

DIY Citizenship: Critical Making and Social Media, edited by Matt Ratto and Megan Boler. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2014. 450 pp.

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If multimodality requires us to shift the primary subjectivity of our students from “writers” to “makers,” then the potential of do-it-yourself (DIY) provides both an extracurricular site and a productive (or even necessary) public and political exigence for the materiality of students’ makings. Whether DIY describes an ethos, process, production, culture, or is simply a standalone noun, it carries with it a number of questions about who controls what gets made, by whom, when, where, and especially how. Put another way, it asks, what rhetorical agency do we have given our available means of production, circulation, and sponsorship, especially in the digital age? These are just some of the essential issues taken up by *DIY Citizenship: Critical Making and Social Media*, an exciting, ambitious interdisciplinary edited collection representing the fields of communication, journalism, education, sociology, women and gender studies, and, of course, media and cultural studies.

Based on revised and expanded papers from an international conference convened by the editors in 2010, the contributions to *DIY Citizenship* range in terms of the makers they consider as much as the things they make, including open source software (chapters one and two), fan sites (chapters three, seven, and twenty-two), pirate radio stations (chapter four), ID cards (chapter five), zines and comics (chapters six, twenty-four, twenty-five), spectacles and hoaxes (chapter eight), knitting and e-textiles (chapters nine and twelve), local television programs and documentary films (chapters eleven, thirteen, fourteen), games (chapter fifteen), growbots (chapter seventeen), vox pop (chapter twenty-three), and, of course, social media. Holding the collection together are the terms of the book’s title—DIY and citizenship—which are consistently and thoroughly defined, explored, contested, and refreshed throughout all the chapters. Helpfully, many authors also introduce new terminology—such as Daniela K. Rosner and Miki Foster’s *inscribed material ecologies* (189), Mandy Rose’s *cocreative media* (207), and Joshua McVeigh-Schultz’s *civic ritual* (313)—which scholars of media and multimodality might find useful in further theorizing hybrid media, participatory processes, or subjectivities crafted via maker identities that have powerful effects on what we make and who we make them with.

One term that is threaded throughout the book is co-editor Matt Ratto’s *critical making*, what he defines here and previously as “materially productive, hands on work intended to uncover and explore conceptual uncertainties, parse the world in ways that language cannot, and disseminate the results of these

explorations through embodied material forms” (227). In short, for Ratto, making is an important process for interrupting and influencing one’s social reality through material play and circulation. Many of the chapters speak to these possibilities.

For instance, in chapter one (and in playful fashion), Steve Mann introduces the terms *maktivists*—authentic, amateur makers, who design and create material things for social change (29)—and *tinquiry*, which combines tinkering with inquiry in order to theorize a pedagogy where student hackers reverse engineer things through a three pronged process Mann calls *praxistemology*. Praxistemology combines praxis, existential reflection, and critical questioning as an “academic counterpart” to activities of making and is representative of a larger thread in the pedagogically oriented chapters of this collection that argue for reflection as an important dimension to making. For composition teachers it may bring to mind innovations such as Jody Shipka’s “Statement of Goals and Choices,” from her book *Toward a Composition Made Whole*, which asks students to document and detail the rhetorical, technological, and methodological choices they make as they produce multimodal compositions. Likewise, in chapter nine, Kate Orton-Johnson works with interview data from online knitters to explore practices of *craftivism*, where knitters take a historically private, domesticated hobby and translate it into a collaborative, embodied, and public act through *guerrilla knitting*—“a range of practices that employ ‘vigorous’ or ‘militant’ knitting activity in mass demonstrations, in urban interventions, and for political causes, using knitting in controversial, unusual, or challenging ways” (143). This occurs, she demonstrates, via digitally mediated maker identities that are created and maintained through online spaces that connect individuals to networks—a necessary meso-space that socializes makers within larger public structures that unite the local/physical with the global/digital. In chapter seventeen Carl DiSalvo also examines hybrid scenes of making, but rather than focus on activist contexts, he explores DIY speculative co-design though “growbots,” robotic technologies meant to support small-scale agriculture. Important to this chapter is the chosen site for making—an annual maker festival in San Jose, CA called 01SJ Biennial—a context that mobilizes participants “from matters of fact to matters of concern” (per the French philosopher and scientist Bruno Latour), meaning that designers forgo precision, as would be the case in an exhibition, in order to experiment and enact “the imaginative projection of possibilities at the intersection of robotics and small-scale agriculture” in a public venue (244).

As the titular term *citizenship* suggests, the public sphere comes up early and often in this collection, illustrating several concrete ways in which multimodality might broaden participation in public life. Some of the work in the collection, for instance, attempts to bridge the gap between fandom and

citizen. In chapter three, esteemed fan studies scholar Henry Jenkins traces some of the online activities of the Harry Potter Alliance (HPA), offering it as a case study for fan activism, a form of participatory politics that parlays the language and rituals of fan culture to more civic forms of engagement. As Jenkins argues early in the chapter, a recent white paper suggests that sites like the HPA, which are made up of over 100,000 members, are important because they act as “a gateway to more traditional political activities such as voting or petitioning” (65). Pushing this argument, Jenkins suggests that HPA’s fandom practices—organizing local chapters, arguing via discussion boards, curating content—actually primes them for more traditional notions of citizenship, such as raising and donating over \$120,000 to rebuilding efforts in Haiti after the devastating 2010 earthquake. In a more methodologically reflective account of fan studies, chapter seven finds Catherine Burwell and Megan Boler looking to the more affective and networked notions of citizenship by interviewing two bloggers for prominent fan sites dedicated to *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*, concluding—experientially and methodologically—that political expression isn’t always limited to rational-critical discourse.

While many contributors to the collection might agree that critical making and DIY cultural production can qualify as contributing to public life, evaluating their effects is a different story. In chapter four, for example, Christina Dunbar-Hester uses examples of media activism to remind readers that “maker cultures” that do not critically or reflectively consider their roles in the social (re)organization of their work—or that too zealously preach maker identities at the expense of historicizing them—can end up, ironically, reinforcing the same cultural scripts they are trying to resist. Likewise, in chapter six, Red Chidgey finds that even though makers announce their projects as DIY, the term can just as likely represent “an empty signifier”—left vulnerable to “depoliticized lifestyle and self-managerial branding” (107)—unless they organize around particular affective identities and progressive initiatives, such as how feminist activist networks make and share zines.

In fact, a key tension throughout the book is how, as Alexandra Bal, Jason Nolan, and Yukari Seko put it, “the DIY ethos has been absorbed by corporate culture” (163) through the cultivation of individual choice. In some ways, these authors remind us that DIY can be used to re-inscribe neoliberal capitalist logics, just as much as they can undo them. As Michael Murphy, David J. Phillips, and Karen Pollock explain in chapter eighteen, dominant companies like Apple and Google have paradoxically sustained DIY practices by offering ubiquitous spaces or freely available tools to everyday, amateur makers in exchange for compliance, capital, or personal data. In this way Rosa Reitsamer and Elke Zobl (chapter twenty-four) as well as Chris Atton (chapter twenty-five) feel that the term DIY has been so co-opted, branded, and overused to the point

that it has become an uncritical term implying romantic, unbridled agency; they therefore prefer the term “cultural citizen” because it suggests that amateur production is an ongoing social and intersubjective process.

No matter what readers make of the political effects of the projects articulated throughout this collection, composition scholars will undoubtedly feel overwhelmed by the volume’s capacity for redefining the public work of multimodality—and this is likely to raise familiar questions and old debates about “the fundamental boundaries of our curricular landscape and our sense of its stakeholders, interests, and purpose” (Hesse 605). But for those among us who see the rising importance of hybridity in not only the forms of composition but also the delivery systems that change them (Trimbur 190), many of the chapters in *DIY Citizenship* have much to contribute.

Syracuse, New York

Works Cited

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