosenberg discusses other reasons for her choice as well, which I reproduce from her “Inspiration” page in their entirety:

Trees are amazingly symbolic. They are strong, steadfast, and resilient. The host tree is full of life. This is how we like to think of our soldiers. The tree that the sweaters will hang from looks camouflaged. (I don't know what kind of tree it is - sycamore? black locust? planetree? - but the bark kind of peels off and is multi colored just like fatigues.) Maybe there is a better way to display the sweaters, but 1500+ bright red t's blowing in the breeze 20' above the ground will be a magnificent sight, full of movement and color. The tree symbolizes the soldier's life, while the hanging sweaters symbolize their death. The red yarn hangs in
contrast to the green leaves. These points of contrast = conflict = war = death = symbolism = art.

Clearly, she considers both simple visual appeal and symbolism here, and finds a way to satisfy both needs.

Project Materials and Execution

Now that Rosenberg’s initial plans have been clarified, it’s crucial to unpack the visual rhetoric and symbolism inherent in those plans; illustrating the discussion with images of the project helps in such an unpacking. A crucial decision was about the material that would be used for the sweaters. Obviously, red was chosen, which occurred for two main reasons: it “is the perfect color to represent blood loss, and would be striking and eye-catching against the tree leaves and branches” according to Rosenberg (“Inspiration”). The following image (Figure 2), which was taken by Flickr user Ila of her own eventual contributions to the project, absolutely proves Rosenberg’s points.
These sweaters have a great deal of visual impact, to say the least, particularly on a leafy backdrop.

However, color was not the only consideration when it came to materials. Rosenberg thought about the fiber content of the yarn as well:

Since I chose to use the color red to represent blood, I suddenly felt that it was important to use yarns that would maintain the same symbolism. Blood has no politics, ethnicity, or class. It is made of the same stuff in every body. Yarn can be made from many different materials; silk, cotton, wool, man-made fibers, etc. By
using the same stuff for each sweater (acrylic yarn), the symbolism of blood is maintained ("Inspiration").

Having all yarn “made of the same stuff” is interesting in its conceptual mirroring of the human body, but I find Rosenberg’s more specific choice of “stuff” to be interesting in other ways as well. First, acrylic yarn would be far more resilient if hung outside. The sweaters would not felt or shrink, as they might with wool, and they would quite probably be hardier than sweaters made of cotton or silk, for example\(^{38}\).

Further, acrylic yarn is often much more affordable and easily found, particularly in the case of the Red Heart yarn that Rosenberg specifies in the sweater pattern on her website. While many people do not have access to a local yarn store, anyone near a Walmart or similar store—in the US at least, which is clearly Rosenberg’s primary audience in this project—can easily find Red Heart yarn. Also, Red Heart is quite inexpensive\(^{39}\). A skein of the specific recommended yarn—Red Heart Super Saver—in one of the shades mentioned in Rosenberg’s pattern (Cherry Red) can currently be found on Walmart’s website for $3.19. This is the specific shade which was the most used in the project and the one shown in the HyperMonkey’s photo of a project contribution in progress (Figure 3).

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\(^{38}\) Not that it is impossible for those materials to be used in a strong yarn, but they’d be challenging on multiple fronts (cost, accessibility, weight) for a project made of this weight, or thickness, of yarn.

\(^{39}\) Based on the label shown in the HyperMonkey’s photograph below, this is a US-made yarn. However, similar inexpensive and readily acquired materials are often made elsewhere, potentially complicating similar projects with economic and nationalistic concerns. Further, highly processed materials like this can bring environmental concerns into play as well. These constraints are beyond the scope of my current project, but they’re worth noting (and potentially worth exploring further in later work).
Figure 3: Contribution in progress/red sweaters! (theHyperMonkey)

Each skein contains 364 yards, according to Red Heart’s website; Ravelry, a major online repository of knitting patterns and information, says that 80 yards are required for each sweater, meaning that four sweaters can be made from each skein. Doing the math, this means that the yarn for each sweater is just under 80 cents, so this is a project that people can participate in without a major materials cost.

The accessibility and affordability of the yarn, as well as the relative ease of participating in the project, makes this very accessible for participants other than Rosenberg. While Rosenberg’s early thoughts above make it sound as though she contemplated this as a solo project, her focus switched quickly to establishing this as a large-scale collaborative piece. She saw this collaborative act of protest as a way to help represent the individuality of each fallen soldier (“Inspiration”). The pattern on her site is
written for stockinette stitch, a fairly simple technique that alternates knit and purl rows to produce a smooth front and textured back. It’s one of the most used stitches in knitting, in my experience. However, she adds that “the sweaters can easily be knit in garter stitch (knit each row), seed stitch (k1, p1), ribs or cables,” calling on knitters to use their imaginations. Clearly, based on what we see in Figure 4, a photo taken by Rosenberg, they did so.

Figure 4: Pile of Contributions (Rosenberg/RedSweaters website)

There are few sweaters here that match the pattern exactly. We can see several sweaters, like the one in the center, that have ribbed waists; ribbing is a detail that is slightly more time-consuming and physically demanding than the knit stitch, but it provides a much neater finish. It is very
common for full-size handknit sweaters to be made in this way, but the decision to do so here shows the knitter’s individuality and level of care about the project. There are other sweaters pictured—at least seven—that use even more sophisticated techniques, such as advanced stitch patterns and stripes. When all of these are hung in a tree, one may not see the differences between them, as Rosenberg seemed to intend. In a close-up, however, they are clearly unique. Even this one picture hints at the range of different ways individual knitters took up this project and adapted the standard pattern to their own uses.

Beginning of Public Project and Installations

The first sweaters were submitted in March of 2005, according to the page’s “Gallery” section. The site lists 1891 sweaters contributed by November of that year. The first installation of the sweaters, in the trees by Rosenberg’s San Francisco home, began on December 29th of 2005. The sleeves of the sweaters were joined together, forming a chain; given the number of sweaters and the pattern specifications, this would have created a bit more than 420 yards of chain to display on the tree. Understandably, this created quite a visual impression, as documented in Rosenberg’s photos below (Figures 5 and 6).

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40 It’s hard to be sure which techniques are being used, even in a close-up like this, given the disarray in the photo. However, I see at least two different stripe variations, moss stitch, a basketweave stitch, and at least one allover ribbing variation.
Figure 5: Initial Installation (Rosenberg/RedSweaters website)

Figure 6: Initial Installation Detail (Rosenberg/RedSweaters website)
As one can see, Rosenberg displayed them rather simply. She did put a sign on the tree giving the project’s web address, though.

However, the images show no tags identifying individual knitters, and there is no other documented signage. The display seems to have been kept simple in order to provoke individual responses from each viewer. Rosenberg states multiple times on her website that it was not her aim to provoke specific pro-war or anti-war statements; this may arguably be a piece of epideictic rhetoric, but the rhetor intends that we make any decisions about praise or blame for ourselves. On the project’s “About” page, Rosenberg writes that the project’s “purpose is to spread public awareness, encourage thought, and inspire discussions about war and current events without promoting a specific view”.

Figure 7: Installation Sign (Rosenberg/RedSweaters website)
Interestingly, though, the neutrality of her view is not always matched by the other project participants, but Rosenberg clearly does not seek to hide that fact. On the “Thoughts” page on the project website, she includes the words of a number of anonymous project knitters in response to questions about the project. Among the responses when knitters were asked why they were participating in the project were the following:

Because people forget—and they shouldn’t.

I made these sweaters not having a firm stand against or for the war. But wishing and hoping people could live in peace and harmony without persecution of any form. Bless those that live in fear and those who have tried and died to create peace.

I participated in this art project because we seem to need visual reminders of the cost of war. It does not matter if the toll is 1500 or 20,000 or 1—it is too high.

I knitted this because it’s the first sweater I’ve ever finished. I hope its lumpiness inspires other beginners to pitch in.

I am so opposed to this war, I’m seeing RED.

I did these sweaters to support our troops and the war in Iraq. It was fun and interesting.

Just as each knitter took up the needles in his or her own way, each knitter took up the project in his or her own way as well. Considering how strongly opinionated these perspectives are, it’s interesting that Rosenberg chooses to share them, regardless of their
clash with her neutral intent; it definitely shows how deep her intent to make this a multivocal project runs. (Granted, these comments were not part of the original physical installation of the sweaters—although the reason for that is unknown—but Rosenberg does include them fairly prominently on the website.) Clearly, there are pro-war, anti-war, and thoughtfully neutral statements included. When participants were asked what the project meant to them, some focused on their specific contribution, and others thought about the project in a wider scope. Again, the responses reveal a huge range of thinking about the war, politics, and the project itself:

I thought these sweaters that I’ve made would show how much we really appreciate our freedom. These men have done so much for us and have asked for so little.

I chose to knit these sweaters as a symbol of loss and rage for the lives that have been needlessly sacrificed.

I continue to be amazed at how many sweaters you still need. It’s a crazy way for me to put it in perspective, but when I hear the count every night I think that you will need that many more sweaters, and that each sweater represents one life.

I know this is not a war protest per se, but it is for me.

My three sweaters are to symbolize [my brother-in-law’s] three friends who died [in the war].
Again, there’s something interesting—perhaps even a bit remarkable—about the way that Rosenberg is allowing these multiple perspectives to coexist and be heard. Use of the Internet Archive reveals that comments and questions like this have been up on the project website since close to the project’s beginning.

As previously stated, the original installation in the tree by Rosenberg’s house went up in December of 2005. Rosenberg states in her blog that she did “call the city before [she] put the sweaters up, and the person [she] talked to could not find anything that said [she] couldn't do it” (“Red Sweaters: 07/01/2006 – 08/01/2006”). However, on June 29, 2006, according to the same blog entry, Rosenberg received a notice on her door from the city, telling her that the garland was illegal and it had to come down within seven days; on July 6th, she uninstalled the initial display, with no immediate future plans for the sweaters.

There are two major recorded exhibitions of the sweaters after the exhibit outside Rosenberg’s home. The first was called the Red Sweater Deployment Project. It took place at a number of galleries and locations around San Francisco, including The Curiosity Guild and The Hardware Store Gallery. The display from The Hardware Store Gallery is quite well documented on the RedSweaters website, which is where all following photos of the exhibit (Figures 8 through 13) are from.\(^4\) In Figure 8, the entry sign for the exhibit is shown.

\(^4\) However, if one wants to access them, it may be necessary to go through the Internet Archive to get there, as there currently appears to be a major problem on the page.
Figure 8: Deployment Entry Sign (Rosenberg/RedSweaters website)
In this exhibit, most of the sweaters were still displayed as hanging garlands, but they were attached to the ceiling of the gallery space, as shown in Figures 9, 10, and 11. These figures show both interior and exterior views of the sweaters hung for display in a garland-like fashion.

Figure 9: Deployment Garlands from Outside (Rosenberg/RedSweaters website)
Figure 10: Exterior Deployment Garland Detail (Rosenberg/RedSweaters website)

Figure 11: Interior Deployment Garland Detail (Rosenberg/RedSweaters website)
There was one partially attached garland, however, where the sweaters were allowed to pool on the floor below. Images of the earlier tree display were projected over this draped pile of sweaters, thereby at least somewhat preserving Rosenberg’s original intent for the way that the sweaters would be shown to the public.

Figure 12: Partially Attached Garland (Rosenberg/RedSweaters website)
At this exhibit, there was also a table where people could sit and knit their own project contributions, which added several sweaters to the project. Some of the letters sent with sweaters were also on display, allowing other knitters to add their words and content to the exhibition in a way that was not previously possible, as shown in Figure 13.

Figure 13: Crowds Reading Letters (Rosenberg/RedSweaters website)
This exhibit ran from mid-September to late October of 2006.

The other major display of the sweaters was as part of the City College of San Francisco (CCSF) exhibit "Yarns of Rebellion: Women Needling History," which ran from February to September of 2007, according to Rosenberg’s site (although the CCSF website for the exhibit lists it as simply “Spring 2007”). According to the exhibition statement excerpted on their website, which was written by then-Women’s Studies Department Chair Leslie Simon, this display offered:

a sampling of contemporary women artists using the needle arts to address social issues, from protesting the Patriot Act to engaging in the revolutionary act of teaching children to read. Like Philomena of ancient Greece who told her story by weaving it into cloth after her rapist cut her tongue so she could not speak, and all the people who spoke the truth about AIDS by creating the NAMES quilt, each artist in this exhibit raises a needle in social protest.

In this exhibit, the sweaters were displayed in a pile, with one “chain” of sweaters leading down to the larger mass. Part of the display is visible in the left of Figure 14.

Figure 14: CCSF Exhibit Display (CCSF)
However, the sweaters were one small part of the wider exhibit, only a portion of which is shown above.

*Project Hiatus*

After this exhibition, the story of the sweaters comes to at least a pause, if not an end. On November 5, 2007, Rosenberg posted the following on the redsweaters.org Yahoo! Groups Message Board:

For the past few months, the red sweaters have been on display at City College of San Francisco. The exhibit has come to an end, and the sweaters are again in need of a home.

Ideally, I would like to donate the sweaters to a gallery or some organization that would be able to display or store them indefinately (sic). If you have any ideas, please let me know. (“Red Sweaters leave CCSF – now homeless”)

Some discussion followed in this forum, with no definite resolution. In February of 2008, Rosenberg posted the following:

Hi everyone,

I haven't written an update in a while, and since there was a little activity this week on the list, thought I'd chime in.

All the sweaters are currently sitting in my garage. I'm still hoping some kind soul will offer to take them all off my hands for a permanent installation. The problem is that I don't have the time/motivation to find this person, I keep hoping they'll just come to me.
Until then, I do still receive sweaters once in a while. I haven't opened up any of the new packages because I don't have the time to count them up and put names on the website. So if you included a letter with your sweaters that has gone unanswered, I apologize, I just haven't seen it yet.

Also, when the packages are too big to fit through my mail slot, they go to the post office and wait to be picked up. I waited too long to pick up a few packages and they were returned to sender - sorry about that.

When I started this project, I really thought the war would end within a year or two at most. Now that there is no end in sight (despite the promises of our dem. presidential hopefuls), I have no idea how to end the project. I also don't have the time or energy to sustain it for a lifetime.

So the sweaters will stay in my garage, and I will keep adding new sweaters to the pile, until someone comes along to change things.

Thanks for your continued support/participation/etc.

-nina (“Mini Update”)

This was the end of the project and its documentation, at least for the time being.

Rosenberg has not updated the website in quite some time, and all the posts after that point in the Yahoo! group are spam. Considering the project’s recognition in online and print media, Rosenberg could be getting new sweaters to this day, but there have been no comments about them in any forum I can find. Therefore, there is no way for me to discuss those contributors or contributions at this time.
Project Website

Looking at this project in full involves consideration of not only the creation of the sweaters, the public exhibitions of them, and the words about them written by the project participants, but also the forum through which the project continues to have a public life—the website that Rosenberg created as part of this project, www.redsweaters.org. It is fairly straightforward. The first page is a picture of three red sweaters on a camouflage-like pattern (which may actually be the bark of the tree in which the project was initially installed). The background of the page is olive green, and the only text is a directive to click to enter the site.

The main body of the website is built on frames. At the top of the frame, we see the site name and the simple legend “An art installation inspired by American soldiers lost in the Iraq war”, placed on the same camouflage-like pattern from the first page. The other prominent text that is on display by default is on the sidebar: the number of American soldiers dead, the number of sweaters knitted, and the number of sweaters needed. While the project was being consistently updated, these numbers changed regularly, but they are now frozen. If the sidebar is scrolled down, full information on the Yahoo! Groups discussion group can be found, as well as the address for sweater submissions. The color palette here, as well as through the rest of the site, is based on the colors in camouflage (olives, browns, taupes) with red accents and black text. This is, again, another way that Rosenberg puts this project in the context of US warfare; these color choices highlight the project’s tie to US military actions overseas, while also visually juxtaposing the project color through accents.
All but one of the tabs—the “Welcome” tab—were still up as of the summer of 2014; they are “About,” “Pattern,” “Thoughts,” “Runway,” “Links,” and “Promotion.” The “About” tab is actually two pages deep, with the first page providing deliberately general background information (such as the project’s start date and time) and the following disclaimer:

The following page includes explanations of the artist's inspiration and intended symbolism. If you prefer to view the piece and discern your own meanings, opinions, and critique of the piece before being influenced, please wait and read this page after you have seen the installation. If you are going to write a critique and would like to use an excerpt from the following explanations, please give credit to the author/artist.

Clearly, Rosenberg is very open to multiple perspectives here; this simultaneously makes analysis more challenging, richer, and—to my view—more clearly in need of feminist perspective. If one follows the link, one finds the “Inspiration” page that I referred to heavily in my previous discussion of the project; this page goes into detail about Rosenberg’s thought process behind the work.

The “Pattern” tab contains the basic sweater pattern. It also has links to several other variations on the pattern. One of these is for a crocheted sweater, but most of the others focus on different techniques and on raising and lowering the difficulty level of the project. Some links to information on needed skills are also available.

As discussed above, the “Thoughts” tab houses reflections from project participants. It includes answers to four specific questions set by Rosenberg, as well as a
space for “other thoughts and sentiments.” Again, the diversity of opinion shared here is fairly remarkable. Another link to the (now-dormant) discussion group is given here as well.

The “Runway” page starts with a large photo of a single contribution, which is a link to a gallery of sweaters created for the project. Also of interest on this page, though, is the list of volunteers who contributed to the project between March 2005 and May 2007. Each crafter or group of crafters is listed by name or anonymously (presumably by request), and the number of sweaters each contributed is listed as well.

Looking through the list, the vast majority of names are female; however, a few are male or gender-neutral. Unfortunately, little else can be known about the project participants—including Rosenberg—as no other details are given about the age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or any other characteristics of those who contributed.

The last two pages are fairly basic. The “Links” page includes links “to knitting sites, places where you can buy the materials to make a Red Sweater, and websites that you can refer to for information on the war in Iraq,” in its own words. The “Promotion” tab has links to printable promotional materials for the project. It also has a very partial listing of print and online articles about the project.

There are very few graphics on the site. The “Pattern” page has useful sweater diagrams and examples. The “Runway” page has one example sweater which, as previously mentioned, is now a non-functional link. The other graphics are to be found on both the first and second “About” pages, and it is these I find most interesting. Two of

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42 Unfortunately, this link doesn’t work at this point, but one can reach most of this gallery and other photos linked through the site through some judicious use of the ever-invaluable Internet Archive.
43 This is where my earlier project figures came from.
them are World War II-era propaganda posters asking civilians to knit for the troops, as discussed in the brief overview of U.S. knitting in Chapter Two. The last one is the cover of a pattern book called Knit for Victory. The main illustration on the front of the book is a black-and-white sketch of servicemen in uniform; an inset (shaped like a medal with two needles crossed behind it) has sketches of knitting women and the subtitle “Warm Wools for the Long Watch.” According to the website for Fabulous Forties Fashions, a UK purveyor of vintage patterns, Knit for Victory contains “USA servicemen's woollies from 1942, [with] great drawings and content. The site specifies that patterns for “[p]ullovers, helmets, windcheaters, mitts, scarves, sleeveless slipovers, great socks, pull on hats for the airman, the soldier and marines” are included in the collection. While there’s no overt pro-war or anti-war message here, this historical content provides some of the strongest visual links in the project to American traditions of knitting for the military. Given Rosenberg’s strong objection to taking a stand on the war within the bounds of this project, this content is an interesting choice. It definitely ties the red sweaters more clearly to the historical tradition of knitting for the US military, but one could read it as being for, against, or neutral about the Second Iraq War depending on one’s own bias.

The RedSweaters Project as Rhetorical Needlework

Now that I’ve covered the complexities of the RedSweaters project, I will clarify the ways in which it meets my earlier definition for rhetorical needlework. In Chapter 1, I define rhetorical needlework as needlework which can be read as meaning-making (through its process, its product, or both) and which can be seen to have most, if not all, of [Robert Herrick’s] distinguishing features. Per Herrick, “[r]hetorical discourse
characteristically is (1) planned, (2) adapted to an audience, (3) shaped by human
motives, (4) responsive to a situation, (5) persuasion-seeking, and (6) concerned with
contingent issues” (8-9).

A great deal of planning went on here. Individual contributors planned, created,
and sent their materials to Rosenberg, who had originally planned the project concept and
who eventually planned at least the first of its large-scale displays. Given Rosenberg’s
comments about the war, as well as the project’s focus on knitting sweaters for US
casualties, this piece is clearly not just directed to a generic audience; it is shaped and
focused to have primary impact on a US audience. The work is shaped by human
motives, as it is intended for display and public viewing. The RedSweaters project is also
clearly responsive to a very specific rhetorical and national situation, and it clearly invites
a response from those who see it.

The fifth criterion, that rhetorical needlework be persuasion-seeking, seems a bit
more difficult to clearly assess at first. Granted, Herrick does specify a few methods
through which persuasion can take place—“arguments, appeals, arrangement, and
aesthetics” (12)—and the last two are clearly present…but is this really persuasion as
such? After all, Rosenberg clearly does not want this project to persuade any viewer of a
specific argument. Yet the sheer degree of focus on viewer response, I would argue, is
where the persuasion lies in this piece. The RedSweaters project tries harder to persuade
viewers to contemplate the war and this group’s response to it than it tries to persuade
viewers to take one specific point of view; there is a clear persuasive aim in operation
here, even if that aim is not for the viewer to take one side of an artificially binary debate.
(That said, of course, I believe there to be many subtleties that may coax the viewer to
one specific stance, whether or not Rosenberg did not intend this to be the case; I unpack those aspects of the project further as I apply the heuristic below.) Finally, the RedSweaters project is concerned with contingent issues. Herrick clarifies the situation that can bring “contingent issues that invite the use of rhetoric” forth as “[w]hen there are alternatives to be weighed and matters are neither inevitable nor impossible” (15). While it is tempting for some to see an armed conflict as a situation where there are only two sides and one is surely inevitable, I would argue that military action in the modern era, and the citizenry’s support of it, is a situation that brims over with complex contingent issues. Therefore, this project has Herrick’s distinguishing features of rhetoric, which make up the bulk of my definition.

The RedSweaters project clearly meets the definition of rhetorical needlework I have laid out. Now that I have shown this, I will apply the heuristic from Chapter Three to this project. This will provide more detail about the project for analytical purposes, while also helping grow and improve the heuristic itself.

**Applying the Heuristic**

1. **Who is the rhetor? If there are multiple rhetors, is there an originating or main one?**

   The main rhetor here is Nina Rosenberg, but there has been an ever-growing community of rhetors through the active lifespan of the project and beyond. Nearly 400 knitters are recorded on the webpage alone, with a more precise number being impossible to determine, based on anonymous and group submissions. Further, Rosenberg herself acknowledges that some sweaters
weren’t logged, opened, or even picked up at the post office, so it’s very reasonable to assume that the total number of knitters involved in the project is quite a bit higher.

2. **Who or what has an intercreative role in this work?**

   Rosenberg and the hundreds of other knitters have shared intercreative interaction. Knitters have been encouraged to create individualized sweaters in response to Rosenberg’s pattern, and they have sent letters along with those sweaters. Many project participants interacted in person at the Deployment exhibition, creating sweaters and stories there as part of a group. Those same knitters have also created some online interaction and community-building as well, particularly around the purpose of the project and its continuing public life. (It’s worth mentioning that, based on the viewable messages, others participated in the project’s Yahoo! Group more frequently than Rosenberg did herself. In fact, one or two diehards still post to the group in 2014, years after Rosenberg’s withdrawal.)

   The U.S. military and the Second Iraq War itself has had an intercreative role here as well. Casualty counts determined the size of the project throughout; once Rosenberg declared early on that the goal was to knit a sweater for each soldier who died, she gave away control over the boundaries of the project. The ongoing expansion of the casualty count undoubtedly added weight to her shoulders insofar as practical demands (the number of sweaters that needed to be knit) and emotional toll (the ongoing, daily awareness of the number of people
who had been lost). Quite possibly, this intercreative link kept the project from reaching a permanent, satisfying conclusion.

3. What is known or can be surmised about the rhetor’s intended message? Does the intended message vary between multiple rhetors?

   Rosenberg writes on the project’s website that her intent was to provoke thought and discussion, not to promote a specific view on the war. Whether analysis supports this statement or not is a far more complicated question. On the site, Rosenberg states that red “is the perfect color to represent blood loss” (Inspiration), and that this is one of her two reasons for choosing it. Further, she juxtaposes that color with the colors of camouflage on her website, which ties blood loss to military service. Considering that each sweater is meant to symbolize a dead US soldier, that makes sense…but can such a visual statement be read as genuinely neutral?

   Further, her choice to carry out this project, instead of leading knitters to work on something that would be donated to or useful for soldiers, is an interesting one. She gives her initial reason to not knit directly for soldiers to be just that she didn’t “personally know anyone over there” (Inspiration). That said, she immediately moved her thoughts to a project that would cause people to “listen to the news, ask questions, form opinions, or to simply take a moment to stop and consider the realities of war and how it is affecting their life, even if they are not directly involved” (Inspiration). While she may honestly mean these goals to be neutral, one could read an anti-war stance here; potentially, either being
clearer about her own stance or going further to guarantee true neutrality might have changed the project and its reception.

However, many other knitters working on the project had no hesitation in sharing their personal views on the conflict, even when those views directly contradict the views of others involved with the RedSweaters project. As shown above, some of the knitters who contributed felt that their knitting was in protest of the war, while other knitters intended it to be read as support for the troops. Some were directly critical of the US taking military action, while others seemed to think such action justified. All of these views are given space on the website by Rosenberg. There is no detailed documentation of what the letters displayed at any installation might have said, but one could reasonably assume that something similar took place. One of the remarkable aspects of this project, then, is the sheer number of points of view that it allowed space for at one time.

4. What techniques were used in the making of this piece, or of its individual components?

Based on photos and evidence, the vast majority of these sweaters were knitted. (There was a pattern linked to on the RedSweaters site for crochet, and I did see one or two sweaters that looked to be crocheted, but I’ve seen no further indication of non-knitted contributions.) The default pattern was written for stockinette stitch, but it did invite knitters to consider other options as well. In the documentation of the project that I’ve found, I have seen more stockinette sweaters than anything else, but I have also seen a variety of decorative variations on stockinette, garter stitch, multi-yarn striping, ribbing, and cables.
While it is a more subtle version of technique, it’s also worth considering Rosenberg’s work of tying the sweaters together into garlands here. Given the number of sweaters in the project, this task has to have taken some time; further, there must have been some trial and error in finding the best ways to connect the individual sweaters to each other solidly while still ensuring that they could be separated later on. Once she had done so, she tried to specify in the pattern itself the way in which tails should be left for this connection to be done. However, according to one of Rosenberg’s project blog entries, the responses to those directions were not uniform:

I have seen tails range in size from 1/4" to 3 feet long. I have seen tails hanging from the top or bottom of the sleeve, from shoulders, neck, and bottom. I have seen some with no tails, some with as many as 8 tails. Some tails neatly gathered into little bunches, some wrapped around the body 10 times, some secured with bag ties, others tangled loosely into a web within the envelope. One sweater has a very cute 1" loop at one end, and no tail at the other.

I know that no matter how many times, no matter how clearly I explain, I will continue to see this variety. And that's OK. It's all part of working on a project of this scale. But I'll explain the tail in detail anyway, for those of you who are curious :)}
The long tail at the end of the sleeves will allow me to tie the sweaters together so they can be easily suspended in the tree. [...] This will create a chain, or garland, that can drape or wrap or climb around the tree.

The ideal tail will be approximately 1 foot long (so there is enough room to pass the tail through the neighboring sweater and tie a knot), and it will emerge from the sweater at the TOP of the sleeve opening. That means that after you finish sewing your side seam, you need to weave the tail along the outside edge of the sleeve opening until it reaches the top of the sleeve - then secure it in place with a knot. The sweater will not hang correctly if the tail starts at the bottom of the sleeve (Tails).

Rosenberg does try to explain this in some detail in this entry, and she makes a point of saying that she’s okay with the variations, continuing to write that if there’s a problem “don't worry about it. I'll fix your sweater when it gets here :)” (Tails). Her attitude of accommodation here undoubtedly made things easier for project participants, but it also quite probably complicated her job and the techniques she had to employ in the project. The work of doing this is something that reflects Rosenberg’s role as the project’s originator…and it may well have been one of the ways in which the project eventually because overwhelming for her44. Further, although this doesn’t necessarily reflect the

44 Here and throughout, I would love to know more about this project from Rosenberg’s point of view. However, her involvement with the project has so decisively been discontinued at this time that I cannot find any usable contact information online. Also, given the tone of the statements she made about the project at the time that her
requirements of craft technique per se, it’s worth noting that she had to document, photograph, track, and store sweaters as well. This curatorial side of things is another form of mental and physical practice, and it certainly added to the project’s difficulty for Rosenberg.

5. **How much time did it take for the piece (and any individual components) to be created?**

I could not find any reliable documentation of how long an individual sweater took to make, so I made one myself. From start to finish, it took me just over two hours to make one sweater, and I’m fairly average in my knitting speed. (However, many participants submitted multiple sweaters; according to the “Runway” page on the site, single knitters contributed as many as 78 sweaters to the project at one time, so individuals other than Rosenberg may have spent far more than two hours each actively working on the project.) Based on the number of sweaters on the site, there were more than two hundred and twelve days of time in this project for knitting alone.

In addition to doing some knitting herself, Rosenberg also spent time connecting the sweaters, setting up the website, and doing other vital non-knitting tasks. The amount of time that those tasks took seems to have built throughout and become unsustainable, especially given the tail issues and the returned and unopened packages she references. One wonders if, had such work been strategized or shared in different ways, if the project would have stayed active longer than it did.

involvement ceased, I would be extremely hesitant to contact her even if I could do so, as it seems that such contact might be a very unwanted invasion.
In summary, individual contributions varied widely, but this project took a great deal of time overall. The largest contribution was doubtless Rosenberg’s.

6. What materials were used? What was the materials cost for the piece (and any individual components)? Were any of these materials purpose-made for the project? Who provided those materials and where could they be found?

Unless contributors went to one of the Red Sweaters Deployment events, they each provided their own materials. The yarn used was Red Heart Super Saver, which can be found at any Walmart or other superstore that carries yarn. The materials cost for each sweater can only be approximated, given individual supply of materials, but that cost was likely under one dollar for each sweater. Even once postage is added in, the knitter who contributed 78 sweaters probably spent around a hundred dollars on the project.

Rosenberg’s materials costs, past the sweaters she herself made, were relatively minimal; she may have paid for the materials that were out for the public at the gallery deployment, but that’s unclear. However, she made contributions elsewhere: storage, signage, publicity, and the website itself. It’s extremely difficult to estimate those costs with any kind of surety; she references storing the sweaters in the garage of her home and getting help with website setup, though, so I would speculate that the major financial outlays were publicity and website maintenance.

7. What specific components can be identified within this project? What are the simplex units and rhetorical clusters?
There is a complication here of considering what, exactly, the project boundaries are. After contemplating this question, I believe that the project consists of the materials included in each separate physical display, as well as the dedicated website. These are the pieces that can clearly be identified to be connected to the project through group participation and Rosenberg’s primary authorship. There are a number of other websites with supporting material and discussion, such as the Ravelry project page and Yahoo! Group, but those take a supporting role, veering away from the project purposes rather indiscriminately on occasion.

**Simplex units:**

- Each sweater is a separate crafted piece with one creator\(^\text{45}\), which is a common craft genre.
- Each chain of joined sweaters forms a visual unit when displayed; at a distance, it can even be difficult to distinguish between the individual sweaters. Each chain can be considered as a separate crafted piece with multiple creators, which is another common craft genre.
- Each of the separate display instances can be taken as one isolatable unit as well. We understand the art exhibit (or in the case of the Yarns of Rebellion display, the art piece) as a genre with its own unique demands. In the case of the two indoor projects, there are separate isolatable pieces, a genre we understand based on the art exhibit. Those pieces are separate

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\(^{45}\) Granted, it’s not impossible that multiple people worked on one sweater, and I cannot prove that this did not occur. However, given the comparatively short knitting time on the project, as well as the technical difficulties of passing one knitted unit back and forth between two people (the stitch and row gauges can change drastically, stitches can fall off the needle, row counts can be lost, etc.), I think it extremely likely that most, if not all, sweaters for the project had a single creator.
draped sweater chains, a hanging sweater chain with projections of the initial tree exhibit over it, the letter from the city asking Rosenberg to take down the initial exhibit, the original sign from the tree, and the letters written by project contributors about their contributions. In the case of the outdoor project, the separate sweater chains could be considered pieces. Also, the project sign—which offered no explanation past the address for the project webpage—\(^46\) is a separate page as well.

- In looking at the project as a whole, the project website can absolutely be seen as one unit. When one looks at group craftivism projects, a unified website is not a required genre, but it is absolutely a regularly occurring one.

- Within the website, each of the tabbed pages can be seen as a unit; most of these pages are fairly genre-typical, particularly for pages related to a craft project where patterns and acknowledgements of contributors are common.

- Individual images on the website can be read as units.

**Rhetorical Clusters:**

- The sweaters themselves can be read as a rhetorical cluster here. Granted, they each carry some meaning on their own, but they can only be read fully as a group.

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\(^46\) One might wonder if Rosenberg would have had the same request to take the project down, or if the request would have been handled differently, if the sign had given more information or if more information had been visibly posted. Her choice not to do so doesn’t make the project unsuccessful, I feel, but it does provide some constraints that did potentially contribute to the need to move the work beyond her original conception of it.
• The juxtaposed colors of camouflage and the vintage military imagery on the website can be perceived as a cluster, since these visual elements function as a group.

• When the letters and documentation from project participants were on display, their function as a group would denote them as a cluster as well.

• Although the website is listed above as a simplex unit, it could also arguably be seen as a rhetorical cluster, particularly when the background visuals are combined with the content that focuses on the project’s meaning.

8. How do multimodality and the use of the material impact this piece? Is significant content being expressed through multiple modes?

I believe the impact of multimodality on this piece to be huge. The website alone shows a vital combination of text and image; without the images on the site, not only would there be no diagrams for people to work from, but a great deal of related material conveying the overall feel of the project would be lost. Everything from the background colors to the vintage posters conveys material that is vitally important and could not be given solely through text. Granted, there are parts of the website that are predominantly text-only, such as the comments from project participants, but those still appear within the visually coded setting of the site’s visuals.

The material component of that multimodality—primarily composed, of course, of the sweaters themselves—is the key to this entire piece. Instead of knitting red sweaters, people could have written to Rosenberg. She could have
even printed what had been said and made a material display with that alone. However, the impact of having empty sweaters—spaces for bodies—creates a much more viscerally felt memorial for the fallen. When those empty sweaters are combined with people’s individual words about their project involvement, as is the case on the website or during the Deployment exhibit, the project’s multimodality is arguably at its most intense and most effective. Further, using individual sweaters that are all slightly different to go along with people’s different statements highlights both the individual identity of each soldier and of each project contributor; both that detail and the scope of the project allow it to convey that it is the combined voice of many people. This is a project that doesn’t merely have an added material component; the material is absolutely vital to the piece.

9. **How has the piece been displayed? Is there one specific way that the creator/rhetor intended the piece to be displayed? If the piece has been displayed in multiple ways, what differences and similarities are there?**

   The main body of the piece—the sweaters—have been displayed in at least three separate ways: chains wrapped around a tree, chains draped across ceilings, and chains connected to a ceiling at one end with the other end piled up in a stack. That first display method, the tree, was Rosenberg’s original idea. On the “Inspiration” page, she writes at length about the symbolism and importance of using the tree to display this project.

   Because of city government, however, other display options had to be found. It is interesting, though, that all of the other displays kept one thing from
the original exhibit...but it wasn’t the tree or any of the tree-like imagery to which Rosenberg seemed so attached. Instead, the concept of chaining the sweaters together, as though they’re holding hands, is the one that every exhibit seems to return to. Rosenberg does not mention this on the project website, but this is the part of the display that seems to have the most rhetorical power and resonance, given how many times it occurs and how often others seem to mention it.

Granted, the construction of the sweaters means that, if the knitter uses the tails of the yarn used to sew up the sides of each sweater (which would be the easiest, most logical approach), at least one yarn tail, if not both, will quite probably wind up at or near the ends of the sleeves; tying the yarn tails together would be the easiest method of joining the separate sweaters, which is why the pattern asks knitters not to cut those tails off. While Rosenberg could potentially have joined the sweaters in another way, this is by far the most logical, easiest way to do so based on the mechanics of knitting. It is fortunate, though, that it is the joining method that also seems to have the most symbolic resonance.

10. What are the effects of both the product and process of this project on the person(s) creating it? What can consideration of their perspective provide us?

There are two separate groups to consider here: the contributors to the project and Rosenberg herself. While there is no existing documentation that answers this question for every single person who made a sweater, the project website contains thoughts about the project and project participation from a wide enough variety of knitters to give a partial answer here. The knitters had a

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47 Granted, as Rosenberg’s blog entry points out, there are many other possible responses on the parts of knitters, however. I would speculate that some of those different methods of construction were used by less-experienced knitters or knitters who did not leave adequately long tails for finishing, but those aren’t the only possibilities.
startlingly diverse range of responses to the process of their work, the products of their work, and the overall project itself. Rosenberg wanted the project to promote thought about the war without pushing a specific view; quite arguably, the project had that effect on both the participants/co-rhetors and the viewers.

Rosenberg’s point of view is quite interesting to consider here as well. Without interviewing her, it would be impossible to give definitive answers. And, as she’s cut off all communication about the project, that simply doesn’t seem possible. Thus, the concepts of critical imagination and strategic contemplation come into play here. Given the degree to which Rosenberg pulled away from the project and her comments about lacking time and energy to focus on it, it’s reasonable to think that this project might have taken a toll on her. Some of her comments allude to the length of the war in Iraq being far more than she had originally thought; is it possible that she set up a project that was unrealistic to maintain? Or that this project took too much of an emotional toll on her? The duration of the war took a toll on the military, on service people who were repeatedly deployed, on the US itself…just as much as the country seemed unable to “complete” this military action, Rosenberg was unable to complete this project about that action in any formal way.

Looking at these two separate points of view gives us more information about the project. It also can lead to speculation about what makes a rhetorical knitting project successful or unsuccessful. Is rhetoric still successful if it reaches an audience but has an unsustainable cost for its main rhetor?
11. How does this project and/or its process engage concepts of gender or related areas? (What, if any, dichotomies does it play with and/or call into question?)

As previously discussed, knitting is seen as a gendered activity in the Western world. Therefore, there is some necessary engagement with gender issues any time that a project uses needlework in a rhetorical fashion. However, this project’s use of a feminine craft to represent a gendered arena like war and the military is an interesting one, simultaneously reinforcing historical traditions of “women knitting for the troops” and juxtaposing images of home and comfort with war and death. The knitting itself is further complicated by the fact that people are knitting for the troops, but the objects produced are not usable or useful.

Also, as much as there were clear lines of demarcation around gender in previous wars, we don’t see those here. Men and women are both knitting here; although the majority of the names on the RedSweaters website are typically female ones, knitters with typically male names are also included. Further, men and women are both fighting and dying in this war; the majority of the casualties were men, but a number of female servicemembers were also killed in the Second Iraq War. Rosenberg’s project does not explicitly explore these new roles that are being taken, but they add an interesting layer of subtle complexity to the project.

What is being knitted also leads to some interesting issues around gender. On one hand, dolls are for children, and we often associate them with innocence or gentleness. Thus, the use of doll-sized sweaters to represent fallen troops, the vast majority of whom were male, may lead viewers to have a different, more
humanized view of soldiers through the juxtaposition of craft and combat. Also, the association that dolls are played with might lead some to think of the troops as people who are being manipulated and used by others, just as dolls would be.

However, Rosenberg specifies that the incident that led her to make this connection involved a “12-inch action figure” being used to convince US media that a soldier had been taken hostage in Iraq. She references a video, but—based on the timing and other context clues—I think she’s actually referring to this still image (Figure 15), which I have found on the Snopes page about the hoax.

![Figure 15: Hoax Photo with Doll (Snopes)](image)

According to CNN coverage of the incident, “Liam Cusack, the marketing coordinator for Dragon Models USA, said the figure pictured on the Web site is believed to be "Special Ops Cody," a military action figure the company
manufactured in late 2003” (“So-called US Hostage”). This figure is clearly based on GI Joe and similar toys of this design and scale, and its accessories and packaging make its military ties quite clear.

Figure 16: Doll in Package (Snopes)

Seeing this toy provides some new context for the piece. The cuddly images that dolls might evoke for viewers are replaced by very differently gendered images of war play. Further, this toy is a very literal representation of a soldier that is meant to be treated as a toy, or as a pawn in someone’s war games. Whichever experience of dolls or action figures the individual viewer brings to his or her own
reading will flavor their interpretation of the project…but either way, that interpretation is clearly colored by issues of gender.

12. Does study of this piece fit into the “core agenda” as delineated by Royster and Kirsch of “rescuing, recovering, or (re)inscribing women into the history of rhetoric”? If so, how?

With the ties between these sweaters and wartime knitting in WWII, it can definitely be argued that study of the RedSweaters project aids in the reconsideration of other wartime knitting as a meaning-making activity, one which was previously predominantly engaged in by women. The wartime rhetoric of women doing their part and taking care of “the boys overseas” is one that many women embraced and purposefully engaged in; looking at the RedSweaters project brings those earlier women to mind.

Also, paying attention to pieces like this heightens awareness of other craftivist works, particularly modern ones that deal with war. This piece—and many of the modern activist knitting projects like it—has been under-represented in rhetorical analysis. While not all of these craftivist works are created by women, many have been; arguably, the reinscribing of one craftivist work into recent history cannot help but lead to the recognition and reinscription of others.

13. How does this project foster connections? First, what connections does it foster between individuals? Second, what sorts of connections can we see between it and other works, either historically or currently?

This project had limited formal connections, as there was no formally organized group working to bring it to fruition, but some personal connections between
project participants were fostered through it. While the majority of work on this project was done by separate knitters, Rosenberg did offer a place for them to connect via the Yahoo! Group. Also, as the work was exhibited in several places, connections between viewers (as well as between viewers and participants) were fostered that way as well.

Another set of connections that was forged was between Rosenberg and the individual participants. Some of these connections were also through the Yahoo! Group and through the exhibitions mentioned above. However, Rosenberg also had physical connections with each individual knitter—through the mailed artifacts of sweaters and accompanying notes—in a way no other project participant did. At some points, these connections seem to be positive and exciting for Rosenberg…but possibly a bit overwhelming at the same time. She wrote a blog entry, simply entitled “wow wow wow,” on June 15, 2005, in which she shared her excitement about the 259 sweaters she had received in the past few weeks. She documented some of them, with a cheerful-sounding note: “Just for fun, I took some pictures of the mess that is my living room. We’re swimming in red sweaters.”
This blog entry includes several such photos, along with her mention that she was keeping “all of the packaging and letters” that project participants sent. In another entry written on June 2, 2005, “life gets in the way,” she states her continuing intent to photograph each sweater individually. Friends were suggesting other ideas to her, but she was persisting in doing so, regardless of the fact that she had “about 200 sweaters waiting to be tallied and photographed” at the time, and was receiving about 50 more each week, by her estimation. Considering that this was all happening fairly close to the start of the project, one could reasonably see this connection eventually becoming quite draining for Rosenberg. Even the physical presence of the sweaters clearly became an issue; their presence, the constant thinking about the project, and the continuing connections to and expectations from other knitters had to take a toll. The persistence of this connection may have been part of what ended the project for her; after all, she referenced unopened and returned packages several times as she began to pull away from the project.
Also, connections to other works and types of work can be seen here. First, as previously mentioned, this work does consciously play with the trope of “knitting for the troops” that was the focus of a great deal of propaganda during the World Wars…especially since this project was arguably knitted for the troops as well, albeit in a sadder, more symbolic way. However, while it may connect conceptually to earlier service knitting for soldiers, the differences between the two types of knitting—more specifically, what’s being knitted and who it’s going to—mean that the connection between them serves as something of a thought-provoking commentary on them both.

Second, as this is a craftivist project, it is both constrained and supported by connections to other large-scale craftivist pieces. If viewers have seen other craftivist works, such as those I mentioned in Chapter 2, before seeing the RedSweater project, those other works will inform—for good or ill—what is taken away from a viewing of this project. As Robertson pointed out, the historical erasure of earlier craftivist works and their significance, as well as the resulting “perception of an interpretation of radical knitting as radical only in its form—in its reversal of stereotype rather than in its content” (188) can be a major problem for the reception and effectiveness of knitted craftivist work. If viewers see other work similar to this in form, it could help put focus on the content…or multiple works grouped together could be seen as “a bunch of knitting projects” without any real individual content.

Even more specifically, in the realm of craftivist work, there could be connections made between the RedSweaters project and other large-scale
needleworked memorials, particularly the one that is arguably the most famous and long-running—the NAMES Project/AIDS Memorial Quilt. As with WWII wartime knitting and the RedSweaters project, the differences and similarities between the AIDS Memorial Quilt and the RedSweaters project provide some interesting commentary on each of them.

One of the most obvious and striking connections is that each project has been primarily added to by volunteers. However, those in the RedSweaters project choose how many sweaters to knit and send them in; the individual sweaters may or may not represent specific deceased soldiers for the individual knitters making them. They may represent protest, they may represent support, or they may simply represent an interesting knitting project. There is simply no way to know. A panel in the AIDS Memorial Quilt is specifically referred to on the project’s page of instructions for panel makers as “a moving personal tribute remembering a life lost to AIDS” that should “[i]nclude the name of the person [the maker is] remembering” (“Step by Step”). Clearly, project contributors are being tasked with marking the specific identities of specific people who have been lost to this disease. The project also specifically requests “a letter about the person [the maker has] remembered” and “[i]f possible, […] a photograph along with the letter for [their] archives” (“Step by Step”). The motivations of contributors are more uniform, as are the meanings of the contributions themselves. Also, visual and verbal markers of identity are highlighted in this project, rather than the visual markers of sameness (yarn color, sweater shapes) highlighted by the RedSweater project and its displays.
Another connection is that the growth of each project has been at least somewhat determined by outside forces, but those forces have been dealt with quite differently. In the case of the RedSweaters project, there was a very specific goal set to create a sweater for each US casualty. The project’s scope was determined by that casualty count, which grew steadily with no regard to project participation or the feelings of those working on the project.

In the case of the AIDS Memorial Quilt, it obviously memorializes those who have been lost to AIDS…but nowhere on the project’s website is there a stated goal of making sure that every person lost to this disease—in the US or elsewhere—is represented in the quilt. In practical terms, this is not surprising. According to the World Health Organization, an estimated 1.6 million people died of AIDS-related causes in 2012 (“WHO | Number of Deaths”). In the US, the CDC’s research finds that approximately 636,000 individuals diagnosed with AIDS have died since the start of the epidemic (“CDC – HIV in the United States). It is difficult to imagine a way in which every single one of these people could be memorialized in the quilt, both because of the difficulty of making, attaching, and documenting that many squares and because of the near-impossibility of finding someone able to personally memorialize every one of them who could participate in the project.

Seeing the connections between the RedSweaters project and projects such as the AIDS Memorial Quilt as part of this heuristic helps in analysis. While there are many ways one could determine whether or not a piece of rhetoric is successful, comparing approaches taken in different projects and the outcomes of
those projects—insofar as their reception, their continuation, or their meeting of their separate goals—can be informative for the analyst. Further, it may help those planning such projects to strategize constructively.

Summary of Analysis

Rosenberg and the other project participants created a deeply charged, provocative piece of rhetoric here. The power of this piece comes from a variety of factors, which I will break down using the general categories of the heuristic, as it has helped to reveal both the strengths and weaknesses of this piece in a new way.

Rhetorical Factors

Through deeper interrogation of who the rhetors are and what each one has contributed, the rhetorical factors of the heuristic make the simultaneously diverse and somewhat conflicted points of view in this project clearer. In particular, the dissonance of many of the choices around the project with Rosenberg’s stated urge to make the project neutral in view is highlighted. These factors in the heuristic also make the intercreative exchanges going on here clearer; of those, I find the intercreative role of the United States military to be one of the most interesting (and potentially problematic) ones.

Craft Factors

Looking at the various practices and materials involved in producing the crafted portion of this piece is revealing. The knitting of an individual sweater really isn’t too difficult or expensive at all, meaning that this project managed to be very accessible for potential participants; time constraints and cash outlay were very low indeed. However, that makes it even more interesting
that so many people chose to knit more technically complex sweaters, especially when the original plan was to display them in a tree where viewers would not be able to see the details of each one. Also, Rosenberg didn’t ask for people to include notes and documentation, but many did. This additional, unrequired involvement shows something about people’s emotional investment in the project; one of its virtues may be that every project participant other than Rosenberg could be exactly as involved as he or she wanted to be, up to a certain point.\footnote{\[48\]}

Further, it shows that something of interest to consider might be what the average project participant did past the required minimum in this piece and pieces like this.

Rosenberg’s involvement, however, was clearly more difficult than she had originally expected. From documenting the project to fixing and joining sweaters, the physical demands on her were high. Considering the difficulties she had in displaying the project—remembering that, originally, she planned that it would be in a tree outside her home—even once these other duties were taken care of, looking at issues of craft and technique clarify even further some of the factors that may have led to the early end of Rosenberg’s involvement with the project.

\textit{Multimodal Factors}

The identification of all units involved in this project—both simplex and complex—means that the tendency in analysis to overlook pieces of less interest is counterbalanced. In this case, I find that this put more focus on the documents and statements from project participants, as well as the website. The sweaters themselves are, in many ways, the most remarkable part of the project, but the nudge to look at them in context with the rest of the work is a helpful one. It also enables a clearer perspective on the myriad interactions between modes, many of which I’ve

\footnote{\[48\] I do wonder what would have happened if Rosenberg had found more ways to spread some of her load of involvement out among other project participants. Would the project have reached a more satisfying conclusion and achieved its stated goals?}
detailed above, and why they’re so vital to the meaning-making happening in this work. Consideration of the project’s display—and particularly the repeated commonality among the displays, the linked sleeves of the sweaters—gives more information about what images in this project may have resonated most with viewers.

Feminist Factors

Consideration of obvious feminist concerns around gender and women’s rhetorical practices definitely informs analysis of this piece. In particular, the consideration of the shifting boundaries around gender, knitting, and war—both in the modern era and in previous eras deliberately evoked by Rosenberg’s website and project design—are useful to consider when analyzing this project. Also, the deeper thinking about various kinds of dolls and action figures that the heuristic led to here provides much more connection to gender issues in this work, as well as about the varying perspectives that viewers may bring to the project, depending on their own experiences and concerns.

That said, however, consideration of other issues tied to feminist rhetorical practices, particularly those linked to Royster and Kirsch’s terms of engagement, made the application of the heuristic particularly fruitful. Considering the experiences all project participants may have had working on this project provided insight, particularly into Rosenberg, her work, and what may or may not make for a successful project of this type. Also, looking at connections between people and between projects is crucially important. The connections between people—both negative and positive—are just as vital a creation of the RedSweaters project as the sweaters themselves are. Also, the connections between projects, historical and current, puts this complex project into a more useful context of craftivist history. This context reveals more from the
standpoint of analysis, but it also gives some fruitful information about what, past the
originator’s role, might lead projects like this to be successful; such information would be of
great usefulness to analysts and craftivists alike.
As I begin this conclusion, I'm heading back from a wonderful trip to Denver. A few things happened on this visit that fueled my thoughts about this project, its conclusion, and where it might go from here.

I paid a visit to the Denver Art Museum, which is particularly rich in textiles, at least at the moment. There is currently a large, thematically-arranged quilt exhibit on display, “First Glance/Second Look”. In the DAM’s Native American section, there’s an evocative interpretation of a totem pole by a modern Native artist; the piece is a huge stack of donated blankets from the Denver community, each of which has a tag attached to tell its story. There's a remarkable display on bark cloth in the Oceanic Art area. Most impressive to me, though, was the stunningly diverse Material World exhibit. The Museum’s website comes closest to explaining it:

From recycled plastics and bound clothing to woven silks and charred tree limbs, Material World illustrates the wide range of materials and techniques used by contemporary artists. Largely drawn from the museum’s collection, with key loans from local collections, this exhibition illustrates the inventiveness of artists from many cultures and geographies. This group of emerging and internationally recognized artists pushes traditional notions of textile art, sculpture, painting, photography, and installation art to new limits.

And I would be utterly remiss if I did not thank Rick Kempa, Fern Stringham, and all the students in the Western Wyoming Community College Honors Program for inviting me along on the trip!
*Material World* really did include a little of everything, ranging from a large quilt made of stuffed animal skins to a finely worked glove. What caught my attention most, though, was this three-dimensional knitted sculpture of a human figure in a rocking chair. Fascinated at first sight, I immediately started taking pictures of it; the photographs in Figures 18-20 are my own, taken in the Denver Art Museum.

![Figure 18: "Double Rocker" Three-Quarters View (Author's Photo)](image)

This piece is nearly four feet high. As Figure 18 shows, its eye-catching sparkle captures attention, but the metallic material doesn’t take away from the effective representation of human
form. This sculpture isn’t just simple representation, though, as Figure 19 makes clearer.

![Figure 19: "Double Rocker" Side View (Author's Photo)](image)

If it is viewed from the side, it is clearer that the same figure is shown twice in an attempt to capture the movement of rocking.

Looking at this work as a knitter, I was deeply impressed. I could see the stupendous difficulty of working with this material at all, let alone forming it into such a clearly representational sculpture. The Mylar tape it is made of was about a half to three-quarters of an inch wide, as seen in Figure 20.
This tape had to have been quite a struggle to work with, particularly when shaped through increases and decreases. The likelihood of tearing the tape or cutting oneself on the edges of it would be quite high. The degree to which the artist had managed to invest this figure with seeming life, not to mention how well he had represented movement in a static piece, was deeply impressive, particularly considering the materials in use.

As I looked further into the piece, I became impressed by it rhetorically as well. This work is titled “Double Rocker” and it was created by artist Oliver Herring as part of *A Flower for Ethyl Eichelberger*, “a series of knit sculptures made between 1991 to 2001. The project began as an homage to the drag performance artist and playwright Ethyl Eichelberger, who committed suicide in 1991 when he found out that he had AIDS” (Oliver Herring). Some of the pieces in this series are sculptural, like this one, while others are wearable garments or garments rendered unwearable by being joined to a more sculptural piece. Yet others are performative. The series is highly diverse, but knitting is the common thread between the individual pieces.
Not only has Herring used the medium innovatively, but he’s spoken thoughtfully about the process in catalogues, interviews, and on his own website, forming a commentary that provides additional meaning about and insight into these pieces. He excerpts this portion of an interview on the project’s page on his own site:

...Knitting was meaningful with regards to Ethyl's gender-bending persona but also slow and incremental. And it happens by hand which frees up the mind to think and by the end of the day I could see how much I accomplished. In addition to being very practical it was also a poetic way to deal with my feelings and thoughts. I started with a complicated personal set of issues and, without really being too aware of it, channeled them through the filters of Eichelberger, AIDS, gender and identity into something larger. Meanwhile, the longer I knit, the more it transcended into a genuine, spiritual, and existential meditation on the passage of time, with my time being the principal capital... (Oliver Herring).

The multifaceted awareness he has of process, of the physical making of these pieces, makes them even more interesting to me; while I’ve spoken to many makers who have similar perspective, I’ve not often seen it explicated so well.

As I saw this piece in the museum and read through information about it online, I found myself considering my heuristic. I went through it mentally while in the museum, and it gave me some new perspective to consider this piece with. It gave me heightened awareness of the interplay of technique with material and gendered strategies. I felt that I was seeing more in this piece, given my enriched consideration of the different parts that are playing within it. Also, the questions lined up beautifully with some of the artist’s areas of focus—gender, process, time—in a way that made even more sense of the heuristic itself. Considering this in conjunction with my
full case study showed me again that, while there are certainly ways that it can improve, this heuristic is functional.

Realizing what I got out of thinking through the heuristic when viewing “Double Rocker” led me to consideration of this project as a whole. There’s still more ground to cover here, to be sure, but I feel that this dissertation has accomplished much of what I wanted to in this step of my work. I present a clearer definition of rhetorical needlework and show the relevance of this area to those in multiple fields of study. I provide a strong review of several areas of the literature, putting them into dialogue with each other in some new ways. I use the material from this literature review as the basis for the creation of my heuristic. I then apply that heuristic in depth to a large-scale, complex piece of knitted rhetoric and show that this tool provides richer understanding than would otherwise be possible when creating a rhetorical analysis of said work.

One of the obvious next steps for any work with a heuristic includes its work by other people. Ideally, others should be able to use this heuristic. The scope of this project hasn’t allowed me to do any in-depth testing of this, although I’m considering that to be among this project’s natural next steps. That said, I’ve been able to talk through this heuristic informally with people with varying levels of knowledge about craft, feminism, and rhetoric, and early indications have been that this tool has the potential to help a wide range of people gain more understanding about rhetorical needlework than they otherwise might. I’m very excited about the possibilities that this could open for this research and my heuristic; I’m actively considering ways to take these next steps as part of the next project.

In assessing my heuristic, experiences in applying it—either in doing so myself or guiding others through its use—such as the ones above, are useful. However, it’s also fruitful to
return to one of the pioneers in the area: Janice Lauer. In her brief yet illuminating article “Toward a Metatheory of Heuristic Procedures,” Lauer proposes three criteria with which to judge heuristics: “(1) transcendency, (2) flexible direction sensitive to the rhetorical situation, and (3) generative capacity” (268). My heuristic meets each of these criteria, though her method of assessment points out several ways I could continue to apply, consider, and develop it in the future.

Lauer states that a heuristic is transcendent “if writers can use it in a wide variety of writing situations. Its operations or questions transcend the subject; they do not arise from it” (268). She opposes this to “data-conditioned” models based on specific subjects, which she finds to be of limited utility, arguing that

[a] transcendent model is more capable of being internalized, of becoming an habitual guide in writers' inquiries, because it can be used repeatedly from one subject to another. A data-conditioned model, on the other hand, is not enabling, because as subjects change, students must rely on either texts or teachers for new sets of questions or operations” (268).

She continues demonstrating the value of transcendent models by showing their benefits over time: the acquisition of “increasing heuristic power and […] confidence in writing as a way of discovering insights” (268). These are the models that not only help in the creation of one kind of work; they help grow the writer’s ability as well.

My heuristic is, of course, bound to a very specific area of rhetorical inquiry. However, I feel that it is still applicable to so many different situations within that area of inquiry that it still maintains a high degree of transcendance. Further, the attention it pays to process, to
multimodality, and to issues of feminism and gender makes it potentially generative of models for other areas of concern, transcending the original purpose I’ve set out.

Considering Lauer’s discussion of transcendency with regard to my case study of the RedSweaters project, I acknowledge that analysis of a project such as this is best guided by a heuristic that helps an analyst transcend the limitations of her own positionality and situatedness within culture. For example, this heuristic might be developed further through questions that better highlight issues central to feminism, such as class, race, ethnicity, and gender. The many people who knit red sweaters were individuals, with identities and subjectivities that were rich and varied—as were the servicemembers who died in the Second Iraq War. Developing the heuristic further would help highlight such matters for its users; I plan to do such development in future work.

Lauer’s second criterion is that a heuristic should provide “flexible direction sensitive to the rhetorical situation” (268). This criterion points out the balance that a strong heuristic must strike between guidance and adaptability:

A model has flexible direction if it specifies a clear sequence of operations. Sequential operations provide more guidance for writers, leading them through cumulative procedures, which must be flexible enough to allow a return to previous operations or a leap to subsequent ones if an evolving insight prompts such recursiveness. The sequence of an adequate model neither traps students in mechanical steps nor abandons them to trial-and-error meanderings. (268-269).

Heuristics must guide exploration; however, too rigid a form of guidance could prematurely cut such exploration off.
The sequencing of my heuristic is deliberate, with foundational questions and understandings about craft being explored before other material is moved to. The questions are placed in an order that I feel to be useful, although this is certainly something I’d want to examine in more depth if and when others use this heuristic. The connections between various areas provide some definite opportunities for recursivity and further exploration; again, if this were used by others, I’d want to examine whether they agreed. This criterion of Lauer’s plays into some of the concerns I detailed when setting up the heuristic, as well as some of Royster and Kirsch’s terms of engagement, such as that of strategic contemplation.

In using my heuristic to analyze the RSP, I experienced tensions that were discomfiting at the same time that they were productive. Again and again, the heuristic led me to identify new areas to explore, while the goals and scope I started with directed my attention back to completing the project in front of me. This project reflects multiple tensions worth exploring through future research and refinement of this heuristic: conceptions of and attitudes toward domesticity among second- and third-wave feminists; blurred gender roles in contemporary times as women and men go to war and men and women create rhetorical needlework; competing value and delivery systems for the processes of creating rhetorical needlework as opposed to the material (and virtual) products themselves. Again, however, these are areas for my future projects.

Lauer finishes by specifying that heuristics should be highly generative:

Finally, a heuristic model is highly generative if it engages the writer in a range of operations that have been identified as triggers of insight: visualizing,
analogizing, classifying, defining, rearranging, and dividing. Such operations encourage the writer to generate increasingly richer symbolizations from which a new synthesis, an insight, can spring (269).

In short, heuristics should provide more than yes or no answers. They should engage users in complex operations that provoke genuine insight, instead of the simple filling in of blanks.

My heuristic does provide plenty of opportunities for users to generate insights; the complexity of the topics they’re asked to consider draws from the literature reviewed, but that complexity also plays nicely into Lauer’s suggestions here. However, there could potentially be new questions or refinements to existing questions that would add to the heuristic’s generative potential. This would definitely be an area I would pay attention to if the rubric were to be used by others.

In using this heuristic again—and in sharing it with others, including my students—I would also pay attention to the rather simple step of continuing to ask each question multiple times, letting one reply guide the shape that the question takes in its next asking. For example, one of the craft questions calls attention to who provided the materials that were used in the rhetorical needlework under examination. In Chapter 4, I answered this question by calling attention to how the red yarn used to knit the sweaters was widely available in large chain stores such as Walmart, noting that the mass production of red sweaters that Rosenberg envisioned was enabled by the mass availability of inexpensive, machine-made yarn. It was beyond the scope of this study to continue asking this question. Yet it would surely be valuable to continue asking "Who
provided the materials for this project?" That is, where does mass produced yarn come from? Whose labor produces it? Who profits from its production? Ultimately, such a line of questioning could lead to a more integrated appreciation of how local actions are part of global systems. With regard to rhetorical needlework, this line of questioning might help draw attention to activist work that involves making a new project through recycling existing materials, for example, or through raising the animals that provide the fibers to be spun into wool that is knitted in a rhetorical expression. Both of these types of projects have occurred in multiple places already; applying my heuristic to them in this ways will surely lead to interesting results in future work.

As these comments hopefully make clear, I do think that I’ve accomplished my goals with this project, and I am looking forward to the next steps at this point. Part of this adjustment in focus also happened during my trip to Denver. In addition to visiting the Denver Art Museum, I also spent time at the stunning Denver Botanic Gardens. I spent a great deal of time there exploring the wildly diverse sights on view—including, at the moment, an exhibit of Dale Chihuly’s large-scale glass work. However, a point came when I just wanted to sit and soak in the lovely, tranquil environment⁵⁰. I found a bench in the corner of the Woodland Mosaic garden; tucked away there, I could nearly forget that there were others in the garden with me.

⁵⁰ After all, I live in a high desert/high plains area as I write this; the sight of green, growing things is a far rarer one than my Ohioan soul wishes it were.
Hidden away from the growing crowds, everything around me was green, shaded, and peaceful. I had carried my current knitting project with me that morning, as I often do. It was a scarf that I was making for a friend. This friend has had a hard time of it in recent years, and things have been far too chaotic for her. As I sat on the bench, I found myself wishing that I could share some of this calm beauty around me with my friend.
I pulled out my knitting and worked a few rows, thinking about the peace around me and wishing the same for her. I planned that, when I gave her the scarf, I would tell her about this place and time, so she would know a little of what I wanted to include in my gift. I took the photos shown in Figures 21 and 22 to share with her as well.

The process of knitting that I undertook in that moment was, without question, one that I believed to convey meaning and have rhetorical significance. To return to Herrick’s definition of rhetoric once again, “[r]hetorical discourse characteristically is (1) planned, (2) adapted to an audience, (3) shaped by human motives, (4) responsive to a situation, (5) persuasion-seeking, and (6) concerned with contingent issues” (8-9). As I wrote earlier, needlework can only happen if planning has occurred, needlework is typically created for an audience, and there is a motive of
some kind behind its creation. All three of these were certainly true in this case. I would also say, though, that the final three criteria were met as well. The needlework I was doing was responsive to both the situation around me and the situation my friend found herself in. I believe that it was persuasion-seeking, as I hoped that my actions and the story I would tell her about them would persuade her to seek a bit more tranquility in her daily life, both through an emotional appeal and the aesthetic appeal of the knitted item in question. Finally, the situation in which my friend found herself—that of unexpected chaos and upheaval in daily life—is not a question with a neat answer. Nor is the situation in which I found myself, that of trying to offer wordless comfort to a friend far away. While some of Herrick’s criteria are better met than others, each of them are met enough to convincingly show that my work on this scarf—both at that moment in time and in general—was rhetorically significant.

The problem, however, is in analyzing this sort of rhetorical situation. The aims of and statements made by projects such as the RedSweaters project or the Nike Blanket Petition are fairly straightforward. Even those with no background information about either rhetorical situation could understand at least a portion of what was going on in each. Those with no background in craft could, again, understand at least a portion of what was happening. In the case of my friend’s scarf, though, it would be difficult for someone to read it as a text, even if the story and images were explicitly included. This more subtle kind of rhetoric is, therefore, a bit more complex for an outside observer to engage with or analyze.

In future work, then, one of my major goals is to continue developing my heuristic so that it can better engage with texts like the one I was creating in the Botanic Gardens that day. As I wrote earlier, there is value in learning to listen to the texts that are speaking to us, such as public statement-making pieces. Some of the craftivist works I examine in this dissertation, including
the RedSweaters project and Nike Blanket Petition, are trying to speak to a very wide audience. However, items like the scarf I made for my friend are not broadcasting their rhetorical intent to the public. If we, as rhetoricians, want to understand the types of things that these objects are saying, we will need to carry out a kind of analytical eavesdropping that enables us to pick up on their subtler statements. One of my next goals for my ongoing research is to either develop this heuristic further or to develop a new heuristic that works with private, interpersonal rhetorical needlework.

This is not my only ongoing goal, though. A great deal of the literature about modern knitting focuses on the craft practice in the English-speaking world. In the case of this project, that focus was further heightened by a case study with an American focus. While that worked well for this dissertation, I’d like to more actively investigate international knitting and needlework practices as my research agenda continues. Not only would this bring such practices into the conversation, but they could also help strengthen the heuristic I’ve developed here.

In short, although this project has functioned as a good, stretchy cast-on that gets knitting started, there’s plenty more to do moving forward. This isn’t a single artists’ project, though; if anything, it’s a knitalong. It is my hope that others read this and join me in continuing to look at the power of modern rhetorical needlework, knitted rhetoric, and craftivism through a rhetorical lens.
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