

NEW MATERIALISM, PARALOGIC RHETORIC,
AND MULTI-MATERIAL COMPOSITION

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A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Rhetoric and Writing - Doctor of Philosophy

2021

ABSTRACT

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While new strides in speculative realism are making thinkers in the humanities more aware of the material world, rhetorical studies have been taking on the task of understanding how a discipline focused on meaning-making makes sense of materiality. This dissertation joins this conversation and provides rhetoricians and new materialist thinkers with a heuristic by which the material world's meaning-making capacities can be understood. The object of analysis for this project comes from a visit I made to the *Allure of Matter* exhibit at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA). This dissertation has five chapters, firstly I describe the exhibit and provide context for the project. Secondly, the focus is on new materialist theory in order to establish a theoretical framework for the project. Thirdly, I describe the ways in which materiality has been discussed in the field of rhetorical studies while establishing my heuristic. The heuristic is then applied in the fourth chapter onto Yin Xiuzhen's installation titled *Transformation* (1997). I conclude by exploring the potential future research this dissertation has to offer for rhetorical theory, new materialism, art, and composition studies.

My new materialist framework relies on Karen Barad's agential realist philosophy and Elizabeth Grosz's concept of incorporeality. This framework takes into consideration the importance of object performativity as a means by which objects exhibit their agency and produce meaning. Material-discursivity becomes an important concept in order to understand these meaning-making methods even further. Material-discursivity posits that discourse and matter work hand-in-hand with one another in order for meaning to be produced. This

simultaneous emergence is what Barad refers to as intra-action, objects/subjects encountering one another to produce new phenomena in ways where the agencies of both subjects affect the outcome of an occurrence equally. Material-discursivity becomes important for the context of this project when taken into consideration with Grosz's concept of *lekta* (sayables). Grosz's incorporeal concepts purport that there are some immaterial phenomena that produce material things in ways which should not be ignored. In this argument. Language becomes an immaterial force which has the ability to transform material realities.

My heuristic, which is developed in the third chapter, is composed by four inquiries; an object's composition, an object's performativity, the discourse that revolves around this object, and lastly the events that took place in order to establish this object as a cultural phenomenon. This section of the dissertation establishes this heuristic after surveying the literature in rhetorical theory on material rhetoric. My intention is to produce a heuristic which offers scholars the ability to discuss objects in their non-discursivity, i.e focusing on their role in the world outside of their symbolcity.

This heuristic is then applied to the aforementioned artwork by Yin Xiuzhen in order to show that material art has the ability to teach us many lessons about how materials make meaning. The fourth chapter shows that materials teach us about human values and how those values transform our human relations. This chapter also shows how one of the materials in this artwork (concrete) plays a role as an active agent in our world building. My objective was to show how even the most basic materials in our lives are making meaning in ways that only become apparent if we choose to listen to them in new ways.

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This dissertation is dedicated to my mentor and friend, Dr. Jacqueline Rhodes.
I will forever be grateful for your unconditional support and wonderful teachings.
HAH! Thanks.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES	vii
CHAPTER 1. A TRIP TO A MUSEUM AND WHY IT MATTERS	1
Chapter 2. How Matter Makes Meaning.....	3
Chapter 3. What Matter Means.....	7
Chapter 4. What Art Teaches Us About Meaning	12
Chapter 5. So What Does This All Mean?.....	15
CHAPTER 2. NEW MATERIALISM AND A FRAMEWORK FOR MATERIAL MEANING-MAKING	18
New Materialism and its Foundations	19
Barad, Agential Realism, and a Framework for Knowing and Being	26
Grosz and the Incorporeal Factors of Materialization	33
Meaning-Making and Rhetorical Implications	38
CHAPTER 3. A HEURISTIC FOR UNDERSTANDING MATTER.....	40
Speculative Realism and Rhetoric	40
A More Material Approach.....	44
Material Rhetoric: Public Memorials as Rhetorical Sites.....	50
A New Materialist Heuristic for Understanding Non-Discursive Rhetoric.....	56
Ultimately	65
CHAPTER 4. UNDERSTANDING WHAT CONCRETE MEANS IN <i>TRANSFORMATION</i> ..	67
Paralogic Material Rhetoric	67
<i>Transformation</i> : An Exemplary Piece with Multiple Lessons	69
Heuristic: A Recap	71
Composition.....	71
Possibilities	73
Sayables	76
Events.....	80
Material-Discursivity	81
CHAPTER 5. WHY THIS MATTERS	85
New Materialist Future	85
Rhetorical Possibilities.....	87
Rhetcomp and Art: The Allure of Matter	90
Rhetcomp and Art: Pedagogical Concerns	94
Ethical Material Engagement.....	100
Ultimately	102
WORKS CITED	103

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Seeds (2007), Zhang Huan	13
Figure 2. Straight (2008), Ai Weiwei	62
Figure 3. Transformation (1997), Yin Xiuzhen	70
Figure 4. Should We Construct Another Cathedral? (1991), Huang Yong Ping, Devons-nous encore construire une grande cathédrale?	92

CHAPTER 1.

A TRIP TO A MUSEUM AND WHY IT MATTERS

I have always been fascinated by art. While I don't have the artistic abilities to express my own consciousness through artistic mediums, I am always excited by the creative endeavors that happen in the art world. Art has the ability to transmit human consciousness in ways that literature accomplishes by using words, however, I've been exceedingly fascinated by art that transforms our understanding of appropriate mediums. Art that transforms our understanding of what can be used for a composition and expands our critical faculties about that medium in its new context.

As a rhetorician who studies new materialism, contemporary materialist installation art has been a great source of inspiration for how I understand theory and rhetorical studies. While studying new materialism I have come across a specific value that seems to transfer across multiple theorists. There is a belief that the material world means things, that matter matters. While new materialism has provided us with great theories about how matter comes to matter, I've been left with a question that is deceptively simple and the inspiration for this dissertation: If matter matters, and matter makes meaning, what does matter mean and how can we understand what it means?

This question becomes difficult to answer because my inquiry is not how a symbolic object makes meaning. It's quite simple to analyze a symbolic object in its material form and translate what that object means: like a poster, a billboard, a religious statue, a monument, etc. These objects are created with the intention for them to mean something. I'm more curious about what everyday seemingly mundane objects mean: what does grass mean? What does concrete

mean? What does silk mean? What does oil mean? These questions may seem strange at first, but I believe that understanding what these objects mean could lead us to understanding the cultural-political and historical context behind the objects which structure our worlds in ways that can provide us with a sense of criticality behind why they build our world and in what ways.

This dissertation is inspired by a visit to a museum, where I saw installation art that was clearly producing arguments in ways that I didn't understand. The *Allure of Matter: Material Art From China* exhibit had installations that continue to baffle me with their creative genius. I admit, I left this exhibit feeling deeply confused; why did I stare at a glass box containing a sculptor of dried and crystalized Coca-Cola titled *A Barrel of Dregs of Coca-Cola*, (2009) by He Xiangyu? What was the artist trying to tell me? What did Coca-Cola mean? More importantly, what did Coca-Cola mean when it was transformed into a giant black crystal, and what does that have to say about Coca-Cola? More specifically, the material and discursive functions of Coca-Cola in its original composition?

In this dissertation I set out to develop a method by which these questions can be answered: albeit, answered in *one* way. As a new materialist thinker this dissertation establishes a framework using new materialist theory in order to provide material things with the agency necessary in order to think of them as rhetorical actors. New materialism has done great work in terms of expanding on our understanding of how matter comes to matter and how matter makes meaning. My framework is inspired by Karen Barad's concept of agential realism and material-discursivity and Elizabeth Grosz's concept of incorporeality.

As a rhetorician my objective is to provide an interpretative framework by which the material things in a new materialist framework can be understood. Using paralogic rhetoric as an interpretive lens within this new materialist framework, I develop a heuristic which can be

applied to materialist installation art to understand not only how things come to matter, but also focusing on what meaning is being made in their artistic assemblage, which further provides insight into how things make meaning outside of their artistic assemblage. My object of analysis is an artwork from the *Allure of Matter* exhibit in which this heuristic will be applied to hopefully answer this question which I continue to wonder about: what does matter mean and how can we understand it?

My objective is to also produce a piece of scholarship which puts rhetoric, art, and new materialism in conversation with one another for the purposes of expanding the knowledge being built across all fields of thought. Due to this objective this project has multiple audiences which I will try to address throughout the project to ensure that any of these audience members can gain something from the project. This objective produces an interdisciplinary exigence. Hopefully, after reading this, rhetoricians will think more critically about new materialism in new ways. New materialists will begin taking into consideration the interpretive work conducted in rhetorical studies as an important and critical faculty which expands their theoretical pursuits. Perhaps artists may think of this project as one that can assist the production of artistic meaning-making, specifically thinking about their audience and how their works will be interpreted. Lastly, pedagogically, my hope is that teachers of writing and rhetoric will think about how they too can create arguments in new ways by using materials as a means of “textual” production, expanding our work being done in rhetorical studies to even include installation work.

Chapter 2. How Matter Makes Meaning

The second chapter of this dissertation provides the necessary context for understanding new materialist conversations and situating this project in a specific framework. It’s important to note the discussions that have happened thus far alongside the specific orientation this project

takes in order to elaborate on what new materialism has to offer for rhetorical analysis. More importantly, new materialism is the selected school of thought for this project for the purposes of developing a materialist understanding of rhetoric in order to develop a heuristic for understanding contemporary materialist installation art. The objective of this analysis is to also provide a heuristic, which can be applied on both objects and art objects equally.

Materialist thinking in its essence is a form of thought which attempts to take into consideration the non-abstractified world as an object of philosophical thinking. Put simply, materialist thinking is concerned with matter, the world of things, and people's bodies as they interact with their world. It aims at understanding all facets of our world via the material interactions and their causal relations with mental processes, politics, social structures, etc. Diana Coole and Samantha Frost brought the world's attention to this philosophy in their anthology *New Materialism: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*. New materialist thinking was happening long before this anthology was published, as seen by contemporary authors' use of Spinoza, Deleuze, and Guattari, and Marx. These thinkers, among a few others, have helped inspire contemporary scholars to think critically about the material conditions of our existence in ways that challenged philosophy and theory that was primarily concerned with issues of discourse, consciousness, metaphysics, etc.

The editors of the collection set out specific principles that outline a new materialist framework in their introduction in order to provide the context for the pieces in the anthology. The foundational concerns that drive the inquiry generated in this anthology and this school of thought include issues ontology, which for the most part is a purely abstract concept that encourages thinkers to philosophize about the nature of being. However, in the context of new materialism, ontology becomes less about the metaphysical, and more focused on the physical

world that surrounds us, the majority of this work occurs in the analysis of human/human and human/non-human relations. Studying ontology in a new materialist context means to study how our interactions with the material world across all things and people play a part in the construction of our being.

Secondly, the editors highlight the importance of new materialism's interdisciplinarity. Specifically, the editors call for scholars to think critically about new scientific research around the material world. They argue that it is important for scholars to begin thinking about the ethical and political issues that arise from new scientific and technological research and the ever-changing landscape of our material world through these pursuits. There is also a move to begin thinking about science from a humanities perspective which is exhibited by the works of Donna Haraway who focuses on biology and ecology and Karen Barad who uses quantum physics and particle theory in order to think about agency and performativity in new ways.

Lastly, the editors call for a reimagining of political and economic theory that takes into consideration the material density of everyday human experiences and relations while keeping in mind the rich historical geopolitical landscape that we live in. This puts new materialist thinkers in a position of having to think in both micro and macro scales, analyzing the relations we have with everyday material things, but also thinking about our local relations as part of global phenomenon. This analytic frame inspires thinkers like myself to inquire about our material relations and how we are ethically implicated in their production, but also expanding this idea of ethical engagement to eco-critical orientations.

The most important scholars that are discussed in this chapter for the purposes of establishing a theoretical framework in this dissertation are Karen Barad and Elizabeth Grosz. When discussing meaning-making and rhetoric in a new materialist context I find it necessary to

describe the theoretical context by which I am operating within which my own analysis can be grounded. This chapter highlights the work from Karen Barad's *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. Specifically, this chapter focuses on Barad's concept of agential realism and material-discursivity as a framework for developing new rhetorical theories about matter and meaning.

Agential realism proposes that material things are engaged in a constant performance with other material things and humans. This concept develops the framework necessary by which we can begin thinking of material things as having agency, which in Barad's formulation simply means the ability to produce effect. Agency for Barad is an emergent phenomenon that occurs during material and human intra-actions. Intra-actions differ from interactions in a way that highlights emergent causality vs mechanistic causality. An interaction occurs when two agents come into contact with one another, and their relationality is exhibited by previously established relata. An Intra-action occurs is when previously established relata are not the driving forces for a relational performance, instead the emphasis is on the agential ability to produce affect in new ways that emerges through the process of relating

Material-discursivity claims that matter and discourse are inherently entangled with one another. Understanding one cannot happen without understanding the other. Intra-action takes place when we think about the ways in which discourse and matter interact with one another in order to produce each other. Ultimately, Barad wants us to focus on is the ability for both phenomena to inform one another and to limit critical theory's history of privileging language over matter. In her conceptualization of material-discursivity, understanding either discourse or materiality requires an analysis of the relational performance that produces both, the language we use to talk about matter and the effects matter has had on our language production.

Elizabeth Grosz's work in *The Incorporeal: Ontology, Ethics, and the Limits of Materialism* provides a new materialism with a generative critique that focuses on incorporeal/immaterial materializing forces behind phenomenon. She discusses four incorporeal phenomena which she draws from a Stoic materialist philosophy. The four incorporeals are void, chronos, topos, and lekta. These four concepts are what Grosz develops as the forces that build material things. Her primary argument is to show that even theories of materialism need to take into consideration immaterial forces in order to understand how material things enter into being.

Grosz and Barad in conjunction with one another offer the framework for this dissertation. Lekta according to Grosz refers to "sayables" which is essentially the immaterial force of language and its ability to materialize things in the world. This becomes important in conjunction with the notion of material-discursivity, realizing that language is just as important in the process of materializing our reality alongside material phenomenon. These concepts in conjunction with one another positions rhetoric in a special inventive role, affording the production of a discourse necessary to provide material things, cultural importance. This incorporeal function in conjunction with Barad's material agential performativity provides a space where I can discuss the relationship between language and materiality and the importance of discussing the rhetoricity of material things in order to better analyze their cultural importance.

Chapter 3. What Matter Means

Chapter 3 reviews rhetorical scholarship which has discussed materialist rhetoric and more specifically speculative realism in rhetoric i.e object-oriented ontology and new materialism while establishing the rhetorical heuristic this project offers. Alongside developing the heuristic this chapter provides a brief example of how this heuristic functions on an artwork

by Ai Weiwei, before conducting the primary analysis that occurs in chapter 4. The editors of *Rhetoric Through Everyday Things* Scott Barnett and Casey Boyle discuss the importance of thinking about object-oriented ontology and new materialism in rhetorical studies. They claim that it's important for us to begin taking into consideration the co-constitution of thing-human relations in order to gain a better understanding of rhetorical agency. They add that it is also important to discuss object-object relations in order to magnify object-oriented studies and to ensure that our work is not an anthropocentric project.

This chapter looks at the work of Jodie Nicotra, Thomas Rickert, and the editors Scott Barnett and Casey Boyle in order to provide insight into how rhetoricians are thinking about new materialism and object-oriented ontology in the context of rhetorical studies. Both articles discuss the importance of attunement in order to gain a better understanding of the environmental context that rhetoric takes place in as an agential force that makes a difference on the meaning being made. Nicotra provides her readers with a real-world example where rhetoric and materiality join forces in a community political context in order to produce change. Rickert offers readers novel ways of thinking about artistic processes with material things as deeply rich performances filled with rhetorical performativity; his example highlights the value of object-object performance and rhetoricity.

This chapter also looks at the work of Laurie Gries and Phil Bratta in order to demonstrate how rhetoricians are thinking about material things in their rhetorical analyses. I highlight their work in this chapter because of their contribution towards rhetorical analysis but also, because they conduct their analysis in a way that is new to our field. The authors spend their time focusing on the material movements and performances of cultural objects and how they afford specific practices and meaning-making potentialities. Laurie Gries' work focuses on

the material transformation of the “Obama Hope” poster first produced by Shepard Fairey. Gries focuses on the cultural practices of transformation highlighting the multiple iterations that this poster takes during the Obama presidential campaign and later. Her work shows that new materialist theory, and digital rhetoric go hand in hand with one another in terms of understanding a digital artifact’s material transformation and journey. Highlighting important concepts such as virality for example, focusing on the vitalistic nature of digital artifacts. A piece like the Obama Hope poster went viral and eventually its meaning developed a life of its own as we saw it transform into multiple iterations. The artifact’s materiality becomes pervasive, it is almost impossible not to recognize when something is inspired by its materiality.

While it is important to think about rhetorical materiality in the context of digital artifacts. My hope is to focus more so on material objects. Gries’ example provides a certain rhetoricity that is developed by the initial artist who made the poster. That meaning then gets translated and repurposed in ways where the initial symbol moves across material iterations making itself prevalent. That being said, this artifact operates as a symbol, which signifies very specific values and meaning. My concern is what happens when we look at artifacts whose symbolicity is not made clear to us, how do rhetoricians begin to understand objects that refuse to tell us what they mean at face value?

Phil Bratta accomplishes this emphasis on material objects and meaning-making in his article “Rhetoric and Event: The Embodiment of Lived Events.” The article explores the rhetoricity of the “Laying of the bones Performance” at Congo Square in New Orleans. Bratta describes the event and the material objects involved in the performance. He looks at the 50,000 bones that are laid in this ceremony in order to highlight the lives lost due to genocide. While his focus is on embodiment, performance, and lived events, His analysis shows us material objects

exhibit agential properties in order to produce meaning in ways that make them rhetorically effective. Ultimately, this ceremony would not have had the same rhetorical impact if it weren't for the bones themselves.

While Bratta and Gries' work is an exceptional example of materialist thinking in rhetorical studies I also cover the larger conversations involving material rhetoric. There was a moment in rhetorical studies where monuments and memorials were an important object of analysis in material rhetoric. However, one of the things that Bratta and Gries' work exemplifies that is not covered by previous scholarship in our field is that they don't textualize material things. My objective in this chapter is to produce a heuristic for understanding material art that doesn't reduce objects to texts in order for them to be rhetoricized. Also, in the case of Bratta and Gries' work, the objects involved in their analysis come with pre-established relata that allows for a specific symbolicity to be produced. We know what the bones mean in the context of the performance because the performance gives the bones their material meaning. Similarly, we know the material impact of the Obama Hope poster because of what it signifies. My concern is what happens when we try to understand the rhetoricity of objects that don't necessarily have symbolicity attached to them. How do we begin to understand the rhetoricity of everyday things? And how do we do so in a way that doesn't reduce their materiality to textual signification in order for them to be rhetoricized? My objective is to develop a heuristic that will allow rhetoricians the ability to understand the non-discursive rhetorical effects of objects in the world.

To accomplish this goal of understanding material things that don't provide any sort of symbolization or pre-established relata, or explicit discursive properties. I develop a heuristic that is inspired by new materialism that focuses on the rhetoricity of objects in a way that situates

their agency as the primary mover for rhetoricity while emphasizing the importance of human-object relations. My object of analysis in this dissertation is contemporary materialist installation art from China. My heuristic is applied to installations in order to show how rhetoric can use contemporary materialist installation art as a source of new knowledge. Art also allows us to think critically about everyday things in important ways by understanding object performativity in the context of the art object.

My heuristic is as follows:

- What is the object's composition?
- What has this object made possible?
- What is being, and has been, said about this object
- What are the events involved in the production of this object as a material and cultural phenomenon?

The reason I ask these specific questions is to gain a better understanding of the human/non-human relations that produce an object. In the context of this project the composition question is focused on both, the art object and its composition, and the composition of the objects in their real-world application, outside of the art object. When thinking about what an object makes possible, it's important to highlight that this question requires rhetoricians to think about the agency of an object and to think about the possibilities it has produced. The importance of what an object has made possible is put in conversation with the discourse that surrounds the object. My hope is that by putting these two phenomena in conversation we will gain a better understanding of material-discursivity and how it functions to produce meaning. Lastly, in order to understand the discourse of the object in question it is important to put the discourse and its materiality in conversation with the events that made this object important—what are the

human/non-human event relations that make this thing important and how do those events affect how we talk about this specific object.

Chapter 4. What Art Teaches Us About Meaning

The fourth chapter takes the previously described heuristic and applies it to Yin Xiuzhen's artwork *Transformation* (1997). The objective of this chapter is to take this heuristic and apply it to an artwork in order to show how art can provide us with an object of analysis that can provide us insight into the material meaning-making potentiality of things. This chapter also discusses the importance of rhetoric as a discipline of interpretation, highlighting paralogic rhetoric as the lens by which I choose to interpret the materials in this artwork. Ultimately, my objective is to provide an analysis where I can present to my audience the entanglement of matter and meaning, by showing that when rhetorical studies and new materialism work hand in hand with one another we can produce a greater understanding of how matter produces meaning, and what matter means.

I have been fascinated with new materialist theory for a while now. I've been infatuated with this idea of thinking about how things make meaning, what they mean, how do we interpret them, and what does that teach us? I did not, however, think that I would be writing about materialist installation art from China. The entire inspiration for this dissertation came from a visit I made to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) in the summer of 2019. The *Allure of Matter: Material Art from China* exhibit drew me to the museum doors for no reason other than the fact that the title of the exhibit stimulated my curiosity.

I grabbed some friends who knew nothing about art and have never gone to a museum and dragged them to a fairly experimental exhibition. The exhibition has the ability of producing shock and surprise over and over again across its entirety. There are moments where you would

look at a piece from a distance and think to yourself “wow that’s a delightful black painting about what seems to be farm workers, how interestingly textured.” With all the artworks in this museum there is the moment of surprise at how incredibly well composed everything is. But then there's the shock that these artists produce. The shock that occurs when you walk closer to the painting and take a look at the description in order to learn more about the medium involved in order to learn that this black painting is not a “painting”, and that the description reads: “Ash on Linen.”

The artwork I’m referring to is by Zhang Huan titled *Seeds* (2007). This artwork was the first piece I saw and was the initial domino to begin the chain reaction of surprise and shock:



Figure 1. Seeds (2007), Zhang Huan

Huan was inspired by ash as a material for art making when he visited Longhua Temple in Shanghai. Focusing on the cultural-material practice of burning incense for ceremonial

purposes and shocked by the amount of ash on the ground he decided to use it as a medium for painting. Huan reflects on this moment of inspiration in his essay “Ash” where he writes:

The temple floor was covered with ash which leaked from the giant incense burner. Seeing this image of ash conjured a feeling inside of me: it was a beautiful material and it moved me greatly. These ash remains speak to the fulfillment of millions of hopes, dreams and blessings (Huan “Ash”)

Huan transforms a material which normally would have been thrown away and forgotten about into something beautiful. The work itself transforms the material value of the incense being burned (thoughts, prayers, hopes) into an artwork which revitalizes those material values in a new context, offering the material a new meaning-making context. While it is easy to see the beauty of this poetic transformation of a material symbol. My concern in this project goes far beyond the fact that this is a creative piece of work. I wonder what it means for this specific material to be used in the production of this exact painting. How does the materiality of the ash communicate with the discourse of the image being produced, and how do we gain a better understanding of what this painting signifies?

Chapter 4 focuses on an artwork by Yin Xiuzhen titled *Transformation* (1997) which combines concrete tiles and photographs into an all-new assemblage in order to bring awareness to the events that produced the art object itself. Applying my heuristic and analyzing this art object rhetorically explores where these concrete tiles are from, and what their initial composition was before they became part of an art object. I discuss the value and importance of the object’s original composition in terms of what they made possible in their original orientation. Afterwards I put into context the cultural-historical information of the concrete tiles’ original composition with its history and connect its historical cultural importance with the

discourse that labelled these tiles as part of an assemblage of obsolete buildings by governmental forces. The discursive structures are then laid alongside the object's original materiality with the events that they made possible, i.e the cultural importance of these concrete tiles. Ultimately, my objective is to provide the analysis which I believe is necessary to fully understand what these concrete tiles mean.

Chapter 5. So What Does This All Mean?

The final chapter of this project provides implications for the work that this dissertation could possibly accomplish. This project focuses its attention in many areas which are seemingly disconnected to begin with. It is my goal to provide an analysis which can convince new materialist thinkers, artists, rhetoricians, and teachers to think about art, rhetoric, theory, and pedagogy cross-disciplinarily to benefit each discipline in ways that can improve our critical, material, and rhetorical sensitivities to the world that we live in.

As new materialism develops as a field of thought my objective is to show here that new materialist thinkers can benefit greatly from the interpretative work that is being done in rhetorical studies. I argue that language as a material force, both corporeal and incorporeal forms, lends itself as a material which a new materialist must be critical of. Moreover, it becomes easier to become critical of these things when new frameworks for interpretation are applied. Throughout this dissertation I emphasize the importance of paralogic material rhetoric which purports an understanding for material interpretation to be a spontaneous guessing game of a material's performativity, influenced by the human values, cultural practices, beliefs, and discourses that we can interpret about a material.

For rhetoricians I believe it is important to begin thinking about the ways in which we choose to listen to material things. Paralogic material rhetoric emphasizes the importance of

making guesses about material objects which we may have normally ignored, like concrete for example. Just because we live in a world where the majority of our materials fall into the backdrop of our lives, operating seemingly on an invisible level, does not mean we shouldn't produce generative inquiries about them. Furthermore, I am wondering about what happens when rhetoric transforms its own material understanding of its own work. What happens when we think about texts differently? What happens when we think about and compose *with* texts in an installation context? How can we use letters as a medium outside of textual symbolic representation and use them as a material for potential installation production? My hope is that we also normalize the relationship between rhetorical interpretation and artistic production. This way, we can begin looking at art as a rhetorical situation that offers new ways of thinking about meaning-making outside of just words, and to not reduce art images to texts for rhetorical analytical purposes.

As a teacher of first year writing in the university system, I have been experimenting with and thinking about the ideas of multimodality with an emphasis on multi-materiality. While focusing on the digital act of production has become synonymous with multimodality, I have been trying to think about multimodality through the lens of materiality. I have been experimenting in my own class by asking students to produce essays in the form of installations. Writing with things as opposed to simply writing about things. I have learned a lot in the process and have had the opportunity of witnessing student creativity that continues to surprise me. My pedagogy is not perfect, I am hopeful that my readers will look at the work I'm doing, expand on its possibilities and begin thinking about multimodality in the material sense. Hopefully in this process we can provide students with the critical faculties necessary to think about the

materiality of their lives just as much as we'd hope that they learn about the discourses that structure their worlds.

CHAPTER 2.
NEW MATERIALISM AND A FRAMEWORK
FOR MATERIAL MEANING-MAKING

The objective of this chapter is to provide my audience with a cursory understanding of new materialism as a project. It's important to note that there are many conversations happening in new materialist scholarship, but in the end scholars are attempting to tackle similar concerns. In the beginning of new materialism's formation there were foundational texts which sketched out new materialism's exigence, concerns, and even its tenets, i.e the work of Samantha Frost, Diana Coole, and William E Connolly. This context is important for the constitution of my framework which is heavily influenced by Karen Barad and Samantha Grosz. It is important to recognize that in order for my theoretical framework to be established this chapter has to wrestle with the inherent entanglements of ethics, ontology, and epistemology within Barad's agential realist framework. These concepts cannot be discussed in a vacuum, and for Barad's work they are always discussed together in order to show their influence on one another. Ultimately, I believe that bringing Karen Barad's work into rhetorical studies provides rhetoricians with a sufficient framework for understanding materiality in new ways.

In 2010 Diana Coole and Samantha Frost produced the edited collection *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics* which would not only collect the various materialists who already exist scattered through the western canon (Deleuze & Guattari, Spinoza, Bergson, Marx, Nietzsche, etc.), but also expand on the Marxist project of new materialism, provide a philosophy to contend with object-oriented ontology, and create the foundation to begin moving away from the representational problems produced by poststructuralism and

postmodernism. The editors of the collection claim in their introduction that specific anglophone continental approaches which have been associated with the cultural/linguistic turn in the humanities/philosophy have privileged “language, discourse, culture, and values... [and have] encouraged a de facto neglect of more obviously material phenomena and processes, it has also problematized straightforward overture toward matter or material experience as naively representational or naturalistic” (3). The editors’ claim is not an attempt to diminish the importance of language, discourse, culture and values. They acknowledge that postmodernism and poststructuralism have provided us with the tools to move away from the assumptions that absolute knowledge is possible and gave us the tools to critique destructive ideologies, however, it has ignored the material world as a powerful phenomenological tool, reducing our world to signs, signifiers, discourse, and ideology.

New Materialism and its Foundations

The editors argue that the boundaries between science, technology, and the natural world have started to blend together in important interdisciplinary ways. This interdisciplinary scholarship requires new frameworks of thought in order to tackle the humanitarian issues that arise with these new innovations. Coole and Frost recognize this epistemic and ontological need and begin their introduction with a transformative understanding of ontology. The editors claim that “ontology involves not simply the abstract study of the nature of being but also the underlying beliefs about existence that shape our everyday relationships to ourselves, to others, and to the world“ (Coole and Frost 5). These ontological concerns and their entanglements are considered in a material framework, which takes into consideration the multiple agencies embedded in the production of our identity and our world, the relationships between multiple actors and the interactions between those agencies, and the importance of narrativizing these old

relationalities in new ways. Karen Barad argues that a shift in Western ontology requires a complete shift in many philosophical concepts such as “space, time, matter, dynamics, agency, structure, subjectivity, objectivity, knowing, intentionality, discursivity, performativity, entanglement, and ethical engagement” (*Meeting the Universe Halfway* 33). In this move against representationalism Barad’s new philosophy (agential realism) is built off of Bohrian epistemology and purports “experimenting and theorizing are dynamic practices that play a constitutive role in the production of objects and subjects and matter and meaning” (56). This entangled ontology requires an epistemic shift towards an understanding that all materials that make meaning in our world are material-discursive phenomena, language and discourse is inherently tied to our material world, and our material world is connected to our values and ideologies.

The reconceptualization of ontology from a new materialist perspective comes with the task of changing how we position ourselves in the world alongside how we treat the agents in our world. This is an anti-anthropocentric framework for ontology, an ontology which no longer centers around humans as the sole agent of the world, and instead, focuses on ourselves in relation to the organic and inorganic material world. Haraway expands on this notion of materiality, ontology, and ethics in her book *Staying With The Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* claiming that “Critters do not precede their relatings; they make each other through semiotic material involution, out of the beings of previous such entanglements” (60). Haraway argues that the material semiotic construction of relations can be expressed and understood by telling new stories about new relations which have not been included in our basic understanding of our ontology, in order to truly exemplify this entangled, relational ontology. The second point Coole and Frost develop in their context section for the importance of new materialism is the

“emergence of pressing ethical and political concerns that accompany the scientific and technological advances predicated on new scientific models of matter and, in particular living matter” (5). The authors’ concerns revolve around the developments of technologies which complicate our human lives and provide new ethical implications. In order to address these new ethical implications we have to transform how we think of the material world.

To further these claims about relations and relating, vitalistic materialism has been working towards transforming our perspective about seemingly passive material entities proposing they have a life force afforded by agency. These ontological shifts produce a new orientation where we can begin addressing the new ethical implications that arise with our new relations. In Jane Bennett’s *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* she provides a theoretical account for transforming our understanding of the material world not as a passive and inert network, but as something lively. Bennett believes all matter is vital, which she defines as “the capacity of things—edibles, commodities, storms, metals—not only to impede or block the will and designs of humans but also to act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own” (viii). Bennett’s focus is on the importance of transforming human relations with the material world in hopes that our culture of consumption and destruction can be counteracted. This counteraction could remove the passivity and lifelessness from the material world and recognize it as a valuable interactive agent. With a move towards vitalism, humanities scholars who want to study materialism can accomplish the type of relational work that Haraway develops with her focus on relationality. Vitalism builds the ontological foundation for things as agents in a way that calls us humans towards ethical action the same way we conceive of ethics for living things. The removal of inanimate passivity builds the foundation for living, active, agential matter, which we are responsible to.

The last portion of the context section outlined by Coole and Frost discusses the importance for new materialist scholarship to testify to a “critical and nondogmatic reengagement with political economy, where the nature of, and relationship between, the material details of everyday life and broader geopolitical socioeconomic structures is being explored afresh” (7). In his article “The ‘New Materialism’ and The Fragility of Things” William E. Connolly discusses ten important and useful tenets of new materialist theory while also demonstrating the types of knowledge that can be produced by taking these theories seriously. In regard to Coole and Frost’s third point about the context for new materialism, Connolly explores the fragile nature of the culture/nature binary and in doing so provides an example of scholarship that takes into consideration political economy, geopolitical socioeconomic structures, and ecological and ideological materiality.

Connolly develops an argument which claims that an appreciation for the fragility of things requires a greater understanding and sensitivity to the “multiple ways in which contemporary institutions, role definitions and nonhuman processes intersect” (403). This type of orientation is an ecological position towards the world, to recognize that our actions and our environment are inherently linked, but to also recognize that there are multiple ways things and cultures can be linked that are not necessarily clear. Connolly provides an example in order to explain this reorientation by looking towards the oil spills in the Gulf of Mexico caused by oil drilling by BP in 2010. Connolly specifically points out that this oil drilling is an action that is produced by the culture of late-stage capitalism, a culture which relies heavily on the dispensability of nature. Connolly explains the fragility of this event and the cultural act of drilling for oil as the:

Perverse intersection between the terms of expanding capitalism and the acceleration of climate change, with implications for world temperature increase, the swamping of low-lying land areas containing large populations, the desolation of fertile soil in some areas, the growing energy demands imposed by increasing temperatures, the increase of extreme weather events and the cross-regional violences such concatenations could trigger (410).

Connolly connects these events directly to the sociocultural and ideological forces that rely on the consumption of nonrenewable resources and the effects this has on our ecologies and relations. For Connolly, recognizing how our human interactions affect our world is the most important contribution for new materialist theory, especially in terms of framing political and economic relations as the responsible agents for disastrous event ontology.

This exploration of material things as an affective political actor is further developed by Thomas Lemke in his article “New Materialisms: Foucault and the ‘Government of Things’” where he takes into consideration the political nature of new materialisms and how things and humans operate in relation with one another as agents that affect and are affected by one another, and how these relations split the nature culture binary. Lemke builds off of Barad’s criticisms of Foucault in order to argue that Foucault’s notion of power never really takes into consideration the material effects of power on bodies and nonhuman actors, producing a static understanding of power that does not take into consideration the relational intra-actions embedded in the construction of a subject, human or nonhuman. These criticisms revolve around Foucault’s inability to produce power in a framework that exists outside of the social sphere—producing an anthropocentric deterministic schema trapped in the space of discursive supremacy. Foucault’s reliance on agency as a human domain requires a reinterpretation of his theories within a

posthumanist framework, one that takes into consideration the possibility of agency as both a human and nonhuman function. Lastly, Foucault's reliance on material phenomena being produced by discursive practices is never clearly articulated and is also posited in a fashion that doesn't provide space for recursivity. This argument is where Barad's notion of intra-action is important to take into consideration, that by operating from a framework that allows the space for multiple causal possibilities and provides space where agents can both act upon each other, but also, the assemblage of a relation can be shaped by either actor—as opposed to a Foucauldian system where causality is linked to power—those subject to power, are subject to the causal design of that power, a design of processes, possibilities, and conclusions for ontology. Lemke proposes a “symmetrical governmentality” of things one that combines Foucault's theory of a government of things which proposes that governmentality is the process of arranging the materials of an assemblage in a way to afford specific possibilities according to the desires of those designing that assemblage, alongside of recognizing agency and performativity being a recursive material phenomenon.

While these discussions may not necessarily be in the analytic scope of humanities scholars. It is important to note that new materialist theory requires thinkers to expand beyond human-semiotic centric issues; humanities scholars need to begin thinking on a grander scale, with a focus on the smaller movements of material actors. This larger universality of materiality is explored in *New Materialism: Interviews & Cartographies*, in which Rick Dolphjin and Iris van der Tuin interview different new materialist theorists in order to develop what they refer to as new materialism's transversal qualities. Dolphjin and van der Tuin propose:

a new materialism that cuts across or intersects dual oppositions in an immanent way. Félix Guattari ([1964] 1984), coining this term as early as 1964, insists on

the “micropolitical” nature of transversality, introducing it as a means to search for the new—not by critiquing the old, but by radically questioning (or smoothening out) all the barriers that supported its logic (100).

Transversality provides new materialism with a framework that approaches the production of knowledge as a phenomenon that cuts across barriers of time, matter (both subject and physical matter), and possibility. Transversality provides new materialism the space to question and work from and within the realms of thought that surpass the notions of siloed philosophies that have to operate in a specific way in order to promote a specific ideology, new materialisms is a fluid philosophy that is in flux in terms of what it analyzes and how, all of which is done in a way that puts performativity, relationality, and agency at the forefront. Dolphjin and van der Tuin claim that the generative power of new materialism is located in its nomadic traversing of “science *and* the humanities, performing the agential or *noninnocent* nature of all matter that seems to have escaped both modernist (positivist) and postmodernist humanist epistemologies (100).

This type of transversality is best seen in Barad’s work on posthuman performativity and hauntology. In her article “Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter” Barad discusses the effects of the linguistic turn in the humanities alongside the damage that it has done in terms of our understanding of the world. She claims that “Language has been granted too much power” (801) and that this power has reduced the humanities’ ability to understand the world in a way that provides space for both human and nonhuman flourishing. Representationalism has produced an epistemology that has reduced our material ontology to the mechanisms of discourse. Purporting that all things are discursive, our individual worlds are limited to the meaning-making possibilities that have been written for us

according to the systems of power where the stories of our world are told. Alongside of this ontological trap comes the epistemic one, the idea that all that can be known is the world that is present to us at the level of language—we know the semiotic representation of things and have accepted that there is a world beyond those representations which are both elusive from our grasp and unimportant to how we know the world. Barad argues that a performative understanding of discursive practices (something she refers to in other places as material-discursivity) provides us with the ability to see the world in a way that frees us from language: “The move toward performative alternatives to representationalism shifts the focus from questions of correspondence between descriptions and reality (e.g., do they mirror nature or culture?) to matters of practices/doings/actions” (802). Barad’s theories move towards Dolphijn and Tuin’s emphasis on the importance of expanding the boundaries of logic, to not only take into consideration the discursive practices of all things but to also take into consideration the material performativity and the representative ontologies that arise from those movements.

Barad, Agential Realism, and a Framework for Knowing and Being

For the purposes of this project, I want to focus on Barad’s conceptualization of ethics and how it relates to material-discursivity. Barad’s conceptualization of ethics is inherently tied to ontology and epistemology, Barad claims that these facets of human thinking and doing are inseparable from one another. Honing in on her ethics however, provides this project the means to develop new ways of thinking and doing with rhetorical studies and materiality. As a key scholar in new materialism is Barad and her ability to bring together science studies and critical theory. In her article “Quantum Entanglements and Hauntological Relations,” Barad continues to explore this transversal emphasis placed by Dolphijn and Tuin. Her article covers the importance of reading the sciences through the humanities and vice versa, while also telling stories across

times in order to understand how history takes place in the present, and the material effects of those events and the affordances they have on the future. Barad explores the meeting between Niels Bohr and Werner Heisenberg in Copenhagen during World War II and speculates about the nature of that meeting. In regard to her speculation she claims that “Science and justice, matter and meaning are not separate elements that intersect now and again. They are inextricably fused together, and no event, no matter how energetic, can tear them asunder. They cannot be dissociated, not by chemical processing, or centrifuge, or nuclear blast” (242). Barad’s article shows us that it’s important for the humanities to consider the ethical implications of all material things regardless of how mundane or even abstract they may be.

This piece is fascinating because Barad performs what she refers to as diffraction. She provides the spacetime coordinates for the moments that she wants to look at before providing an analysis which also emphasizes the importance of context when it comes to understanding the materiality of a phenomenon. For example, in the section “Diffracting Events, Entanglements, Ghostly Matters,” Barad provides context for her piece in the following way:

“SpaceTime Coordinates: Returning for the first time, again / 1941 [Copenhagen]
/ diffracted through 1998...diffracted through 1927...diffracted through 1994
[Specters of Marx]...diffraction as a methodology: reading texts intra-actively
through one another, enacting new patterns of engagement, attending to how
exclusions matter (243).

These SpaceTime Coordinates provide the reader with an understanding of Barad’s new materialist methodology for reading, one that accomplishes Dolphijn and Tuin’s emphasis on transversality: to read through texts, through time, through events, in order to uncover the hidden logics, boundaries, im/possibilities inherent within the meaning-making mechanisms or events

that the scholar chooses to observe. Barad locates the performative function of these theories and events and in doing so has them speak with and through one another in order to propose new claims about the act of storying, historicizing, critiquing, and generating new knowledge.

Barad's explanation of scenes also connects to the larger understanding of relationality within a new materialist framework: "Each scene diffracts various temporalities, iteratively differentiating and entangling, within and across, the field of spacetime mattering" (Barad, "Quantum" 244).

Barad's theory of spacetime mattering and diffraction brings together the importance of telling stories through and across time and thinking about the subjectivities and possibilities within and through different relations and assemblages.

In order to understand the impact and depth of Barad's research it is important to understand the overarching aims of her philosophy of *agential realism* which is best developed in her book *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*: "I propose 'agential realism' as an epistemological-ontological-ethical framework that provides an understanding of the role of human and nonhuman, material and discursive, and natural and cultural factors in scientific and other social-material practices..." (Barad, *Meeting* 26). Barad helps us reconceptualize how we can begin understanding issues of ethics, ontology, epistemology, discourse, agency, materiality, etc. in new ways that take into consideration materiality in ways that are not reduced to discourse. Instead, her work aims to locate the causal relationship between discursive practices and material phenomenon (Barad, *Meeting* 34). Barad specifically refers to this framework as a posthumanist one meaning that it centralizes nonhuman and material agents in the production of her theory (32). This transformation of theory and philosophy's primary object of analysis from a human centric orientation to a more materialist

one creates the foundation necessary for thinking about material things in ways that expands the responsibilities of understanding our subjectivity and our role in the world.

Understanding how Barad positions subjects and things in relation to one another within her agential realist framework provides greater insight into her conceptualization of ontology, epistemology, and ethics. Barad claims it's important for agential realism to have an “Understanding of matter as a dynamic and shifting entanglement of relations, rather than as a property of things” (35). This claim that matter and humans are intertwined/entangled in complex and significant ways transforms the ways in which we have to think about subjectivity. This transformation of subjectivity also demands new ways of thinking about subject formation and the subject’s involvement with the production of meaning-making and ethics.

Barad’s conceptualization of ethics requires readers to begin re-thinking their relations with one another while simultaneously re-thinking their relations with the material world. Her conceptualization of ethics transforms the concept to ensure that humans are not the only thing in this world worthy of ethical treatment, Barad argues that:

Ethics is not simply about responsible actions in relation to human experiences of the world; rather, it is a question of material entanglements and how each intra-action matters in the reconfiguring of these entanglements, that is, it is a matter of the ethical call that is embodied in the very worlding of the world (160).

Barad’s ethics requires individuals to take into consideration the relations which they hold dear and the relations which they haven’t learned are part of their entangled ontology. The starting point of Barad’s ethics at an individual level is to understand the multiple agents and events that are involved in the overall ecology of our personal social and life worlds. This is where Barad’s claim about onto-ethico-epistemology—areas of human thought which can never

be separated from one another—begin to make more sense. In order to understand how you must treat the agents in your world you have to learn about what those agents are and how your ontology is built from intra-actions with your world. After these moments of recognition and rebuilding are enacted, we can begin to think about our responsibility to those agents and what that might look like.

Barad's entanglement of human knowing, being, and doing requires us to intersect these aspects of our world in order to understand each aspect more fully especially because none of these aspects of our thinking can exist in a vacuum without the other. One of her greatest contribution to critical theory is this move intra-act our own concepts, in order to perform the concepts that she develops, she writes:

different material-discursive practices produce different material configurings of the world, different difference/diffraction patterns; they do not merely produce different descriptions. Objectivity and agency are bound up with issues of responsibility and accountability. Accountability must be thought of in terms of what matters and what is excluded from mattering (Barad Meeting 184).

In order to explicate a heuristic for ethical action within a Baradian framework it must highlight three things: (1) the relations subjects have to agents involved in their entanglement (2). The responsibility and accountability the subject has towards those agents, (3) An emphasis on the orientation the subject has towards the nature and future of their entanglement.

This entangled subjectivity formation that happens between matter and bodies and vice versa is caused by what Barad refers to as “intra-activity” and its role in the production of “material-discursive” boundaries. Intra-activity is developed by Barad in order to push back against the idea of “interactivity” or “interaction” both of which presume a predetermined

conscriptio of relata onto new and old relationalities (139). For Barad, agency is the potential and effect that arises from intra-actions, as opposed to a predetermined phenomenon with limited potentiality. Agency is the ability to also direct the potentialities of phenomenon production which emerges through novel intra-actions; this form of agency is exhibited by a subject's performativity.

These concepts of agential realism come together and are enfolded in Barad's description of agency: "Agency is 'doing' or 'being' in its intra-activity. It is the enactment of iterative changes to particular practices—iterative reconfigurings of topological manifolds of spacetime-matter relations-through the dynamics of intra-activity" (178). For Barad, agency is an ontological attribute that is held neither by objects or subjects prior to their relationship with their entanglements. Agency is an emergent phenomenon which arises through intra-action. The agency of an object or subject is present in the production of material-discursive phenomena. Understanding the production of phenomenon requires an understanding of the different agents involved in the phenomenon's enactment which can be traced through an object or subject's performativity in the context of its specific entanglement. In an agential realist framework agency's role is to promote both doing and being, making it an onto-epistemic enactment, one which requires an understanding of the ethical parameters of its entanglement. Ethics, then, is at the center of Barad's framework. Ethics guides the agential trajectory which occurs in the midst of intra-actions and understanding the nature of entanglements provides us with a greater understanding of the potential phenomenon that should be produced in the midst of an enactment. Understanding, our ethical responsibilities and accountabilities towards our entanglements promotes a greater understanding of the material-discursive construction of phenomenon.

In the context of rhetorical meaning-making, Barad's framework promotes our consideration of the entanglements in which we are implicated. New materialist rhetoric in Barad's framework requires an understanding of the materiality of our situation and the agents that are involved in the construction of that entanglement. Furthermore, an utterance—whether it be visual, spoken, or written—necessarily positions us in a way to take responsibility for the agents involved. This agential-realist framework could mean either rhetorical production that recognizes and is accountable to the agents that should be involved in an enactment, or a co-constitutive performance involving the agency of subjects and objects involved in the rhetor's entanglement in order to further promote an intra-active material-discursive utterance. Finding ways to identify and compose with or alongside the multiple agents involved in our entanglements is ethically responsible; furthermore, it promotes a greater understanding of the material-discursive nature of meaning-making.

Rhetorical scholars would benefit from incorporating Barad's work on ethics and agency into their own work especially because of the emphasis on material-discursivity. If we are to accept Barad's argument that meaning-making is a dynamic relationship between objects and subjects in their entanglement, which arises out of their agential intra-activity then her conceptualization of material-discursivity is one that requires theorization. Barad claims that "Discursive practices and material phenomena do not stand in a relationship of externality to each other; rather, the material and the discursive are mutually implicated in the dynamics of intra-activity. The relationship between the material and the discursive is one of mutual entailment" (151). This conceptualization of material-discursivity requires us to re-imagine rhetorical analysis in a way that does not attach semio-discursive methods of analysis on top of material phenomena in order to understand their materiality. As rhetoricians, we need to work

towards a method of analysis that can simultaneously understand the mutual emergence of the material and discursive nature of phenomenon and incorporate this understanding into a praxis which can promote a form of composition that is more responsible and ethically engaged with the rhetor's entanglement.

Grosz and the Incorporeal Factors of Materialization

The majority of new materialist theory struggles to contend with things that do not already have material dimensions. Grosz reminds materialist scholars that there are limits to what material frameworks can understand. It is important to understand those limits in a way that promotes a greater understanding of the parameters of invention when taking into consideration the immaterial. By fully understanding the immaterial forces that produce material things we gain a better understanding of our world. In *The Incorporeal: Ontology, Ethics, and the Limits of Materialism*, Elizabeth Grosz pushes back against the totalizing orientation of new materialism and its emphasis on materiality, similar to the critiques Barad provides for language. Grosz's argument in this book emphasizes that material thinking without immateriality provides materiality with too much power. Grosz's book builds a generative critique for new materialist philosophies that simultaneously locates gaps in the scholarship and provides the theories with a conversation around ideas that fill those gaps and yet, fill them in a way that complicates the theories as a whole. Grosz's focus on the incorporeal in this text requires thinkers to wonder about the non-material phenomenon that affect our materiality in deep and interconnected ways. She asks:

What is it that materialism must assume without being able to acknowledge as material? What intellectual maneuvers must materialism develop to hide what it must assume—concepts, processes, frames that are somehow different from and

other than simply material? What must materialism assume, what terms must it develop, in order for it to explain what appears to be immaterial or extramaterial? (17).

Grosz claims that there are four important incorporeals that arise from Stoic philosophy: (1) void, (2) space, (3) time, and (4) *lekton*. She writes:

These are among the most intriguing—and brilliant—ontological concepts within western philosophy. They cannot be considered anomalies or contradictions of the Stoic commitment to materialism, but are ways of understanding the immaterial conditions that uphold, enable, and complicate materialism. It may be the case that space, time, and the void are the immaterial conditions for any material something(31).

Grosz's claim demonstrates that these four incorporeal phenomena are an integral part of any material phenomenon. However, a strict materialist theory does not necessarily account for immaterial or virtual things, ignoring the incorporeal phenomenon which build material things. Her theories are especially important considering her emphasis on *lekta* or "sayables"; these ideas can assist us in the process of understanding rhetoric as an immaterial/incorporeal force with material implications. Conversations about rhetoric and energy, utterances and materialization, the production of space, *kairos* and *chronos*, all of these conversations are opened up in Grosz's book.

Grosz claims that the Stoics believed that incorporeals are non-existent phenomenon in the material sense: "However, unlike something, they do not exist but subsist as the incorporeal conditions for the appearance and operation of somethings, objects, subjects, and their qualities and relations" (28). An incorporeal is an immaterial thing which can exert causal relations on

material things which transforms them into subjects. Incorporeals are not the primary factor of materialization but they are involved in the process of materialization in distinct ways. “Every materialism, whether this is acknowledged openly or not, requires an incorporeal frame. The appeal of the Stoics, even today, lies in the audacity with which they develop the concept of the incorporeal as the subsisting condition of material existence” (29). As a subsisting condition of material existence, it is important to take Grosz’s critique of new materialism seriously and to begin theorizing and incorporating these incorporeal elements into our analyses, especially considering the complexity it opens up to interpretation of meaning-making capacities.

The first two incorporeals that Grosz discusses are “void (*kenon*)” and “place (*topos*)” Grosz’s discussion of these two incorporeals is deeply intertwined considering that they build into one another. Grosz claims “Void is that which occupies the infinity of extension without being able to be localized anywhere” (33). This concept envisions a space prior to materialization. Void operates as the realm of nonexistent potentialities—things and places that are yet to come. Discussing void as such demonstrates the intertwined nature I had mentioned. In regard to its materializing effects Grosz claims “Void is what subsists during the expansion and contraction of bodies, qualities, and states, enabling place to be restored as bodies come to occupy it” (35). This enactment of enabling constructs void as a phenomenon which opens up the possibility for events and places to exist, it is essentially a materialization catalyst.

Place then, is the materialized potential ontology of the void. Place has the ability to produce what the void could have made possible. In order for void to be a successful catalyst in its materializing effects, it has to open up reality for the construction of places. Grosz claims that “Place is capable of being occupied by a body; the void is not. Void is thus that which lacks a body, that which is incorporeal, but is capable of receiving a body, a process that transforms it

from void to place” (33). The catalytic relation between void and place is best described by Grosz when she claims that: “The void subsists as a possible condition for place, where things abide: it constitutes the conditions and terms of place with none of the things that occupy or take up place” (34). Under these conditions Grosz provides scholars working within a new materialist framework to begin theorizing about potential voids and the conditions they can provide for the potential materialization of places. The concept of place can also assist scholars in a reductive analysis to analyze the materiality of a place by reducing it to the void. New materialism can learn more about understanding the influence of the different bodies embedded in the materialization of a place by understanding the void which made that place possible.

The third incorporeal that Grosz writes about is time (*chronos*). The Stoics operate under the assumption that time is a linear phenomenon, that there is a distinct past and future which stretch outwards to infinity, and that we are all living in the present, even though that present could be the length of a millisecond or some indeterminate amount. These conceptualizations are important because for the Stoics, time as an incorporeal indicates the movement of bodies in space. Grosz elaborates on this phenomenon as such:

Time is understood as incorporeal because the measure of the motion of a moving body is not itself material, just as the space a moving body covers is not material. Rather, both time and space (as we now understand the Stoic concept of place) are the incorporeal conditions of the causal force of movement (37).

Grosz’s development of the Stoic concept of time situates it in the concept of place. Time is the measurement of bodies’ movement, and that movement is understood as happening in and between spaces across history and into the unforeseeable future. Time, in this framework, is the

movement of the universe in its totality (37). The void is the future potential of places that have yet to be manifested, and time is the measurement of that materialization.

The final incorporeal that Grosz addresses that is most fascinating for rhetorical research is *lekta* (sayables). “Lekta address not only what is part of language, meaning, or sense but also parts of the world, whose sense they render articulable in language” (38). According to Grosz, *lekta* is a complicated incorporeal, it encompasses the meaning-making methods by which individuals can transform their perceptions in the world into a translatable form to be shared with others. Its complication arises in the role it plays as an incorporeal. Like the previous incorporeals their materiality is not necessarily tangible. They also exist in a realm of nonexistence until their materialization. *Lekta*, however, have the ability to exist as an incorporeal phenomenon which have direct material impacts on the formation of an individual’s world: “Language becomes oriented in two directions incapable of reconciliation, material and incorporeal. Language, as utterance, is material, and every statement it makes possible is material” (Grosz 39). Grosz specifically attaches the materiality of language to its ability to produce events. The moment at which *lekta* produces material effects is the moment it transforms from an incorporeal phenomenon into a corporeal one.

The complicated aspect of understanding *lekta* arises when we think more deeply about its incorporeality. Grosz describes *lekta*’s material impacts and possibilities in its material sense; however, she claims that “...*Lekta* adhere to events, independent of language: they are the ongoing possibility of sense whether such a sense is thought or said or not” (38). This conceptualization of a *lekta* brings us to a difficult moment in the field of rhetoric. If it is true that *lekta* are ever present in the materiality of our world and are awaiting interpretation, then it can be the case that there are material meaning-making phenomena which have eluded our

ability to understand them. This proposition gives light to the interpretative potentiality within our material world. We may not necessarily have the language or methods to transform the meaning-making capacities of material phenomenon; however, if we can produce a method to translate the material meaning-making capacities of material phenomenon, we may be able to discover lekta which are already in things which we have yet to understand.

My objective is to focus on the non-discursive material phenomenon which the field of rhetoric has attempted to understand using theories of material rhetoric. The field itself has a rich history of attempting to understand material symbols and their rhetoricity. This comes with many challenges especially when we take into consideration Grosz's conceptualization of lekta. The meaning-making we are used to exists in a sign system which we understand and use consistently. But what happens when material phenomena produce meaning in ways that a semiotic analysis cannot understand. This incorporeal meaning can enter the realm of corporeality so long as we work towards understanding the means by which these material things can be understood.

Meaning-Making and Rhetorical Implications

My goal is to develop a heuristic using Barad's work specifically around material-discursivity, within the framework of Grosz's incorporealities, in order to work towards understanding the meaning-making of material things. I believe in order for rhetorical studies to develop knowledge about understanding our material it will have to take into consideration the important new materialist concepts. Understanding how things make meaning requires us to understand the entanglements we are a part of including the multiple actors that are involved. Because meaning itself is an incorporeal phenomenon it too must be materialized. Grosz's emphasis on the incorporeal provides insight into how material-discursivity can be interpreted

rhetorically. An emphasis needs to be placed on how things become important in our cultures, in what ways do our social worlds produce important material things, and how do those material things work towards creating our social worlds.

There have been some scholars in the field of rhetoric who have attempted to understand the material world using new materialist approaches. Material rhetoric recognizes that material things are important and that meaning is being made in substantial ways. My hope is to use the knowledge produced by Barad in order to expand the knowledge produced by material rhetorical scholarship. In chapter three I will focus on how material rhetoric has discussed material things and develop a heuristic that provides rhetoricians with the ability to understand the meaning-making potential of material things without textualizing them.

CHAPTER 3.

A HEURISTIC FOR UNDERSTANDING MATTER

The purpose of this chapter is to show how new materialist theory can inform materialist understandings of rhetoric and to establish a new materialist heuristic for rhetorical analysis. There have been some scholars who use materialist theories in order to develop new ways to understand the material world. The aforementioned work of Karen Barad and Elizabeth Grosz will inform my heuristic as their work provides us with the foundation for thinking about things in ways that do not reduce their thingness. This heuristic will also be applied to an artwork by Ai Weiwei in order to demonstrate its efficacy. However, it is important to take into consideration the conversation that has been happening in rhetorical studies when it comes to material rhetoric. The exigence for new materialist theory in this conversation on material rhetoric arises primarily out of the need to think more critically about non-discursive rhetoric outside of a semiotic system which reduces materialism to a series of signifiers. Alongside this older conversation I will discuss the following theorists in order to develop the terms and framework for this project. Specifically, I will be looking at work from Laurie Gries, Phil Bratta, Scott Barnett, Casey Boyle, Jodie Nicotra, and Thomas Rickert, all authors who have developed new ways to discuss materiality. However, it is important to note that material rhetoric has been a conversation for years and I will address these conversations alongside the spaces for growth within those conversations.

Speculative Realism and Rhetoric

The field of rhetoric has been thinking critically and generatively about the speculative turn in rhetorical studies. *Rhetoric Through Everyday Things* edited by Scot Barnett & Casey

Boyle is a collection of essays that works towards transforming rhetorical theory with speculative realist philosophy. In their introduction the editors emphasize that accounting for the co-constitutive relationships between humans and things is important for a rhetorical understanding of things (6). However, the editors claim that it's also important to not produce epistemic limits by thinking only in human-thing relations. They claim that "we should also be interested in relations between things themselves, how things interact with and have effects on other things" (6). This emphasis is directly inspired by philosophical thinking in object-oriented ontology. I believe that it is important to take into consideration how things relate to other things, but in the end, our understanding of object-oriented relationalities is limited due to our human subjectivity. More pertinent, this conversation about understanding object-object relations distracts us from larger issues involving politics, ontology, and ethics, choosing to focus on object-object relations frames the discussion around metaphysics, while that is important, a rhetoricians job in this framework is to understand the meaning-making capacities of things, which is inherently a human phenomenon.

One contributor to this collection, Jodie Nicotra, in her article "Assemblage Rhetorics: Creating New Frameworks for Rhetorical Action" addresses both, the importance of maintaining human-thing relations, and in the process of doing so shows the value of expanding away from thinking about object-object relations. Nicotra claims "In assemblage thinking, nonhuman and material objects are equally bound up with human actions in events. All actions come about not as products of deliberate human decisions. But from a heterogenous, distributed agency of many actants, both human and nonhuman" (186). This assemblage framework for human-nonhuman relations positions rhetoric as a field of study which aims at understanding the effects that the different agents involved exhibit and the meaning-making that can be deciphered. In their

introduction the editors of this collection claim that the objective of rhetoric in this interdisciplinary field of material ontology is to figure out “how to do things with things” (11). The emphasis Nicotra places on heterogeneity and events in this framework connects back to this overall objective of figuring out how to “do things with things.” Understanding the agencies of material things in the context of our human world, provides us with a better understanding of how things are doing things, allowing us to think more rhetorically about the production of events—if we figure out how things do things, we can figure out how to do things with things. This can lead us to potentially rethinking our relationship with the natural world, while also rethinking how we engage in our own world building.

In order to explain how assemblage rhetorics might work Nicotra looks towards a community activist organization called “The Transition Network.” The objectives of the community are to support “community-led responses to climate change and shrinking supplies of cheap energy, building resilience and happiness” (194). Nicotra claims that the organization's rhetorical challenge is to bring together people in a community who may hold drastically different beliefs around whether or not climate activism is important in their community and that the community should work as a collective towards a better future (194). Nicotra uses this organization as an example because of their philosophy of attunement, which as a rhetorical concept implies the need to reassess what we notice about our world to transform our orientation. My concern with both her example and her use of attunement as doing the material-rhetorical work that she writes about is that neither of them accomplish what her framework claims is important. I agree, understanding who/what the multiple actors are involved in our assemblage and framing our actions around those actors is important in order to produce generative events. However, these arguments assume that we all know how to attune. Before we move to a position

of action involving our assemblages we need to understand how the things in our assemblage matter, in the process of doing so we will gain a better understanding of what and how they mean, but we will also be able to address their ontologies in the production of future events. Successful attunement begins with successful interpretation of the assemblages and relations that make up our world.

The concept of attunement is best attributed to Thomas Rickert who writes the “Afterword” for this collection of essays. Rickert claims “A return to things that sees them as rhetorical renders them agential and at the same time elevates their status” (226). Rickert connects an object’s rhetoricity directly with its agential capacities, meaning, an object becomes rhetorical because of its ability to agentially produce affect. This orientation does a good job of making sure that when we talk about things as rhetorical they are not reduced to simple signs and signifiers, textualizing their materiality away. The object of analysis Rickert chooses in order to demonstrate this rhetoricity is an art piece titled *Evident Materials*. The art piece consists of a film stock that is drenched in household chemicals which is then shocked with 15,000 volts of electricity. The electricity operates as a vital force, catalyzing a composition which even the artist themselves could not necessarily anticipate.

Imparting the agency of the production of the artwork on to the performativity of the material things involved places the artist in a mediator position. Considering the artist’s agency does not determine the final product, the work of assembling materials becomes the role of the artist in this meaning-making event. In the process of doing so the materials “Illuminate how we are laced into a dense stitchwork of things that make us what we are” (229). Rickert’s comments here exemplify the work of Haraway, Barad, and Bennett. This idea that art has the ability to not only produce something that is aesthetically wonderful, but also incite within us a sense of

wonder about the interconnectivity of our material worlds, is important as we move forward as scholars attempting to understand how we can better practice attunement. A better practice of attunement could result in new forms of criticality where the passivity of the material world dissolves, and we can think of the meaning-making capacities of our world more critically. Like Nicotra, Rickert, proposes that the challenge with a new materialist rhetoric "...is not to single out a particular framework but to spur another sensitivity, a different attunement, and to crack open a few of the illusions of certainty enwrapping our lives, by means of a new concreteness" (231). As important as it is to locate these new attunements, I believe it's also important to develop a framework for locating and disseminating these attunements, and art is an object which can assist us in the process of this attunement sensitivity. Laurie Gries' work on the rhetoricity of the Obama Hope poster lends us some insight into what it might look like to build a new materialist framework for understanding art in the form of images, her methods assist us in this attunement process.

A More Material Approach

In *Still Life With Rhetoric: A New Materialist Approach to Visual Rhetoric*, Gries develops five principles for understanding new materialist rhetoric and the potential application of new materialist theory in rhetorical studies: becoming, consequentiality, vitality, agency, and virality. Gries begins her new materialist rhetorical principles with the principle of becoming which she develops as "...an opening up of events into an unknown future. Reality is change, an open process of mattering and assemblage. From such perspectives, a new materialist rhetorical approach recognises that things constantly exist in a dynamic state of flux and are productive of change, time, and space" (289). Gries emphasizes the quality of materiality which I feel new materialists have helped us see the best—malleability. Rhetorical and material becoming is a

fragile and transformative process which can be altered into many directions, directions which we may not even be capable of expecting.

The second principle which Gries outlines is the principle of *consequentiality*: “The meaning of matter is constituted by the consequences that emerge with time and space via its relations with other entities. These consequences emerge before, during, and after a thing’s initial physical production and delivery” (289). Gries’ concept teaches us that material objects can be understood in terms of their meaning-making capacities when we look at the consequences that they produce—who and what they affect and in what ways. Gries’ principle of *vitality* is her third principle which adds to this larger new materialist notion of things having agency and the ability to affect their environment and other actors. “Things have lives of their own and exert material force as they move in and out of various assemblages and trigger diverse kinds of change. A new materialist rhetorical approach tries to account for a thing’s distributed, emergent materializations in a non-teleological fashion and disclose the complexity of unsurprising and unpredictable ways it impacts collective life” (289).

Gries’ principle of *agency* is directly correlated to the principle of vitality and consequentiality. “Agency, better thought of as actancy, is a distributed, dynamic dance enacted by diverse entities intra-acting within and across assemblages...a new materialist rhetorical approach focuses on a thing’s emergent and unfolding exterior relations intra-actions” (Gries 289). Conceiving of interactions as intra-actions allows rhetoricians to adopt this new materialist idea of agency as being a force which is not inhabited by one agent and not by another. The final principle Gries develops is a principle which mostly occurs in digital infrastructures and spaces: *virality*. She writes that “The tendency of things to spread quickly and widely—is a consequence of a thing’s design, production, distribution, circulation, transformation, collectivity, and

consequentiality” (290). This concept is important for Gries’ project, because the material object that she studies in this text, has gone through multiple transformations and became a cultural rhetorical object via its initial circulation into the public sphere.

While Laurie Gries’ work is important and useful in terms of connecting new materialist theory and rhetorical theory with one another. It is important to note that her theorizations are useful for material analysis specifically when it comes to images and pictures. Her principles and frameworks do not lend themselves to understanding the meaning-making capacities of “Ready-made” objects that exist out there in the world. For the most part her principles apply to material objects which have explicit signifying abilities: a visual artifact. My concern is how we are supposed to understand things which don’t provide us with any signs about how they should be interpreted. How are we supposed to understand the meaning-making capacities of trash, chairs, sidewalks, and laptops?

However, I’m not sure that virality would apply outside of visual/digital objects. But this does not mean that new materialist rhetoric cannot look at objects outside of the digital. I do believe however, that it is going to be important to understand how new materialist theory and rhetorical theory can come together in order to create theories for understanding meaning-making outside of digital materiality. It is important for us to develop the ideas that Gries has developed and to look at digital visual artifacts in order to understand the culture of their circulation and the political transformation it can create. However, it is still also important to look at more mundane “real world” materials in order to understand how they create meaning in our world. Observing the more fundamental materials that construct our world allow us to understand the human relations that come from them, allowing us to gain a better understanding of the conditions of people’s materiality. While Phil Bratta’s article is not a new materialist piece

of scholarship, it is helpful to take into consideration how he understands the materiality of human practices and the rhetorical power embedded within the objects that support those practices.

In Bratta's article "Rhetoric and Event: The Embodiment of Lived Events" he discusses the intersections between materiality, performance, perception, and embodiment. His article accomplishes what most conversations around material rhetoric seem to stray away from. His focus on the body as a quintessential aspect of rhetorical meaning-making provides new insight on the importance of materiality in that performative process of interpretation. Bratta's article focuses on the "Laying of the bones Performance" at Congo Square in New Orleans. The performance consisted of 250 volunteers constructing an installation of 50,000 fabricated bones in the square. This performance was followed by the "Reclaiming of the Bones" performance in order to be constructed in their final installation at the National Mall in Washington DC (Bratta 2015).

The bones were specifically chosen as a material to "bring awareness to ongoing genocides happening in the Republic of Congo, Sudan, Burma, Syria, and Somalia" (Bratta 2015). The bones were meant to both materially and symbolically convey the atrocities of genocide that have happened and are currently happening. The installation is jarring—seeing thousands of bones laid out in a large space looks like somebody dug up a graveyard and laid the human remnants bare for spectacle. Bratta emphasizes the importance of space in his argument claiming that "...The ground situates and contributes to the ecology of affective intensities that will form through the material rhetoric of the bones, the performance of laying them, and the music. This ecology will shape the potential of lived events" (2015). Bratta brings together the important relations between the materiality of the installation (the bones) and the performance of

producing the installation (laying the bones) alongside the space in which the bones are laid, in order to show the importance of the space itself and its necessity for the larger rhetorical event.

Bratta provides his readers with an expansive understanding of the multiple elements embedded within the notion of material rhetoric. His emphasis on space and event requires us to imagine a larger ecology of meaning-making and effects and their relations. Bratta claims that:

Non-volunteers saw the material rhetoric of bones and the movement of bodies. And they also saw the development of an art piece. But they also experienced multisensory stimulations: visually, aurally, and proprioceptually, all of which created perception. Non-volunteers heard the bones, the rhythms of the music, and the silence of human voices (2015).

Bratta shows us that material rhetoric is so much more than an object and its rhetorical qualities. The ecology of meaning-making at the material level, according to Bratta, is a multisensory phenomenon. In the context of his conversation around rhetorical events, it becomes necessary to take into consideration all of these multisensory elements. His argument not only expands the ways in which we think about rhetoric and events. It also pushes us to imagine in what ways these different sensorial elements make meaning. This becomes a challenging task especially considering the fact that the majority of these elements are not necessarily simple signifiers. Bratta emphasizes the importance of perception in his article which becomes exceptionally important when his conversation around material rhetoric primarily consists of non-discursive elements.

Bratta connects material rhetoric to this idea of the rhetorical event by analyzing the role of the bones in the larger performance and their meaning-making capacities in the installation: “participants embody a deep, concrete yet symbolic relation to genocide as attention was drawn

to the materiality of bones and bodies (actual and symbolic) across public space” (Bratta 2015). Bratta brings to our attention that events themselves can have an impact on the symbolic interpretation of material objects. The rhetorical situation that material objects are a part of impact that ways in which that object can potentially produce meaning. In this situation the event that relates the bones to genocide is the performance that is attempting to raise awareness about genocides happening around the globe, throughout history, and into the present. The activists who were part of this performance and installed the installation channeled the materiality of genocide through the fabricated bones, and it’s through this intention and the event they wanted to highlight, that a non-discursive object was materialized into into a symbolic signifier. The bones are no longer just bones, they are bones that are meant to make us remember and understand the terrors of genocide in the present. Without the intentions of the performers and the events at hand, the bones could mean many different things, but it’s through the performance, intention, and event that bones begin to materialize a very specific meaning.

Bratta and Gries’ orientation to the concept of materiality is more of an outlier than the trend. As material rhetoric has been developed in the field of rhetoric it has taken a special interest in public memorials. This is most evident in Sonja Foss’ article “Ambiguity as Persuasion: The Vietnam Veterans Memorial” where Foss spearheads the conversation around material rhetoric. Foss’ article provides good context for thinking about visual materials as rhetorical. “Visual works of art, then, may be considered rhetoric in that they produce effects and are intentional and purposive objects... I propose that a useful way to conceptualize a viewer’s response to a visual object is that it assumes two forms or occurs in two steps—the aesthetic and the rhetorical” (329). This is an important concept from Foss especially because she is reflecting on the importance of non-discursive experiences and their role in interpretation—interpreting art

cannot be just rhetorical, it limits the possibilities of an art object to a semiotic system which does not encapsulate its complexity in terms of its multiplicity of interpretation. If you limit interpretation to an object's symbolic elements you are then stuck within that sign system for meaning. However, our aesthetic response is processed rhetorically, a subjective experience needs to be translated into a semiotic system that can communicate that meaning. This dialectic between discursive and non-discursive alongside rhetorical and aesthetic response provides an important framework for interpreting visual material things.

Material Rhetoric: Public Memorials as Rhetorical Sites

Foss' article focuses on the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial because of its meaning-making complexity and its ability to reach multiple audiences. Foss emphasizes that the value of this memorial for rhetorical studies comes from its ability to be rhetorically effective in multiple situations across multiple audiences. Foss claims that it has become a truism that effective communication is to be "tailored to a particular audience and particular circumstance" (328). However, in regard to the memorial it has the ability to transcend these particularities and address all audiences regardless of their orientation towards the war and the memorial. Foss brings up the important fact that understanding a non-discursive thing requires new forms of understanding. This new form of understanding has to reconcile with the fact that material things lack referents which I'm beginning to recognize is the most difficult aspect of my own project. In order for rhetorical studies to understand material things we have to begin thinking about them non-discursively. Foss claims that "The attribution of meaning in the rhetorical response, then, has a basis in the formed matter of the work. The various interpretations viewers bring to it are grounded in the material of physical aspects of the work...meaning must be shown to be grounded in the material characteristics of the work" (330). If a thing doesn't have a

recognizable symbol that provides it meaning through its usage, understanding it becomes more difficult, especially when a non-discursive object cannot be understood materially through a semiotic system because of the lack of this referent.

Foss validates the value of material rhetoric and thinking about art as rhetorical by explaining its multiplicitous nature: “To say that an art object has meaning does not mean that it signifies some fixed referent. Rather, meaning results only from a viewer’s creation of an interpretation of the visual object” (330). Foss’ claim provides art a sense of rhetorical validity because of the emphasis she places on the audience members’ reliance on perception, which is inherently affected by interpretation. In order for interpretation and perception to work hand in hand with one another it is important for them to build off of the visual material signifiers that arise from the art object itself. The difficulty arises when attempting to understand the performative material function of an object, and the perspectival affordances that come along with it.

In regard to non-discursive rhetoric Foss refers to the multiple referents embedded in a visual work that provide the opportunities of interpretation. Non-discursive rhetoric needs to take into consideration the multiplicity of referents and what they could mean and how they could mean to different people. Foss continues by looking at public interpretations of the memorial with a key focus on material referents—the V shape of the memorial, the black color of the memorial, the submersion of the memorial in the earth, and she provides her own interpretations of what these material referents could signify, not focusing on a single interpretation. Foss sadly, does not provide a heuristic, but instead focuses on multiple non-discursive (material) factors and shows the possibility of their interpretation—she performs her argument as opposed to structurally and systemically producing an argument that should be performed. However, she

uses the ambiguous memorial as a way of showing how anti-war rhetoric needs to make use of “unconventional, unusual images or symbols that attract attention because of their freshness and unpredictability” (338). I think that Foss’ emphasis on non-discursive rhetoric is important in terms of understanding how materials make meaning, however, I feel as if there needs to be an expansion in terms of what we look at in order to understand an object’s material rhetorical force. We have to build an interpretive method for understanding what we choose to analyze.

The scholar whose work on rhetoric and materiality that I feel coincides very closely with my project is Richard Marback in his article “Detroit and The Closed Fist: Toward a Theory of Material Rhetoric.” Marback focuses on the rhetorical effects of the closed fist monument of Joe Louis in Detroit. Marback writes that “As one person at the unveiling put it, "Monument to Joe Louis" is a ‘hopeful reflection of the black community fighting against all the odds, rising out of obscurity, refusing to be a passive victim of an unjust system’” (80). Marback expands on this comment in order to understand the materiality of the monument in conjunction with the space in which it resides. “Reading in the monument, and in the histories it evokes, possibilities for hope and renewal rather than the agonized disintegration of the city turns at least in part on choice of interpretive strategies” (84). Marback uses the space, alongside of its socio-historical stories in the larger context of America alongside the black power movement and the civil rights movement in order to show the multilayered meaning of a closed fist and it’s symbolic representation of perseverance and determination in the face of racial, economic, and political injustice. This piece however lacks a clear heuristic but instead provides readers with the tools necessary in order to begin theory building as a community of scholars calling for future research.

This type of call towards a greater theory of materiality is best exhibited when Marback introduces the importance of corporeality and spatiality into his analysis of the monument:

A material theory of rhetoric maintains the dynamics of corporeality and spatiality and textuality not out of reverence for reality but out of recognition that the significance of spaces grounds in uses of texts at the same time that the meanings of texts ground in uses of spaces. Rhetoric is always already embodied. Meanings are made, then, through the ways we occupy, and are asked to occupy, spaces and texts (86).

Material rhetoric for Marback arises from the intra-actions between people and the material conditions of their world. From those intra-actions, meaning is made in ways that do not reduce the materiality of our world to mere texts, but instead, requires materialization in order to exist, not discursive theorization producing an abstract symbol for the possible material conditions of reality—things matter, not the words we use about the things. Similarly, to Foss, Marback proposes specific aspects of matter’s performativity that we should take into consideration in our analyses “The point is to develop strategies for theorizing how inscriptions of memories, hopes, and fears on words, bodies, and cities, in discourses, cultural practices, and material spaces enable and constrain ‘gestures’ of rhetorical agency” (87). I believe that in conjunction with new materialist understandings of agency and performativity, alongside these larger discursive frameworks about values, actions, beliefs, histories, and socio-political characteristics, I can work closer to establishing a heuristic which fulfills Barad’s idea of material-discursivity.

This continued conversation on the materiality of the Joe Louis monument takes place in Gallagher and Ware’s article “Sparring with Public Memory: The Rhetorical Embodiment of

Race, Power, and Conflict in The Monument to Joe Louis” which was potentially the least relevant to my project. However, I did notice a trend between the articles when the authors claim:

What are the values made visible in and through The Fist? The Monument to Joe Louis is connected to a larger social discourse involving the struggle over defining and representing public memory in the form of local and national histories, particularly ones that evoke painful memories of racism, marginalization and injustice” (5).

The authors look at discourse and values in order to understand the signification of the memorial which is then used in order to “read " its materiality. Marback also traces the multiple stakeholders involved in the production of this memorial, pointing out the corporate relations that have materialized this work of art, ensuring that these relations are an aspect of our understanding of the memorial. The authors continue doing a psychoanalytic analysis of the memorial in order to make claims about its materiality. Which operates as a theoretical framework moreso than a heuristic. However, it is important to note that values keep showing up in terms of understanding non-discursive rhetoric. Understanding how things matter and in what ways that matter tends to come back to how we value those things.

Lastly, in Carole Blair’s article “Contemporary U.S Memorial Sites as Exemplars of Rhetoric’s Materiality” her method of establishing a heuristic is something I find really useful for thinking about in regard to my project. Blair poses five questions that she wants us to think about in terms of understanding a memorial’s materiality:

- (1) What is the significance of the text’s material existence?
- (2) What are the apparatuses and degrees of durability displayed by the text?
- (3) What are the

text's modes or possibilities of reproduction or preservation? (4) What does the text do to (or with, or against) other texts? (5) How does the text act on people? (31).

I find these questions to be an important move towards understanding a rhetorical text's materiality, however, that's the problem that I run into in these conversations. What happens if I want to understand a thing's rhetorical materiality as opposed to a text? All her questions and all of the ways in which she develops them in the context of the memorial merely textualize a material object in order to discuss its rhetorical energy and by doing so transform the material thing into a symbolic referent and afterwards applying an understanding of materiality onto that thing. My concern here is that materiality is only discussed in the ways in which a symbol becomes material as opposed to how material becomes a symbol. I don't want to write off the value of these questions especially because they do something that I believe a new materialist framework would find important which is that they reflect on the agency of a text, all of these questions reflect on the text as doing something and that doing is the space where materiality arises and it seems to be the space where materiality arises for many of these authors. When a text has done something, when it has materialized new effects, produced new consequences, produced new assemblages, transformed the perception of the viewer, it has entered a state of materialization and in the process of doing so, it has become rhetorical.

Overall, Foss' emphasis on the importance of establishing the means by which we can have better conversations around non-discursive rhetorical phenomena is very important. Her article (and the others) gave me the language to express the challenge of this dissertation. These articles are all referring to the material rhetoric of an art piece, which very specifically has a referent. There is a thing, and that thing has a discursive history which comes into conversation

with the materiality of that thing. The Vietnam soldier refers to the war, providing viewers the opportunity for interpretation depending on their relationship with the referent. The closed fist is a referent, referring to Louis' legacy, black pride movements, and the complicated race relations in America. However, the methods of reading these artifacts would not apply to an art piece made with concrete tiles—the tiles are not referents. In respects to visual and material rhetoric I've gathered that it is easier to conduct an analysis on a visual/material artifact when its symbolic reference doesn't require interpretation—I don't have to figure out that the Vietnam memorial is a soldier the same I don't have to figure out the meaning of the fist—these things already have meaning before they were composed. However, the meaning of a cigarette relies on its cultural and material relations—what meaning do viewers bring with them, and what do the cigarettes make possible in the larger network of other objects. I feel Foss' conversation around non-discursive rhetoric and more research into the subject matter may help me understand the means by which a heuristic can be made to analyze something with such fluidity and large means of interpretation.

A New Materialist Heuristic for Understanding Non-Discursive Rhetoric

While researching new materialist methods and research models, I've come across an article whose arguments are so well constructed that the author's concepts can translate across multiple disciplines in the humanities. A rhetorical heuristic inspired by new materialist thought will give rhetoricians the opportunity to think about material things in a non-discursive way alongside our discursive work. This means we have the opportunity to think about an object, its relations and performativity alongside its discursive functions in order to fully understand a material's meaning-making potentiality. I've gained inspiration for my own heuristic by looking towards Nick Fox and Pam Alldred and their article "Inside the Research-Assemblage: New

Materialism and the Micropolitics of Social Inquiry” where the authors synthesize new materialist scholarship in order to establish a methodology for inquiry in the social sciences. Their article discusses the importance of understanding the role of the researcher in what they refer to as the research-assemblage within a new materialist framework. Their article’s synthesis provides readers with methodological information to be used in their own research, and plenty of space to inspire new methods. I will be covering the main propositions of their research philosophy in order to establish a heuristic which allows us to gain new insights on material rhetoric using a new materialist method. The authors claim that this is a DeleuzoGuattarian method which rests on three primary propositions. Their first proposition is that:

Bodies and other material, social and abstract entities should be regarded not as ontologically-prior essences occupying distinct and delimited spaces, but as relational, gaining ontological status and integrity only through their relationship to other similarly contingent and ephemeral bodies, things and ideas (3).

This concept requires rhetoricians to think of material rhetoric as a means by which we can understand how things enter into states of becoming—whether it be at a physical or cultural level, while also taking into consideration the assemblage of relations that provide that thing’s specific ontology and the effects of that ontology. This emphasis on relationality builds a greater sense of understanding of an object's agency and its effect, focusing on what a thing does, and what happens when it interacts with other actors in its assemblage. The second proposition is:

All matter has an ‘agential’; capacity to affect, rather than being inert clay moulded by human agency, consciousness and imagination... Affects produce further affective capacities within assemblages (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 400), and because one affect can produce more than one capacity, social production is

‘rhizomic’(ibid: 7) rather than linear: a branching, reversing, coalescing and rupturing flow. Affective flows render assemblages constantly in flux, with territorialising flows stabilising an assemblage, while others destabilise or de-territorialise it (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 88-89), fragmenting an assemblage (3).

This second proposition provides us with the necessary framework in order to understand the concept of change and flux as a consequence of material meaning-making. Objects produce meaning when they affect or are affected by other objects or people. This rhizomatic conceptualization becomes valuable when we need to take into consideration how an event comes into being, the types of relations it produces and how the material things involved are oriented to those relations. This concept allows us to think of materiality as a moving force which can actively make differences in the world. Their third and final proposition for their framework:

Marks the radical divergence from the exclusive focus in earlier materialist sociologies upon macro-structures, social institutions and economic relations noted earlier. Because thoughts, ideas, feelings, desires, and collective abstractions and ‘constructions’ can all materially affect and be affected by other relations in an assemblage, they can be treated in exactly the same way as other (seemingly ‘more material’) relations (3-4).

This proposition most closely resembles the work that Karen Barad calls for us to accomplish in her concept of material-discursivity. In the new materialist framework, we have to think of incorporeal, abstract concepts as material effects which can produce drastic realistic change when they come into contact with the correct assemblages. Words may not inherently

have a material effect, but when words are designed and interpreted in a way to transform an assemblage's material constitution it is clear that this immaterial phenomenon is as material as any other object. This orientation lends itself to rhetorical studies' expertise—understanding the discursive construction of material phenomenon provides us with the ability to gain a greater understanding of how culture, politics, the social, etc., can have an impact on the material world, while focusing on how discourse and material objects work with one another in order to produce specific assemblages and effects.

In the following chapter I will discuss the importance of paralogic material rhetoric and its influence on my heuristic. However, it is important to note that while my heuristic affords a method of analyzing material things, it is still necessary in order to understand how we come to the conclusion about which material things we analyze. While the objective of my heuristic is to inform how we look at objects in order to understand their rhetoricity. Paralogic material rhetoric provides my analysis with an interpretive framework. An interpretive framework in this regard is different from my analytic heuristic due to the fact that the heuristic will discuss how we look at objects, paralogic material rhetoric discusses the means by which we understand which objects to look at and how we understand what they mean.

My heuristic is a series of questions intended to produce new materialist inquiries about the rhetoricity of objects and is as follows:

- What is the object's composition?
- What has this object made possible?
- What is being, and has been, said about this object
- What are the events involved in the production of this object as a material and cultural phenomenon?

First and foremost, it is important to assess the object itself and for researchers to ask themselves “what is the object’s composition?” This becomes especially important if this analysis is meant to be applied to objects that are human made—the composition of a cellular device for example is laden with an entire network of materials which are wrought with political strife. The practices that are involved in the production of our objects signify meaning about our societies’ values. This concept also reflects Nictora and Rickert’s emphasis on attunement; attuning to an object’s composition provides greater insight into what it tells us about our values in terms of social practices.

Secondly, it’s important in order to begin understanding an object’s agency, which is correlated to its influences in its different assemblages. In order to gain a better understanding of an object’s agency I propose we ask the question “What has this object made possible?” A cellular device provides humans with greater abilities to connect with one another, to take photographs, to make video/phone calls. The materiality of the cellular device i.e its constitutive parts have different forms of agency which would normally go unnoticed if the conversation around composition was ignored. In order to understand the affective dynamism of the material world we need to also take into consideration the more abstract aspects of our world and their relation to materiality. Specifically, I’m pulling from Fox & Aldred’s emphasis on “thoughts, ideas, feelings, desires, and collective abstractions and ‘constructions’” (4). This concept alongside Barad's concept of material-discursivity places researchers in a position of having to produce a dialectic between an object’s agency and affect alongside of the human discourses that revolve around the object and its relations.

While the second question helps us understand the materiality of an object, an object’s discursivity is best addressed by asking: “What is being, and has been, said about this object?”

This will allow us to put in conversation the discourse around the object and the materiality of the object in order to gain an understanding of how these two effects one another and what types of phenomena it produces. This point of inquiry would not only collect the words and phrases that circulate around an object, it would also focus on the reasons for those discursive productions. In this sense, the object becomes a mediator for larger rhetorical production. This question also works in conjunction with the next question I propose which is an attempt to pull together the larger rhizomatic nature of the material assemblages that we take a part in.

I believe it is important for scholars to ask themselves “What are the events involved in the production of this object as a material and cultural phenomenon?” This question not only requires us to look at the present events that have led towards the object’s importance, but also at the history of human and nonhuman relations which have produced a world where this object is assembled into its specific ontology. This question is also meant to be asked with the question regarding discourse in order to understand the larger incorporeal materializing effects of the object. When we begin to take into consideration the events at hand alongside the language that circulates around an object we gain a better insight into an object’s material-discursivity. These questions in conjunction with one another allow for an understanding of what events inspired specific discourse, and how the events catalyzed a specific cultural orientation around the object.

In Ai Weiwei’s piece entitled *Straight* (2008) he displays steel straightened out steel rods which were left in the aftermath of the infamous Sichuan earthquake which devastated the area and collapsed multiple schools resulting in thousands of casualties.



Figure 2. Straight (2008), Ai Weiwei

The numbers of the death toll from this earthquake sparked controversy as the People's Party had refused to provide the public with an accurate representation of the damage caused by the earthquakes and poor infrastructure. Weiwei and another activist Tan Zuoren established teams to trace the number of missing children. Both activists were arrested and tortured for their attempts, but this violence never silenced Weiwei.

Weiwei produced a documentary on the missing children and the aftermath of the earthquake and also reclaimed 200 tons of steel rods from the wreckage in order to produce an artwork criticizing the Chinese government's handling of the situation. In his documentary his team interviews multiple parents in order to gain a better understanding of the event and its aftermath. Viewers are exposed to the reality that no rescue teams were sent in order to locate the

children that may be buried under the rubble. This is especially frightening when we hear the stories of multiple parents saying they could hear the screams of children from under the destroyed buildings. These buildings were blocked off from the public, and yet we hear stories of parents gathering with their motorbikes at night using the headlamps to help them dig through the rubble to find their screaming children, being left with bleeding hands and no refuge in sight. The shoddy construction of the buildings provides a larger insight into the government's orientation towards this province and its people. We learnt through the documentary that many people in the area are poor farmers whose infrastructures and lives are not treated equally as those who live in larger metropolises and engage in manufacturing work. This is a class and labor issue, these disrespected citizens received poorly produced buildings which helped the builders cut costs while also cutting quality. In the documentary you can see chunks of concrete with mangled steel rods protruding from them as if the buildings had almost no reinforcements.

Weiwei's plan was to collect as many steel rods as he could and employ a team who would hand straighten the rods. In *Straight Weiwei* uses language and materiality to produce multiple layers of criticism. According to Barad:

In summary, the primary ontological units are not 'things' but phenomena - dynamic topological reconfigurings/ entanglements/ relationalities/ (re)articulations of the world. And the primary semantic units are not 'words' but material-discursive practices through which (on tic and semantic) boundaries are constituted. This dynamism is agency. Agency is not an attribute but the ongoing reconfigurings of the world. The universe is agential intra-activity in its becoming (141).

The steel rods were straightened out and aligned in a way to replicate the design of a fault line which rematerializes the Longmenshan Fault that the Sichuan province sets on. The reconfiguring of the rods transforms them from their mangled state into a straight position to represent this topological phenomenon. But this straightening out is not meant to erase the material damages of the earthquake itself, instead, they operate as a material-discursive signifier which requires us to put in context the discourse around the earthquake and its aftermath. The Chinese government never gave the Sichuan people a straight answer to the cause of these buildings collapsing. They never gave the people a straight answer as to how many people died. They never gave a straight answer as to how many children were killed or abandoned in the rubble. The buildings were never built with a straight code of ethics, crooked building strategies cut corners and helped produce this tragedy.

The rods as an agent represent the material and political distortion that produced this tragedy. Being reconfigured back to their original configuration requires spectators to understand the story and the materiality of their configuration. By no means can a steel rod from a wreckage be completely straight, it is this configuration that calls viewers in to witness the process by which these rods have entered this state of becoming and the types of configurations the world has undergone in order for them to be in this state. These rods are the material embodiment government corruption, dead children, natural disaster, class discrimination, and the Chinese government's desire to make their citizens accustomed to the lack of transparency, these straightened rods tell the story "straight" as opposed to the initial story from positions of power which were mangled messes, like the rods' initial configurations.

Furthermore, when applying my heuristic and we take into consideration the object's composition we see a narrative, the rods' configurations and reconfigurations teach us about the

tragedy of the earthquakes and the loss experienced by the Chinese citizens. The composition of the rods also puts into question our underlying assumptions about their materiality--their straightness, rigidity, reliability, security—and requires us to reconcile with their malleability, plasticity, and potential for transformation. When thinking about what this object has made possible, we learn that it gave schooling to a region of China that had been underserved in terms of possibility and opportunity due to its infrastructure. However, these rods also made possible the destruction of the security which it materially purported through shoddy construction and the misuse of the public's trust. When we align the discourse around this material with its materiality, we learn that the narratives around its security were false ones, the buildings were never built to last, and the information surrounding the tragedy of the earthquake will never be as straight as the reconfiguration of the material. Lastly, when we think about the events that have transformed this object into a cultural and material phenomenon, we learn more about the mistreatment of the Sichuan people, the lack of transparency from the Chinese government, and most importantly, the rods are the untold story of the multiple lives lost in this earthquake, lives whose story the people of the Sichuan province will never get straight.

Ultimately

Material rhetorical studies has come a long way. It is a leap of faith for our field, one which concerns itself with speech, writing, persuasion, and communication, to look at memorials as rhetorical objects. While we owe many thanks to the scholars who began this work, it's important to realize how far we've come and how much further we can go with our analyses. Rhetorical analysis of public memorials opened the doors to looking at material objects, new materialist rhetorical approaches are providing us with the language we need to begin thinking about the deeply interconnected lives we live. My hope is to have made a contribution to these

conversations, specifically the parts of the conversation that did not spend enough time listening to the rhetoricity of non-discursive things. My hope is that this heuristic build helps us build new knowledge in the material rhetorical conversation. A heuristic that combines an understanding of the incorporeal production of material things, the material-discursive nature of meaning-making practices, and the vibrant agency of objects across time and space will help us gain a better understanding of how matter makes meaning.

CHAPTER 4.
UNDERSTANDING WHAT CONCRETE MEANS
IN *TRANSFORMATION*

The *Allure of Matter: Material Art from China* is an exhibition which presents artworks by Chinese artists whose art represents the importance of working with different materials. The art collected in this exhibition is a representation of how art can be produced by using a multitude of media. Its objectives are to show how some artists in China are making strategic and conscientious choices about the materials they use in their artworks. This exhibition highlights artworks where the materials that are involved are just as important as the art work on a whole. In some situations the materials themselves are the point of the artwork, producing a situation where spectators have to contend with their understanding of the materials involved alongside the intention of the artist in conjunction with its assemblage. Incorporating this exhibition into this project is inspired by the rhetorical work that is done by the different materials that these artists choose. This exhibition presents artworks whose material complexity can provide great insight into how matter makes meaning, inspiring new thoughts and ideas for new materialist thinkers including rhetoricians.

Paralogic Material Rhetoric

It is important to emphasize that alongside the new materialist theories which frame the analysis that is going to be applied in order to understand how material things make meaning, there must also be an interpretative framework to understand what material things mean. I look towards Thomas Kent's *Paralogic Rhetoric: A Theory of Communicative Interaction* in order to establish this interpretative framework. Kent's use of the term *paralogy* is meant to emphasize

the importance of communication and interpretations unique qualities of being “beyond logic” (3). Kent’s overall objective in this text is to point out that communication and interpretation are non-codifiable and non-systematic phenomena which cannot be reduced to a simple heuristic. Instead, paralogy implies that “When we communicate, we make guesses about the meaning of others’ utterances, and we, in turn, guess about the interpretations that others will give our utterance” (5). Within a new materialist framework, a material object produces the equivalent of an utterance through its performativity and relation with other materials and subjects. Therefore, to produce a rhetorical framework by which we can understand what materials mean through their relations, we need to approach this understanding as a method of guesswork. In order to do so, I look towards Kent’s inspiration behind what informs the information by which we make our guesses.

Kent draws from Heidegger in his formulation of the elements that make up the content which supports our guesswork. By looking at concepts such as “thrownness” and “forestructure” (12) these concepts are established in order to address the larger existential aspects by which we make our assumptions about the world. Kent claims that “Thrownness enables us to know things in the world while simultaneously enabling us to know ourselves” (12). This concept in conjunction with forestructure, described as “...the assemblage of interpretive equipment that each of us brings to a particular communicative situation” (13). We gain an understanding of how paralogic hermeneutics operates as a communicative and interpretive phenomenon. Our guesses happen when we apply our unique experiences of the world and apply it to our understanding of the unique experiences others may have of the world. Experiences which take into consideration our human-human, human-object, and object-object relations.

Paralogic material rhetoric lends itself to this interpretation as we can work towards

making better guesses about what we should inquire. Paralogic rhetoric in the context of material-discursivity places rhetors in a position of having to make guesses about the material performative function of things and to put that performance in the context of the language that surrounds that object with special attention to: what is being valued and what is being done. With these elements in mind, I believe rhetoricians can assist in the production of material-discursive analyses of material objects in order to gain a greater understanding of our world.

Kent sums up the concept of paralogic rhetoric as “communicative interaction as a thoroughly social, public and historical—albeit uncodifiable—means through which we get things done in the world” (16). To propose a paralogic material rhetoric then, is to propose that communicative interaction at the material level requires us to make guesses about the context, relations, and agential performativity that objects exhibit in relation to other objects and subjects. Due to the uncodifiable nature of communication and interpretation, the remainder of this chapter seeks to make guesses about materiality in order to make assumptions about their meaning-making. That being said, this analysis is not the end all be all of a paralogic material rhetorical analysis influenced by new materialist thought aiming at uncovering the material-discursive nature of our world. If anything, it is the beginning, the stepping stones by which my own heuristics can be transformed by the unique experiences of other rhetoricians. Hopefully future ideas will help us increase our cultural material sensitivities, expand our understanding of the material world, while also expanding our understanding of how to communicate materially.

Transformation: An Exemplary Piece with Multiple Lessons

I want to hone in on a specific artist and artwork in order to explore the heuristic developed in chapter 3 to demonstrate the knowledge that contemporary Chinese materialist art can teach to both rhetoricians and new materialist thinkers. The purpose of this chapter is to

apply the previously developed heuristic, analyze the new knowledge the artwork provides us, and to develop implications these artworks have for expanding rhetorical studies and new materialist theory. Yin Xiuzhen and her piece entitled *Transformation*, 1997 will be the primary focus of this analysis:

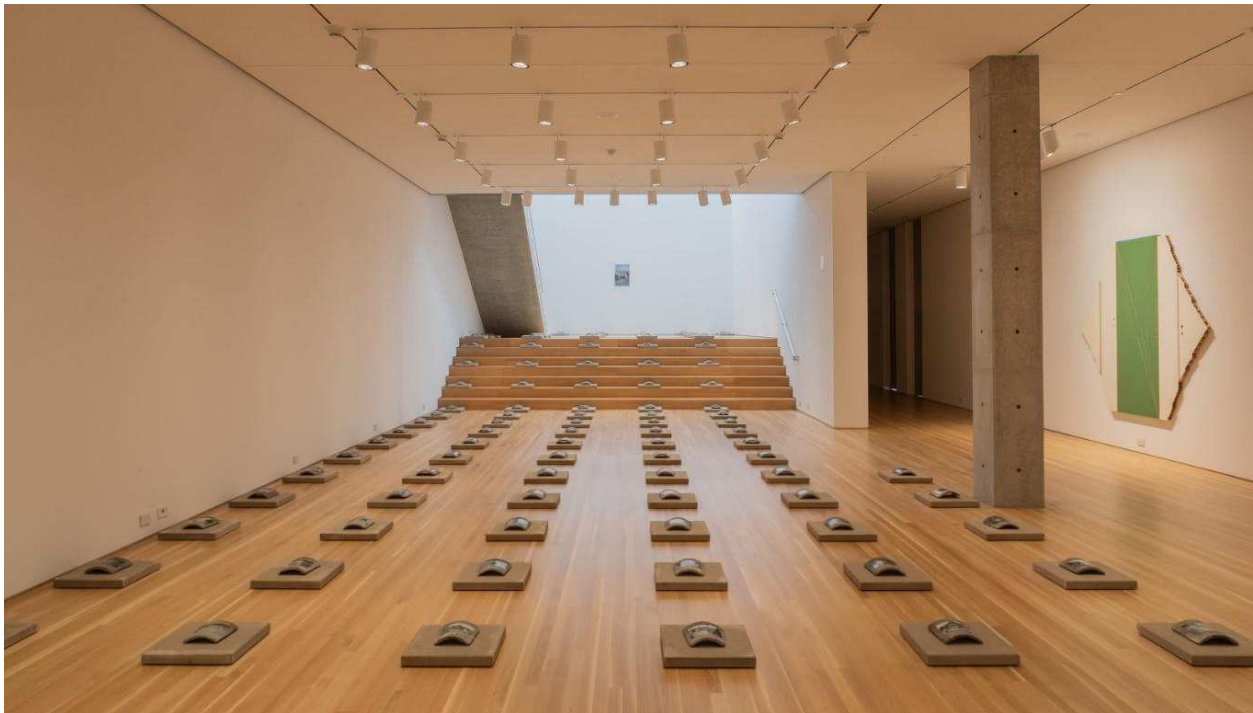


Figure 3. Transformation (1997), Yin Xiuzhen

Her installation includes 128 concrete tiles with black and white photographs placed on each one. The concrete tiles are salvaged from destroyed homes in the Beijing area. The photographs that the artist places on top of each tile is meant to capture the life in these destroyed areas prior to their destruction and the process of the destruction. Her installation provides spectators a disjointed material screenshot of a world that used to exist, placing her spectators in the midst of a transformation of a space and people's lives.

Heuristic: A Recap

As described in the previous chapter the objective of this analysis is to locate a means by which we can understand the rhetorical affordances of art without textualizing its materiality.

The heuristic developed in chapter 3 consists of four analytic moves:

1. What is the object's composition?
2. What has this object made possible?
3. What is being, and has been, said about this object?
4. What are the events involved in the production of this object as a material and cultural phenomenon?

In the context of an artwork, the object, and its composition, will be considered the “art object” as a whole and its constituent parts. Understanding what the object has made possible requires an investigation into the art object itself and its effect on spectators while also understanding what the objects the art is composed of has made possible. A focus on language provides this analysis with the ability to understand the material-discursivity of the objects in their initial entanglements prior to their art assemblage. The events involved afford the opportunity to understand the material performativity of the objects producing greater insight into the worlds that these objects were a part of. My objective is to take these elements into consideration and provide us insight into how objects make meaning while highlighting their materiality and avoiding a reduction of their materiality to mere signification.

Composition

Xiuzhen's installation is produced by assembling concrete tiles in conjunction with black and white photographs. We learn from an interview with the artist that these tiles are collected from demolition sites in Beijing “But the photos are not only about the demolition sites, [they're]

also about the life of people in Beijing” (interview). Xiuzhen decided to take these photographs as a means of documenting life before and during the demolition of these buildings. Placing the photographs on the tiles is a decision she made that was influenced by her own role in the composition of her art piece. Xiuzhen reflects on the fact that the original composition of these tiles were for the roofing of these courtyard houses. They were designed in order to be connected, providing the usual stability and protection that roof tiles should provide. However, now that these buildings have been destroyed Xiuzhen claims that “When it’s taken down, its support is gone, so it’s me, I’m the one giving it a new support” (interview). This makes her as quintessential to the composition of the art object as the objects themselves in their original composition, i.e providing support for those who lived in the spaces where the tiles originated.

Her decisions engage in the intra-active reconfiguring of the destroyed buildings. in regard to compositions in general, using Barad’s new materialist language, she would classify this composition as an apparatus, which “Are specific material reconfigurings of the world that do not merely emerge in time but iteratively reconfigure spacetime-matter as part of the ongoing dynamism of becoming” (142). This dynamism is something that Xiuzhen considers when discussing her own intra-actions with the artwork:

And because I’ve changed its location, its meaning also changes. So this is also a material shift. I had also tried putting this tile on cement powder, trying to make a Pingan Avenue, a street—in fact, this was all done during the period when Transformation was made, placing the black-and-white photos on the tile, then putting them on the street, the street of cement powder (interview).

Xiuzhen has a clear understanding of how her own agency and the agency of the tiles themselves produce different material shifts in meaning. Placing them in different areas in China

produces a different composition compared to placing them in the Los Angeles County Museum of Arts (LACMA). As Xiuzhen operates as a form of support for the tiles in their new location she gives them a chance to enter into being in new ways for different spectators.

Xiuzhen discusses her appreciation for concrete as a material due to its popular interpretation as an object. For the most part whenever we see concrete we imagine just that, a "concrete" material. However, its malleability isn't usually juxtaposed with its stability. For the most part, concrete as a material is a stable object, one which is cemented into existence and is meant to provide a sturdy foundation for the composition that it is a part of. However, using it as a material in the context of the art object, lends us insight into its plasticity, providing spectators with the realization that concrete as a material is flexible and easy to transform. This juxtaposition of concrete/malleability lends itself to the meaning of the art object. What people had assumed was a sturdy foundational composition, i.e their home. was transformed via the agency of the government which decided that this concrete needed to be removed from this space. This lends itself to the hermeneutic nature of concrete as an object, it's dynamism is not evident in our forestructures, our understanding of the world, Xiuzhen brings to our attention that the stability of an object's composition has a level of ephemerality which we are not accustomed to, making the destruction of these homes even more important when laid side-by-side with our anticipations of the object's composition.

Possibilities

In regard to the object's possibility it is important to distinguish the art object and the objects in the art in order to see the ways in which these possibilities intra-act in order to produce new meanings. To begin, it's important to understand the function of the tiles in their original assemblage prior to being constructed into an art object. In his book *A Century of Change*:

Beijing's Urban Structure in the 20th Century Yi Wang highlights and documents the development and importance of courtyard houses in Beijing alongside their destruction. Wang describes courtyard houses as “A typical form of the traditional residences in Beijing. Its hierarchical structure reflects Chinese cultural traditions, most notably the ideas about social grades and order, and one’s personal importance with regard to one’s family status” (72). The social hierarchical structures in Chinese culture formatted their architectural design logic. Houses were built in different ways for different types of families; small, large, rich and poor, and in different ways for politicians or people of public status: “Houses of gentry and officials are usually strung together by corridors or verandas, which shelter the houses from sunshine and rain in summer and from wind and snow in winter, and thus make the residents comfortable in all seasons” (72). These homes were designed as a means of providing private worlds for their residences and producing a space where multiple generations of a single family would reside. Wang claims that homes with multiple courtyards were built for the wealthy as opposed to the homes for the poor which consisted of a single courtyard; the homes with large courtyards “Were usually inhabited by big traditional extended families of several generations. By contrast, for poor people, several families might live together in one courtyard” (73). The fact that a single type of home was architecturally adapted for multiple purposes, across classes, speaks volumes about the importance of these homes to Chinese cultural heritage.

Wang describes these courtyard homes as a catalyst for possibilities in Chinese culture. The space of the courtyard and the construction of these homes were designed to provide their residence with the possibility of owning their own little world as “long as the gate is tightly shut” (74). Wang notes the importance of privacy in traditional Chinese culture and the material importance of gates which opened the walls of these courtyard houses which are important

aspects which lend to the performativity of these spaces. These gates specifically not only served an important architectural function to promote the establishment of these little worlds, they were also highly decorated. Wang mentions that the gates to courtyard houses were named “pendant gate” or “screen gate” (74) to reflect on their decorative nature, they would be designed in ways to reflect the identity of those inhabiting the home. In regard to the world building nature of these spaces Wang teaches us that it was normal for these courtyards to be a space of cultural ceremony, where practices that matter to Chinese people were afforded a possibility because of the architecture. “Whether the principal house had three, five or seven bays, the middle one was always the parlour where people received guests, offered sacrifices to their ancestors, held family feasts or stayed up all night on New Year’s Eve” (72). It is important to note that the agency of these spaces allowed the fruition of Chinese culture providing residents with the opportunity to make meaning with the ones they care about in a space whose materiality afforded their cultural potentialities. This speaks volumes to the importance of these homes as being more than just a simple residence, they were spaces for ontological enactment, spaces which intra-acted with inhabitants in order to make the inhabitants' world possible.

This context is necessary in order to understand the performative role these tiles have in Xiuzhen’s artwork. She was born and raised in Beijing in one of these courtyard houses. As an artist her artwork is a reflection of her own courtyard home and the possibilities that happened within its walls but that reflection extends outwards to the larger culture. When she claims that she is the support for these tiles to operate as a material mediator for the meaning-making practices of their initial configuration it is important to note that she is the support for the stories of these spaces and their lost possibilities in the world. To reconfigure these tiles is to enact the lost potentiality of a destroyed culture. Barad claims that:

Phenomena are constitutive of reality. Reality is composed not of things in-themselves or things-behind-phenomena but of things-in-phenomena." The world is a dynamic process of intra-activity and materialization in the enactment of determinate causal structures with determinate boundaries, properties, meanings, and patterns of marks on bodies (140).

The idea of enactments producing structures that represent the patterns of marks on bodies signifies the role of the artist in the intra-active meaning-making production of the objects in the artwork. Xiuzhen's artwork makes it possible to witness the marks of home demolition on the bodies of those affected by the destruction of these homes. The tiles themselves when composed by Xiuzhen in her *Transformation* composition are the trace of a cultural-historical signifier. In conjunction with her inclusion of photography we are given clear images of the types of meaning that have been removed and forgotten in the removal of courtyard houses. This historical and cultural context is emphasized by the concrete's composition, cementing human practices as a fixable phenomenon, housed and supported by our materiality. Art as material enactment provides the space for objects to perform their original possibilities in new configurations. In this particular configuration we're confronted with the devastating changes that came to these cultural sites, denouncing our understanding of concrete as a material.

Sayables

In order to understand the material-discursive qualities of an object or phenomenon it's important to look at the discourse that surrounds an object and to incorporate its discursive construction alongside its material construction so that they operate with one another resulting in a greater understanding of an object's meaning-making capacities. While Grosz explicates that language is an incorporeal phenomenon with corporeal consequences, Kent locates the

relationship between corporeality and incorporeality in the moments of interpretation. Kent claims that paralogy:

Indicate[s] only that the activity of communication interaction cannot be predicted in advance by any framework theory, and we emphasize that all meaningful utterance, in its own particular way, represents a living event that embodies hermeneutic guessing—which is, of course, the practice we employ in our attempts to fathom meaning (16).

For Kent paralogic rhetoric is a system of communication that believes that meaning is made in the process of hermeneutic guessing. Essentially, when communication is in process the subjects involved in that communication make guesses about how their audience will interpret what they have to say and formulate their utterances accordingly. Their audience in turn uses the same method of guesswork to try and understand what the rhetor is attempting to communicate. Meaning is produced through these interpretative guesses both at the level of delivery and at the level of receiving a message. The value Kent places on communicative interactions being a “living event” reflects on the corporeality of language. When meaning is made by using language to materialize an embodied event, language becomes a corporeal phenomenon materializing utterances in a way that affects the world.

In order to understand the material-discursivity of this art piece and other objects I propose using Barad’s conceptualization of discourse: “Discourse is not what is said; it is that which constrains and enables what can be said. Discursive practices define what counts as meaningful statements” (146). For Barad, discourse goes beyond language and utterances. In her conceptualization of the term, “discourse” becomes the larger systemic values that inform utterances and practices. This emphasis on practices is meant to provide the concept more

flexibility in terms of iterative intra-active capacities. Discourse is not a thing that is out there in the world which people and things are subject to—it is in an active process of becoming that occurs intra-actively alongside matter and meaning’s materialization. A material paralogic rhetorical understanding of Barad’s new materialist discourse would propose that we point our hermeneutic guesswork towards the performative capacities of an utterance in its material context. This means we have to think about how our meaning making practices reflect the rhetor’s interpretation of the material world that their discourse is aimed towards and how this interpretation affects the material-discursive meaning of a phenomenon.

In regard to this analysis there are multiple utterances that can be taken into consideration which we can aim our guesswork towards in order to understand the material-discursivity of the concrete tiles that make up Xiuzhen’s composition. However, I will focus on one utterance specifically, in order to demonstrate how this paralogic material rhetorical analysis provides us with an interpretative framework for understanding matter’s performativity. This analysis begins by looking at the language involved in the event of destroying these homes. That language is then placed side-by-side with the material impacts of that event which intra-acts with the discourse.

The practice that produced the conditions which allowed Xiuzhen the opportunity to collect these tiles was enacted by the Beijing government. People living in courtyard houses began adding more and more buildings to their spaces. Presumably, in an attempt for working class citizens to expand their smaller homes into bigger courtyard homes like those owned by upper class citizens. These were not usually professionally done which ultimately produced a space that did not meet the original courtyard home aesthetic. This aesthetic argument became the driving force by which the government could justify the removal of these spaces, and yet, this

argument was leveraged as a form of improvement. In 1986 the Beijing government decided to label these homes as “Old and Dilapidated Houses (ODH)” (Wang 72). Moreover, leading to these labels during the Cultural Revolution 80,000 homeowners in Beijing had their property rights stripped away from them (Wang 72). Wang argues that stripping away property rights from homeowners could have led to homes becoming “old and dilapidated” removing the incentive to renovate and maintain their buildings, regardless, in 1990 the “Old and Dilapidated Houses Redevelopment Project (ODHRP)” was instituted. Meaning, that these homeowners no longer had rights to their property and space, and the space’s subjectivity was discursively produced by those in power.

The utterance “ODHRP” places the materiality of these courtyard homes into a situation where their material performance is inadequate in terms of housing people and their aesthetic. This comment becomes part of the forestructure communicated by those in power. These guesses are informed without interacting with the material importance these spaces have for the people who inhabit them and the practices that these homes afford. Essentially, the materiality of these homes and their intra-active potentiality were ignored for the sake of a different agenda. The utterance “Redevelopment Project” did not materialize what it implies. These homes were not redeveloped, they were demolished. We can make guesses about the values of the Beijing government when titling this urban plan, however, having distance from the event we can see their intentions embodied in their material practice: courtyard houses were destroyed for high rises and more space for business in order to produce economic and capital growth. Another incentive for the removal of these homes was so that labor forces would transition to more urban spaces where they can participate in the economy that was being produced at the cost of these homes. The rhetoricity of this performance is embodied in the paradox of what was said and

what was done, this redevelopment shows us the true material values exhibited by those in power.

Events

Understanding the events involved in the production of the objects involved in the art alongside the art object itself provides us with a better understanding of how things materialized—both materially and discursively. Xiuzhen explains the process of making *Transformation* in her interview for the *Allure of Matter* exhibit:

Transformation was completed around 1998 using tile and black-and-white photos. At that time, Beijing was undergoing a massive reconstruction, and I was going to work from Pingan Avenue. So every day I would pass through these ruins. Maybe when I'd leave for work a house would be there and by the time I came back, it would be gone. I'd pass through the cement dust and smoke, so at that time I had very deep impressions of Beijing. I collected some tiles from these demolition sites. But the photos are not only about the demolition sites, [they're] also about the life of people in Beijing.

Xiuzhen witnessed the material reconfiguring of a space which she called home. This event was a process that she had to witness and even lost her own home in the process. The renovation that was promised did not result in a sustained movement to preserve the history of these homes which held stories of the development of Beijing. Collecting these tiles was only made possible by their demolition which the Beijing government carried out in order to produce a city that was more desirable for economic prospects. The destruction of these homes—captured in Xiuzhen's photographs—resulted in the destruction of material practices that the people of Beijing were accustomed to. The performance of destruction resulted in destroying people's

history, their heritage, and their culture. This conceptualization of renovation did not take into consideration the people whose homes were destroyed.

The event of producing this art object is the act of gathering the remnants of these “renovations” and reconfiguring them across different times and spaces. Xiuzhen refers to herself as being the support for these tiles, support which they no longer engage in as material practice—they will never be part of the roofs of the homes that the Beijing people once dwelled in. In this reconfiguration I was transported back in time to an event that I never witnessed. The tiles themselves in this art piece made it possible for me to witness the performance the Beijing government enacted in the process of destroying these homes. The black and white photographs assist in this material enactment allowing spectators a window into the world that is long lost. The tiles, in the configuration of the art object perform a form of remembrance, reconfiguration, and rhetoricize a moment in time which many should know about and it becomes more clear when we are able to witness a primary material actor of that event. Ultimately, what I hope my readers will take away from this example, is that materials can re-perform an event. We don’t necessarily need to witness the destruction of these homes, but the concrete shows us what happened. We can see the wear and tear, their new location, their new composition, we can see that they are no longer part of the composition of which they were intended, instead, they are a mediator, rhetoricizing the historicity of an event.

Material-Discursivity

After Analyzing this object’s composition, possibilities, sayables, and events we can begin to formulate the material-discursive effects of the art object itself and to extrapolate meaning from material things without textualizing them in a way that reduces their performative function. The composition of the art object provides us insight into its dynamism. The concrete

tiles themselves alongside the black photographs were removed from their initial site but in this new context where the artist has the ability to retell a story of their performance. Providing support for these objects in a way that intra-actively produces the opportunity for interpretation from spectators, while spreading awareness of an event and allowing them to continue to perform their historical value, a value which is embodied by both the government which destroyed the homes, and the people who valued these homes. Material-discursivity teaches us about the forestructures that build worlds, the unique experiences and interpretations of the multiple worlds and their condition, rhetoricized by the intra-action of materiality and discourse, producing new meaning for spectators.

The possibilities of these tiles are located in the cultural material practices of the Beijing people who lived in the courtyard houses. We learn that the homes themselves are an important piece of historical architecture for the city of Beijing's identity. We also learn that the Beijing people relied on these courtyard houses as a means of cultural performativity—giving them places to celebrate holidays, keep a close knit family, and to perform their religious practices. These tiles in a new context in the composition of the art object continue to mediate those lost performances through the black and white photographs, giving spectators an understanding of the possibilities of the tiles in their original composition and the worlds that they performed.

When we look at the rhetorical construction the Beijing government gave to these homes, specifically the term “ODH” we can make guesses about the neglect they embodied towards the performance of these homes for Chinese citizens. To discursively produce these homes as something of a burden to the city produces a strange disconnect between the local government and the people who live in the city. This disregard to the Beijing people's values, beliefs, and material practice is performed through the art object's composition and the stories it tells in

regard to the possibilities that it once held. Arranging these tiles and photographs in the art object allows this discursive and material clash between the Beijing government and the Beijing people's practices to come to light. We can see in the art object that the government's capitalistic priorities did not include the Beijing people living in the courtyard homes in its envisioned reconfiguration of a new Beijing.

Lastly, the event of the demolition is embodied in the performance of the art object—the tiles wouldn't be in this composition if they were never destroyed. The tiles themselves in their destroyed reconfigured form produces a sense of awareness of the loss that the Beijing people experienced, and in the context of the discursive practices of the Beijing government provides us with a greater understanding of the corporeal effect of language. An “old and dilapidated home” has no place in this world of progress and growth, regardless of who inhabits them, regardless of its importance to those people, and regardless of the history that is going to be lost. The discourse from the Beijing government, produced material destruction, the tiles in the art object composition remind/teach spectators of the material-discursive consequences that occurred in Beijing.

A material-discursive understanding of Xiuzhen's *Transformation* gives us insight into how the tiles operate within a new materialist framework. We learn about the performativity of the object's in the context of being an art object, but we also learn about what they meant and how they performed. Learning about how they performed provides this method with a greater insight into the discursive values that have produced the tiles in the first place. *Transformation* in my interpretation is a piece, which at the material-discursive level, performs/signifies, a history and way of life that is lost to many people but also the absolute disregard and negligence that came from the Beijing government. When I first saw this art piece I was mostly in awe of the

number of tiles on the ground and the embodied response I had to its context. Being able to put in conversation the materiality of these tiles alongside of the discourse that has reconfigured them provided me greater insight into the importance of understanding how a simple tile can signify a people's history, practices, pain, culture, and loss. *Transformation* is for me a reminder that a material-discursive understanding of the objects and utterances in our world is necessary in order to understand their performativity.

CHAPTER 5.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Paralogy leaves thinkers in a paradoxical situation. It is difficult to keep in mind the freeing nature of hermeneutic interpretation in a situation where claims must be made about a specific phenomenon in a research context. However, this lack of systemization provides scholars with the opportunity to explore and inquire in new ways about the material-discursive performativity of the things in our world. Paralogic material rhetoric provides us with the space to work together as thinkers to analyze and build new ways of thinking about how things make meaning and what they mean. Living in complex worlds where a multitude of relations constitutes and mediates our materiality means we need ever more expansive means and perspectives to understand what our world means. This is both a blessing and a curse, being able to reflect on multiple relations embedded within an object's materiality—or even our own materiality—affords us the opportunity to work towards understanding that which constitutes our reality. However, this seems to open an exceptionally large gap in terms of what-can-be-known. While we march through this messiness of multiplicitous materiality I would like to reflect on the implications of my own research and point to future moments of inquiry in new materialist theory, rhetoric and writing studies.

New Materialist Future

With Grosz's explanation of Stoic Materialism and her development of the four incorporeals: space, time, void, *lekta* (sayables) we gain a great insight into the process of materialization. We become more prepared to expand our inquiries into the immaterial forces that generate material production and material consequences in our lives. Emphasizing the inter-

relations between them provides space for philosophical and theoretical work where researchers can assess the relationship between the materializing forces between incorporealities, i.e how does void produce space in the context of Yin Xiuzhen's art piece? What if a void analysis was done on art in order to understand how art transforms our understanding of spaces? This becomes an important method of understanding materiality when we think about the concept of materializing things that no longer are in existence. While spaces transform we are left with the traces of its own void. In the context of Xiuzhen's *Transformation* she restores a void left in the hearts of the people whose home and homespace is transformed against their own will.

Grosz's emphasis on *lekta* highlights the importance of not privileging matter or language in the context of understanding our world. Grosz and Barad both show us that language and human-made symbol systems are important for understanding the materiality of our world, so long as we do not reduce an object's materiality to our symbol system. It's possible that there could be an entirely new sub discipline in the field of critical theory & linguistics/rhetoric that assesses the world building characteristics of language as *lekta*. Grosz shows us that language itself is the means by which we translate our embodied experiences of the world. It is through language that we materialize what we are experiencing. It is possible to make the claim that all symbolic representations of human thought and emotion can be considered a *lekton*, that which materializes via a communicative medium, the embodied experiences we have in our world for it to be shared with others.

However, in the context of reflecting on Grosz's argument *lekta* as "sayables" in conjunction with Barad's concept of material-discursivity puts new materialist thinkers in a position where language continues to matter as a means of materializing matter. I believe there are generative inquiries that can be taken up by language studies and new materialism when it

comes to understanding these concepts in conjunction with one another. Observing how language operates as a materializing force across different disciplines and objects of study will expand the transversal potentialities of new materialisms. For example, in regard to the "Old and Dilapidated Homes" discussed in Wang's book, this utterance materializes a very specific orientation towards a set of material objects which have produced a great sense of value to specific Chinese citizens. Analyzing the values that the government exhibits through the materializing force of their own language in contradistinction with the lived reality of the Chinese citizens teaches us a great deal about how "sayables" can transform the value of the material world.

We can transform our perception of other people's lived experiences of their material world by transforming the discursive reality of an object. The political context of this example is a severe one. It becomes much easier to destroy a family's home when you can abolish its cultural value, reducing its materiality from a "home" to a dilapidated nuisance which needs to be removed from a city's overall architectural structure. Language, in this sense, can structure how we think of the material world. This emphasis on language in the material-discursive production of an object lends itself to logomaterial analysis: a method of analysis which highlights the effects that language and representation makes on the ideological relationships we have with our material world.

Rhetorical Possibilities

Rhetorical studies have an important role in the production of knowledge across different objects of study the discipline, historically, may not necessarily be accustomed to looking at. In the context of this project, I looked at two objects, concrete, and an art object. My project's objective is to add to the growing sources of inquiry that rhetorical scholars aim their attention

at, while simultaneously expanding on the interdisciplinary potentialities of rhetoric. Hopefully, challenging ourselves to think more critically about the multitude of meaning-making possibilities in our world both symbolically and materially.

Expanding our interpretive processes from systemic symbolic analyses to a paralogic hermeneutic inspired analysis allows us to listen to material things in new ways. Paralogic material rhetoric allows for rhetors to pay keen attention to the hermeneutic performative movement of an object and its relations. New materialism has shown us how objects make meaning rhetoric can help us understand what that meaning is. New materialism afforded the possibility of entangling the concrete tiles in relation with the Beijing Government, rhetoric afforded me the possibility of connecting the relationship between the discourse of the Beijing Government and the cultural historical importance of courtyard homes in relation to chinese practices in order to understand what these concrete tiles mean across contexts.

Neither this analysis nor this project would have been possible if it weren't for the *Allure of Matter* exhibit or Yin Xiuzhen's installation *Transformation*. Xiuzhen's art is the only art object I focused on in this project when in reality there is a wealth of knowledge and inspiration coming from this exhibit from artists such as Cai Guo-Qiang and his use of gunpowder as a medium for producing "paintings," Xu Bing and his use of tobacco as a medium, or gu wenda and his house made of human hair entitled *united nations: an american code* (1995-2019) where wenda claims that "One can't combine every living person into a single work, but one can use DNA as a representation. So in reality, if you want to realize a united nation, it's not quite possible. But this dream can be achieved through art by bringing parts of humanity together" (Interview). Wenda and I share similar desires here, while his work embraces the entangled aspects of our humanity. My hope is that rhetoric can entangle itself with knowledge building

aspects of our humanity in order to generate an incomprehensible wealth of knowledge about human-nonhuman meaning-making processes.

The new materialist emphasis on material-discursivity argued for by Barad feels like an invitation for rhetorical scholars who most likely work closest with discourse in the humanities. I've attempted in this project to combine the material performativity of the concrete tiles with the discourse involved with the destruction of the courtyard homes in order to address what these tiles mean in the context of Xiuzhen's art object. However, I feel that my project requires more work to be done in terms of understanding how discourse has been transforming. This requires a greater attention towards understanding the relationship between new forms of discourse and our understanding of materiality. While new materialism has provided us with greater insight into materiality as agential performance and relationality. Discourse, I believe, needs to be transformed in a way that provides us with explicit rhetorical-material relations with symbol-using methods of meaning-making to gain a greater understanding of the material-discursive mechanics of our world. This may also afford future research in the materialization of discourse and how this may relate to theories of new materialism.

Similarly, to the potential work that can be done with the concept of sayables in new materialist research. This new form of discursive research could pay special attention to the means by which discourse is produced in relation to the material world. Issues of invention, circulation, and ethics come to mind in this context. While a sayable, like "Old and Dilapidated Homes" produces a specific orientation around these material objects, I'm claiming that rhetoricians can assist in this knowledge production by assessing how these sayables enter into our public and cultural consciousness. What are the cultural systems and institutions that invent these specific sayables? How do sayables that construct our material-discursive worlds circulate

through publics (i.e practices, politics, different media forms, etc.)? Lastly, what are the ethics that inform these sayables? What are the guiding principles that inform rhetorical materialization? Who benefits from them, and who is hurt in the process?

Research on historical material-discursivity could provide rhetoricians with the ability of re-thinking our own canonical works and their contexts, while simultaneously producing new forms of historical work. What could we learn about Ancient Greek judicial rhetoric when we put into context the materiality of the spaces of which certain rhetorical practices were performed? How does a greater insight into the material construction of rhetorical forms inform our understanding of their discursive production? What could inquiring about the materiality of an epideictic topos tell us about the contextual elements which produce specific performativity? Looking beyond Greek and Roman traditions, we might see how cultural material practices reflect and refract that culture's values/ways of being that the Western canon would elide.

Rhetcomp and Art: The Allure of Matter

Xiuzhen's argument in *Transformations* offers the possibility of thinking more deeply about the compositional nature of multi-material pieces and art installations. Seeing material things organized and assembled by an artist provides us greater insight into an object's materiality, allowing us to reflect on things outside of their context and reducing the passivity we ascribe to material things. Xiuzhen's piece turns concrete into an actor, one that we must contend with as a rhetorical agent in this new context, transforming our understanding of concrete in other contexts. We can be moved by and inspired to think more critically about a material that is both ubiquitous and thus invisible. Xiuzhen's focus on concrete continues to inspire beyond the material itself--encouraging us to see the material's role in our own materiality.

Future research and scholarly activity in rhetoric and composition can employ multi-material composing strategies in order to theorize installations as scholarly and creative work. Considering that our field excels at making arguments and understanding arguments through textual systems, it would be to our benefit to begin creating differently so that we can expand our critical faculties. I may sound like a traditionalist arguing for a return to material methods of composing in a world where multimodality scholarship places a great deal of its attention on the digital world. However, I feel that multi-material installations like Xiuzhen's can provide us with a specific material sensitivity that we would like, while also adding to our ability to think materially and analyze the material world.

The extensiveness of this potential research can be exhibited by the multiple material entanglements that can be taken into consideration when understanding a material composition. Additionally, different artworks may lend themselves with new forms of inquiry and knowledge that other artworks don't necessarily generate. As I have been learning and researching for the purposes of this project, I have been wondering about what it means for rhetoricians to compose in ways that transform their own relationship with their own compositional materiality. For example, what does it mean to use a symbolic letter system in order to produce things that are not essays? What would it look like to produce an installation using words in a way in which words are not functioning as building blocks for sentences in order to construct arguments in an academic context?

There is one artwork in the *Allure of Matter* exhibit which I wish to share to demonstrate the knowledge building possibilities of looking at multi-material art from a rhetorical perspective. Huang Yong Ping's artwork *Devons-nous encore construire une grande cathédrale?* (*Should We Construct Another Cathedral?*) (1991) uses text as a material in ways to produce an

argument that goes beyond how we as scholars may think of using texts to produce a generative critique.



Figure 4. Should We Construct Another Cathedral? (1991), Huang Yong Ping, Devons-nous encore construire une grande cathédrale?

His installation is composed with a table, stools, black-and-white photograph, and papier-mâché. “The work was inspired by a historic conversation between the artists Joseph Beuys, Enzo Cucchi, Anselm Kiefer, and Jannis Kounellis, depicted in the photograph hanging on the wall above Huang’s work” (Allure of Matter). This conversation was amongst European artists who met in order to collaborate with one another in order to theorize and produce some form of Neo-European symbol to reinstate the value of European culture. The *Allure of Matter* exhibit

cites Beuys where he proclaims, “Now we have to carry out a synthesis with all our powers, and build a new cathedral.” The texts that are seen on the stools and table are documentation of this conversation which Ping ran through a washer machine; the text was then added to the exhibit as a pile of pulp.

Performatively, this textual pulp diminishes the power and grandeur of a discourse that was attempting to reproduce European identity. Ping comments about this material performance in powerful ways: “Washing books is not about making culture cleaner; rather, it makes its dirtiness more evident to the eye” (Allure of Matter). Ping’s work operates as a form of critique outside the traditional understanding of how critiques happen. That is, instead of producing a new text which presents a series of arguments and criticisms in order to generate a new orientation and perspective about the text, Ping’s material transformation of the text becomes a critique in itself. His emphasis on washing books as a means of showing us how dirty culture is produces a form of criticism which visually transforms our understanding and relationship with texts. Materially, we expect texts to be clean, organized, and structured compositions, which provides readers with a systemic understanding of the arguments and ideas laid out within. However, Ping gives us a dirty, deconstructed, destroyed, piece of text in order to demonstrate the damage the text itself represents. Ultimately, Ping uses texts as *material* in order to compose a new understanding of texts outside our traditional understanding.

The title of the artwork addresses the material-discursive symbolic criticism that is produced by washing the text. This idea of building a new cathedral reflects on the Judeo-Christian heritage leveraged by European countries in order to establish themselves as cultural superpowers. To think about building a new cathedral, symbolically, is to exert the same types of culture-power that we have seen European nations exhibit across world history. The dirtiness that

Ping reflects on is the dirtiness of colonialism and white supremacy that is inherently entangled in the discourse of this text. The stains on the textual pulp, materializes the stains that these eurocentric systems have afflicted on to the world.

This artwork makes me wonder what rhetoricians can learn about in terms of composing textual arguments through installation. How can we expand our own means of analysis via artistic methods? What new theories can be produced about texts and textuality when we transform their materiality and simultaneously their performance? In regard to this artwork I wonder about the analysis that can be conducted via combining material performativity and textual-discursive analysis. What happens when scholars take into consideration the literal textual production with Ping's material performativity? What can be said about the artist's conversation when a textual analysis is conducted? What is the rhetorical dirtiness that Ping points out through this textual washing? Lastly, what further types of installations could be produced and in what ways can we incorporate material performativity to produce new discursive potentialities?

Rhetcomp and Art: Pedagogical Concerns

Material-discursivity as a phenomenon requires us to think more critically about the relationship between the discursive and material world and how they inform one another in the process of meaning-making. However, we need to explore the ways in which this new form of analysis can be framed as a compositional philosophy. Contemporary materialist art provides us insight into what it means to produce artworks in a way where material things perform the cultural and discursive practices that have composed them. I'm still developing and honing a multi-material pedagogy that provides students with the opportunity to explore the material-

discursivity of their own lives in order to produce a material sensitivity towards the worlds they inhabit and develop a critical faculty about their orientation towards their material world.

Multimodality, in composition studies, operates a vast referent. While the term might imply the idea of composing via multiple media, or media outside traditional media. Culturally, composition studies have attributed the term to a specific type of meaning-making. Jody Shipka in her article “Negotiating Rhetorical, Material, Methodological, and Technological Difference: Evaluating Multimodal Designs” claims that she’s “...Concerned that the tendency to equate terms such as ‘multimodal,’ ‘inter-textual,’ ‘multimedia,’ or even ‘composition’ with digitized, screen-mediated texts could limit, provided that it hasn’t already limited, the kinds of texts students produce for our courses” (348). The move towards multimodal composition has opened the possibilities for students to submit work and think in modalities outside of the traditional academic essay. The move towards digitizing our practice has done great work offering students to work with different media. However, as Shipka points out, this move may overshadow the possibility of multimodality affording compositions outside the traditional academic essay genre and digital methods.

While these new digital forms of composing may provide students with the abilities to work in ways that expand their rhetorical literacies via forms that are more appropriate outside of the university. Shipka argues that privileging certain modalities over others may be antithetical to the objectives of a multimodal pedagogy and composition philosophy. She recognizes that it is important for our classrooms to address technologically advanced forms of composing, but that doesn’t mean that multimodality needs to be focused on the digital:

Yet I am also aware of how writing on shirts, purses, and shoes, repurposing games, staging live performances, producing complex multipart rhetorical events,

and asking students to account for the choices they make while designing linear, thesis-driven, print-based texts can also broaden notions of composing and positively impact the way students write, read, and, perhaps most importantly, respond to a much wider variety of communicative technologies (Shipka 349).

Shipka really wants educators to think about the possibilities of learning new forms of communication while embracing the possibilities these new forms will take. Shipka's efforts to push the field towards expanding the potentialities of multimodality. I have been trying to work in Shipka's footsteps while combining my own research on new materialism and contemporary material art in order to imagine a new form of composing. While Shipka lists different forms of meaning-making and how they should be included in multimodal composition (I recognize her list is not an exhaustive one) my goal is to produce a new genre that incorporates the multi-material aspects of contemporary material art and traditional writing.

One such example of multi-material composition is "installation rhetoric," which Jacqueline Rhodes and Jonathan Alexander write about in "*Multimedia[ted] [E]visceration and Installation Rhetoric*." Rhodes and Alexander composed and presented an installation at the 2008 Watson Conference at the University of Louisville. In this multi-material composition, space, digital materiality, and bodies came into contact with one another in order to produce a message in novel ways. The installation consisted of a dark room, projectors which showed images of bodies and texts, a remix of the Voyager Space Probe recording, a whalesong, and most interestingly for the conversation of multi-materiality, a spycam which projected shadows of bodies on to the space. The authors composed an event which intentionally disoriented their participants and their understanding of texts, images, and bodies.

When theorizing about the rhetorical effects of installation and their compositional importance about making arguments the authors claim:

Our sense is that multimedia might return us to embodied experiences of language, discourse, and composition—and thus to a critical sense of how composition studies has eschewed such awareness. The realization that rhetoric is an embodied art seems central to an understanding of how rhetoric functions (Rhodes and Alexander).

While embodiment is a conversation in rhetorical studies, Rhodes and Alexander show us that it is important to begin composing in embodied ways in order to truly reflect on the embodied potential of rhetorical meaning-making. Installation, in this regard materializes in new modalities the values of rhetcomp in ways that the field hasn't been experimenting with. While Rhodes and Alexander's installation work is designed to materialize the ideologies of embodiment, I've been thinking about how installation can materialize the value of materiality in rhetorical studies.

Rhodes and Alexander's installation is an inspiration for expanding multimodal composition in ways that extends beyond the digital world in both theoretical and pedagogical work. My own pedagogical work has been transformed and continues to transform to have students produce essays as installations. In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, I have had my students explore their material worlds while in quarantine (staying at home). I felt that this was a timely assignment and would provide students with the ability to reflect on the pandemic in generative ways, reducing the stress of the situation by gaining a better understanding of the transformations their material worlds were enduring. I asked my students to reflect on the material things in their life and to construct a 1-5 word essay using material things which reflect

on their experiences of the Covid-19 pandemic while accompanying that installation with a reflection where they explore their decision making process and the importance of choosing the materials they chose. This reflection is an important aspect of the project as it requires students to explore the material-discursive movements that arise in their own thinking and their world.

My objective was to produce an assignment that accomplished a few different tasks. First, it provided students with the opportunity to reflect on an ever-changing material world. My objective is to increase student's material cognizance and sensitivity to our world, especially at the rapid rate of which our normal human lives have been transforming during the covid-19 pandemic. Secondly, to explore the material-discursive forces that produce the meaning-making that immerses our lives. Having students write a reflection that discusses the materials they chose, the reasons behind those choices, and the meaning of those materials afford the opportunity for students to think about their relationship with their material world in the context of drastic change. Lastly, because the essay has 1-5 words produced from any material of their choosing so long as that material is important in the context of their essay, students had to think about discourse in new ways. The words they chose to write with the materials they chose requires students to put into conversation the language that comes to mind regarding the pandemic and the relationship these words have with the material practices and transformations they were experiencing.

I've had the honor of witnessing intensely creative compositions. For example, a student wrote the word "Positivity" using cooking supplies and explored her new relationship with time and family. The student reflected on the importance of strengthening her relations with her family through cooking together as a means of keeping positive in tough times. Other students have written essays with more specific material objects that reflect on the pandemic including

hand sanitizer, medical masks, and toilet paper. These materials show up in a multitude of assemblages, where students choose numerous materials to write their essay. While some students choose to focus on a specific material. The trend I am noticing across my student's responses the two semesters I've assigned this project is that students are very keen on understanding their material world if given the time to think it through.

Student's reflections are the space where they get the chance to explain their essay and a chance to show the learning that has happened in their composing process. I was very pleased to see that students are able to pick up on the nuances of material-discursivity. Some students reflected on larger socio-cultural discursive utterances and related those utterances back to their own lives and their own work, while analyzing their daily lives and how larger socio-cultural issues have affected them at home. There was generally a strand of positivity that connected these material compositions, but when that positivity is not there, students reflect deeply on the number of lives lost, the materiality of lonesomeness, the phenomenon of no longer being able to see certain family members, or even the loss of specific practices that mattered to them, i.e sports.

Overall, my students continue to surprise me with their ingenuity. I plan on transforming this assignment after the pandemic is over. While it was a timely subject, I plan on assigning the same project as a moment of reflection, reflecting on the return of a material world that the pandemic changed. Furthermore, this concept can be applied to material-political awareness, having students think about the material in their city/hometown and what they mean, or even having them think about their consumption in order to bring about meta-ecocritical-awareness. I also recognize that this is quite a simple assignment and that there could be more sophistication regarding its execution and the demands I have of my students. I am excited to see what other

educators may contribute if multi-material composition—inspired by contemporary material art installation—becomes an impactful pedagogical concept. It is true that limiting students to writing an actual essay with material things limits, to a certain degree, the creativity of their assemblages. With more thought on the matter, future pedagogical moves can be made that embrace multi-material composition and that we can one day see installation-building as an effective rhetorical practice and assignment.

Ethical Material Engagement

The basis of my theoretical framework rests on Karen Barad's agential realist philosophy. One of the main factors of her own philosophy that inspires its exigence is her desire to transform the ways in which we think about our ethical orientation towards each other and towards the material world. I want include what I believe is the most succinct phrasing of Barad's motivation for a new form of ethics, she claims:

Ethicality is part of the fabric of the world; the call to respond and be responsible is part of what is. There is no spatial-temporal domain that is excluded from the ethicality of what matters. Questions of responsibility and accountability present themselves with every possibility; each moment is alive with different possibilities for the world's becoming and different reconfigurings of what may yet be possible" (182).

Barad's philosophy for the most part has been an attempt to reconceptualize how we think about and engage with the world, while centering the material world as a human concern. This emphasis on paying attention to responsibility and accountability I believe plays out in many ways when materiality is at the center of our being.

In the context of my own project, ethical responsibility is enacted by paying attention to the materiality of different worlds. The lessons we gain from Transformation in Barad's framework, is that it is important to question the material value that some things have for certain types of people. The concrete tiles are a reminder of what happens when we begin to reduce the material world to nothing more but its parts and exclude its relational world building. To frame the homes as Old and Dilapidated the same way the Chinese government did, is to discursively destroy the world of many. I believe Barad would argue that our responsibility to the concrete that supports people's homes is equally as important as our responsibility to the thriving of those that live in these homes.

One major point that I believe becomes more apparent in the context of Barad's ethics is how we treat the non-human organic world. As we begin to think of ourselves and our relations differently in this new context, it is important to note the eco-critical awareness that arises from this new orientation. It becomes easier to think about our environment in new ways when we frame ourselves as being responsible for ecological catastrophes. I believe this becomes easier because of Barad's argument of entanglement, specifically, the idea that our performative effect has consequences on agents which are in/visible in our daily lives. Therefore, we can create cultural practices where we think critically about our own practices and how they affect the relations we know we are a part of, while inspiring us to dig deeper in order to understand the relations that we don't know we are a part of that we are inherently affecting.

In the context of rhetorical studies, a new materialist rhetorical ethic would make a major contribution in terms of agency and voice. Barad's ethical concepts are situated on the idea that we are intra-actively entangled with one another. This means that the agency of the listener/reader in the development of an utterance must be a central force. This ethical

framework also means that we would have to take into consideration the materiality of our utterances, i.e how do the things we say/write make a difference on people's words. Furthermore, how can we take into consideration other people's worlds in order to ensure that their voice is not lost in the production of our utterances?

Ultimately

I'm filled with hope: hope that this project provides greater insight into new creative outlets that rhetoricians can take with their own work; hope that we can begin to understand our material world in ways that does justice to its immense value; hope that new materialist thought can be used in generative ways in the field of rhetoric and composition studies; and hope that new materialist thought can be transformed by the important interpretive work being done in the field of rhetoric and writing. An expansion on installation rhetoric could assist in this endeavor to think more critically about the embodied work of composing and the new theoretical concepts it could produce along the way.

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