

# (Re)Turning to the Seams of Composing as a Feminist Orientation

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**Abstract:** Taking up what Paula Cameron calls a seamful ethic, this article invites readers to consider how a repeated small, feminist act—a turn to the seams of our composing processes—can illuminate sites of friction in the writing process where writers can renegotiate access. The author explores how a feminist seamful ethic might intervene in our understanding of the formative networks of writing partners from which our texts emerge, following Laura Micciche’s research on writing acknowledgements. Sharing embodied insights from an ongoing embroidery project, the author engages embroidery as one method to probe the seams of the composing apparatus as a disabled scholar. Attention to the seams of composing creates opportunities for subtle yet meaningful feminist interventions in our orientations toward knowledge-making.

**Tags:** [ethic of seamfulness](#), [material rhetorics](#), [material methods](#), [disability studies](#), [labor](#), [writing process](#), [friction](#)

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Welcome, readers. In the spirit of a feminist *ethic of seamfulness* (Cameron), this text is stitched together with a running thread of narrative autoethnographic reflections. In the italicized snippets, I share glimpses into the seams of my own embodied composing apparatus—the assemblage of entangled materials, experiences, and partners that shape my writing process. I compose my essay in this way to demonstrate how a recurring small, subtle feminist act—a slight turn towards the seams of our writing processes—can accumulate into a feminist epistemological re-orientation that invites disabled ways of knowing. By threading my process throughout this published piece, I am acknowledging the precarity of composing in community from a vulnerable body, writing against seamlessness as an exclusionary disciplinary value, and prompting you to turn with me to the seams again and again. I invite you to follow these threads with me.

## Introduction

*I compose  
with my  
family and our  
histories:  
with my mom,  
my Mucka,  
my Oma.*

As a young girl, I first learned to sew with my mom and my grandmas, Mucka and Oma, collaborating on small projects together, before moving on to sewing next to them. I learned to mend, to extend the life of socks, pants, shirts; to reinforce buttons, repair holes, restitch hems. I learned to look at everything around me as full of potential re-making—to see a snag, a missing button, a burst seam as laden with the possibility of repair. Over time, coupled with my experiences of dynamic disability, these quotidian material practices have reoriented the way I make meaning beyond cloth, recon-

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figuring my understanding of the writing process to be a study of seams. This orientation towards the seams of composing has become central to my scholarly work as I compose my way into the field. As a cumulative practice, this cyclical reorientation towards the seams of composing opens space for feminist reimaginings of access in the writing process. Identifying these seams and the friction within them allows me to negotiate ways of composing that draw on the resources I do have available—including my embodied disability insights, experiences of crip time, and attention to the entangled network in which I compose. In this article, I invite you to consider how a repeated small, feminist act—a turn to the seams of our composing processes—can illuminate sites of friction in the writing process where writers can renegotiate access and invite insights from crip composing practices.

Despite efforts to cultivate inclusive practices and acknowledge the personal, our field continues to privilege “seamlessness,” a disciplinary value that elevates polished products and obscures the struggles of the composing process. In the competitive corridors of the academy, presenting polished, seamless prose has been one way that scholars—including many feminist rhetoricians—have been able to gain traction and authority. In the name of “professionalism,” we are trained to “tidy our texts” (Ahmed, *Living* 9)—to hide the seams of our thinking, writing, and selves. These “seamless” texts can be incredibly persuasive, artful, and resonant; often, they prove quite accessible for readers given their conciseness and clarity. However, in aspiring towards seamlessness, we may unintentionally obscure the tracks of our thoughts and present our ideas as complete and unrevisable. Furthermore, in decontextualizing “polished writing” from its messy formative process, we risk neglecting feminist commitments to critically attend to the ways power dynamics, labor distribution, material resources, and ableist expectations for legibility impact the writing process. While this may not register as a problem for many enculturated in the field, this performance of seamlessness can disproportionately impact emerging disabled scholars who are searching for ways to sustainably compose their way into the field. The process for tailoring a scholarly identity for disabled bodyminds—for those whose bodies, experiences, and insights misfit within the expectations of academia—is routinely occluded (Obermark). How are emerging disabled scholars to find ways to gain traction when the vestiges of the composing process are obliterated from existing model texts, occluding much of the underlying labor, time, influences, friction, and possible resources? As we enter

*I cannot  
write about  
composing or  
rhetoric or  
disability or  
anything without  
bringing my body.  
I write with and  
despite all my  
former selves.  
I write with  
dreams of my  
future selves,  
coveting what they  
have learned,  
yearning for their  
guidance,  
flinching at their  
pain, eager  
to become.*

the field, how can we negotiate for our particular access needs if the choice points in the composing process—the seams—remain unidentified, if the friction of composing is assumed to be uniformly “manageable” for every bodymind? How might identifying these seams be a small, subtle feminist act?

*I write between  
heating pad  
and ice pack,  
between graduate  
student stipend  
and bill, between  
prepping to teach  
and grading,  
between  
insomnia and  
exhaustion.  
I write with hives,  
with headaches,  
with hunger.*

Although the seams of our composing processes may seem insignificant at first glance, they are rife with epistemological activity and feminist possibilities for re-making the field in more inclusive ways. These seams mark the discrete moments where we negotiate friction and make choices in the writing process; tucked within them are the “hows” of composing. Some of these seams are readily acknowledged steps of the writing process—e.g., conceptualizing an idea, developing a methodological approach, drafting an argument, exploring existing scholarship, and revising a draft. Yet, when we take up a perspective informed by feminist, material, and disability rhetorics, we recognize that many other seams of the writing process are less commonly accounted for, perhaps because they are stigmatized, disproportionately impact disabled writers, or are not considered particularly legible within academic settings. For example, in my experiences as a disabled writer, the following seams of the process are much more demanding than those mentioned above: doing access labor (Cedillo), navigating the “ambient uncertainty” of disabled experiences within academia (Price “Precarity”), working with “bad feelings” about writing (Micciche), managing pain and other symptoms of dynamic disabilities, processing the emotions that accompany the feedback cycle, navigating fluctuations in executive functioning, advocating for the time that is needed to write sustainably, adequately nourishing my bodymind throughout the writing process, balancing my commitments to friends in my network of care, and managing the labor of concurrent domestic demands. These latter seams of the composing process are of particular concern for feminist scholars who seek to account for the material needs of disabled writers and inequitable distributions of labor. Though this shift in awareness may be a subtle one at first, becoming a student of the seams of composing—of the cumulative impact of the small yet agential “stitches” within the processes—can reorient our understanding of the composing process to attend to embodiment while opening more supported space for disabled ways of knowing to emerge within feminist rhetorical scholarship.

Expanding on Paula Cameron’s call for a “seamful ethic,” in this article, I focus on the ways this ethic can prompt a feminist epistemological reorientation towards the seams of our composing processes. Instead of dismissing the writing process as a normative “given,” I invite feminist rhetoricians to engage with disability insights about the seams of composing as sites for negotiating access. This small reorientation is a useful ethic for all feminist scholars because it reveals the subtle ways in which their own composing processes—and their expectations for that of peers, colleagues, and students—might be adjusted to resist ableist academic norms and, instead, support their embodied access needs. In this way, a seamful ethic can intervene in disciplinary pressure to perform seamlessness, an expectation which does not adequately account for disabled experiences of composing in crip spacetime and the accompanying negotiations of friction in the process. Below, I flesh out some ways a feminist ethic of seamfulness can expand our understanding of the writing process, connecting it to existing scholarship in feminist rhetorics, material rhetorics, and disability studies. Next, I turn to Laura Micciche’s study of the genre of writing acknowledgements to understand how our field typically represents the networks of writing partners in which our texts are formed, noting the ways this genre often occludes the most friction-full seams of composing. Then, to further explore a seamful ethic, I write about engaging embroidery as method to probe the seams of my own composing apparatus, sharing disability insights from my ongoing project of embroidering my writing acknowledgements on a tote bag. I close with a call to feminist rhetoricians to attune to the seams of our processes, noting how this subtle shift in orientation can support the proliferation of crip composing practices.

*I compose  
with  
frequent  
snows  
and the  
occasional  
Syracuse sun,  
with blisters  
on my heels  
from walking  
and on my  
wrists  
from typing.  
I live and  
stitch and  
type with  
calloused  
fingers.*

## **An Ethic of Seamfulness as Feminist Intervention**

*I write  
to reach for the  
unlanguaged edge  
of my knowing.*

In her 2012 piece in *Hypatia*, “Curriculum Vitae’: Embodied Ethics at the Seams of Intelligibility,” Paula Cameron introduced an “ethic of seamfulness” as a means for examining the “(necessary) silences and foreclosures” within academic writing—foreclosures which academic genre conventions often enforce by devaluing the personal (423). Engaging with work by Judith Butler, Cameron uses this ethic to explore the implications of storying, analyzing, and crafting accounts of others’ vulnerable embodied experiences, noting the complicated ways these accounts—and the academic conventions with which they are crafted—can simultaneously illuminate and perpetuate unintended harm through the clinical academic gaze and the pressure for

*I write to gather  
incompletenesses,  
to bring what's  
absent into  
almost-view.*

narrative coherence. Cameron invites feminist scholars to reconsider “the specter of academic authority within the context of intellectual and economic history: the author, the expert—whose voice and hands, both steady and unsteady, enact forceful modes of truth on the lives and bodies of real people” (431). Taking up a seamful ethic can reveal the complex active spaces between language and embodied experiences, between disciplinary polish and the processes of composing. Notably, Cameron takes care to demonstrate what she argues for through her writing craft: integrating excerpts of research materials with meta reflections on the writing process and critiques of the way complex texts (both written and embodied) are often flattened in academic spaces.

To appreciate the nuances of a feminist ethic of seamfulness, it is important to understand the materially-grounded framework of “seams.” In sewing practices, a seam marks the place where two pieces of material are drawn together by a thread. A seam indicates a relationship, constructing a functional coalition across differences and joining two separate pieces into one. Paradoxically, a seam is a site of both vulnerability and strength—the seam creates a juncture between the two pieces and may resist tearing more than one piece of material alone, yet with the snip of a knot and the pull of a thread, it can be undone. A seam is constructed through a recursive pattern of stitches, threading back and forth between two materials to create an emergent third. A seam can be made, un-made, re-made—a seam is a site of agency (both past and potential). A seam is a liminal space of transformation, a space of *nepantla* (Anzaldúa). A seam is a site of negotiation, a space for small feminist acts. Threaded throughout our bodies, our clothing, and our built worlds, seams are ordinary, ubiquitous, and often overlooked—yet they are sites of significant activity, of possible feminist interventions.

*I write with  
guidance from  
the editors of  
this special issue,  
Jessi and Tammie.  
I revise with  
thoughtful  
suggestions from  
anonymous peer  
reviewers, carrying  
their feedback into*

Importantly, this project is not simply about sewing, unpicking, or showing seams, but rather about exploring the ways attention to the seams of our composing processes can transform our knowledge-making processes in feminist ways that are more inclusive of crip composing practices. Taking up Cameron’s concept of a seamful ethic, we can explore the composing process as situated at the intersection of disability studies, feminist rhetorics, and material rhetorics. Through this lens, a seamful ethic is not simply about making the seams of our compositions visible and make the underlying process accessible; transparency is not the only dimension. Rather, seamfulness is about ethical commitments to recursiveness, responsivity, and relational accountability. It’s about being a responsible steward of the avail-

*I write to  
stitch together  
uncertainties,  
to bridge the  
unknown  
and the less  
unknown.  
I write to stick a  
handle onto  
concepts, to pull  
them in, to hug  
them tight as they  
reshape me.*

*and beyond  
this article.  
I shape this  
publication with  
Hannah's generous  
production support.*

able resources and being accountable to one's network of knowledge-making partners (including people, stories, and materials). To approach knowledge-making with a seamful ethic is to commit to being re-made again and again in relation to the entangled network beyond oneself. Seamfulness resists the static illusion of the "complete"—as an orientation, it tacks back and forth, subtly weaving between what seems known and what seems unknown, ever in-process, inviting feedback.

Furthermore, a feminist ethic of seamfulness is an approach to composition that turns to the seams of our processes as valuable sites for inquiry and insight that can transfer across composing modalities. My understanding of seamfulness is simultaneously textured, material, conceptual, and tied to disabled ways of knowing. Learning from Elisabeth L. Miller's disability materiality approach and Sonia Arellano's theorizing of quilting as method, the framework of seamfulness chews at false binaries between concept and material, process and product, matter and mattering. Attending to the agential seams of the composing process enables us to grapple with the material, ethical, and temporal implications of these choices while centering the disabled bodymind as knowledge maker (Nusbaum and Lester; Price, *Mad at School*; Yergeau). Teasing out the seams of the composing apparatus allows us to more thoroughly account for the ways friction shapes knowledge-making processes (Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*) and to make small and subtle feminist interventions.

*I write with  
every student I've  
ever worked with,  
continuing to learn  
from them. I am  
a student of their  
stories, their many  
ways of composing,  
their diligent  
questioning  
of prescribed  
methods.*

*When my mind  
tries to make a run  
for it, my body  
tugs my attention  
back, chronic pain  
too creative to  
ignore.  
My bodymind  
won't let me forget  
my bodymind.*

As feminist scholars have noted, the theoretical emerges from and feeds back into bodies; no methodological or ethical commitment, therefore, is unaccountable to the living (whether currently, past, or future). Because of the entanglement of access, disability, and ethics of care, feminist scholarship is foundational to my approach to seamfulness. Central to a seamful ethic is a feminist understanding of responsivity: a recursive practice of seeking out, integrating, and responding to unfolding information. As Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa E. Kirsch write, feminist rhetorical practices do "not permit us simply to tack on an extra layer of concerns as an afterthought"—in other words, as a one-time retrofit. Rather, enacting responsive feminist rhetorical practices "compel[s scholars] to recast our whole ways of thinking and doing and to situate ourselves more deliberately in the company of others as we reach for more-comprehensive and more-nimble views, attitudes, and expectations" (39). My understanding of seamfulness is further informed by Jessica Restaino's "intimacy as methodology," an ap-

proach which pairs well with qualitative disability studies methodologies to integrate the reflective and the analytical (Nusbaum and Lester).

When theorizing about the affordances of a seamful ethic, I'm not arguing that everyone must show the seams of their work all the time—certainly, showing all the seams of one's process at all times presents its own set of accessibility complications. Rather, I'm proposing a small shift in orientation towards epistemic responsibility which includes a willingness to re-examine the seams of our work when prompted—especially when faced with new insights, experiences, and feedback from people who experience heightened precarity through their embodied experiences of disability, racialization, indigeneity, sexuality, gender, socioeconomic positioning, and systems of colonial violence. Taking up a recursive orientation towards our composing seams is one way to “take responsibility for one's own writing” not as “something one owns,” but rather “to be justly responsive to something one has created”—to be willing to revise and recontextualize one's work within a developing, responsive understanding (Pohlhaus 47). As a relational and epistemological approach, an ethic of seamfulness can help feminist rhetoricians resist perpetuating the white possessive move (Moreton-Robinson) of claiming “ownership” of knowledge and settling on a “certainty”; instead, a seamful ethic allows for contextualizing one's work as a living attempt embedded within a community patchwork of meaning-making that respects the abundant ways of knowing outside a specific Western academic tradition (Kimmerer; Sudbury and Okazawa-Rey; Tachine and Nicolazzo; Todd). A call to seamfulness is a call to resist severing one's work from the web of other people's labor in which it has emerged and the communal knowledge-making context in which it has been nourished. Over time, this small, subtle shift in orientation can equip us for more “bold” feminist acts of solidarity by reshaping our posture towards knowledge-making, community, and accountability.

*I write from  
a white settler  
body with  
borrowed words  
and shared texts  
on stolen land.*

*I write from a  
legacy of not-right  
relations.*

*I write within a  
chorus of violently  
inflicted colonial  
silences.*

## Tracing the Composing Apparatus

*I write with two  
computer monitors,  
with pragmatic yet  
grudging trust in  
cloud storage.  
My digital writing  
scrapes the earth.  
I stretch my  
awareness and find  
it suddenly  
close—the  
cumulative carbon  
emissions from  
my open tabs,  
my powered screens.  
I switch  
to dark mode,  
reducing lit pixels.  
My headache  
intensifies.*

In order to enact this small, subtle feminist shift in our orientation toward the seams of composing, we must identify these seams and the ways we are patterning our work within our composing apparatus—the assemblage of intra-active patterns, sources, experiences, histories, influences, and structures that shape our knowledge production. As Karen Barad argues, “apparatuses 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). An apparatus is not neutral; rather, it is a vibrant assemblage which intra-acts with the matter and knowledge it structures, blurrily entangled with the human subject. If we are being made and remade through our writing, then we should consider the subtle ways in which a feminist orientation might intervene—where noticing the friction of composing might lead to a choice to rest, to seek support, to integrate some of our vulnerability into the text. Notably, Barad points out that an apparatus may be most apparent to us at the point where it breaks down—where the threads loosen, the edges fray. If we’re not actively looking for the seams of our process, we may only notice them when they split apart unexpectedly—yet this breakdown may become apparent quickly to disabled writers with complex experiences of friction in the writing process, lending them insights into it.

Soon after I began my doctoral studies, my own composing apparatus began to fall apart. The academic patterns that had shaped my thus-far “successful” approach to coursework (e.g., assigned readings, weekly reading responses, class discussions, etc.) no longer worked for me as I embarked on larger projects. As a neurodivergent person living with chronic illnesses, I had scraped together ways to somewhat self-accommodate for the first part of the term, relying on a text-to-voice app to narrate assigned texts aloud while I lay in bed sewing, crocheting, or embroidering—a process which helps me to encode memory while reducing my chronic pain. As final project deadlines approached and my attempts at self-accommodation no longer matched the scale of demands I faced, I began to wonder: how do disabled scholars do this? Is anyone else here writing from bed (Piepzna-Samarasinha; Anzaldúa)? How can I compose my ideas, experiences, and engagement with others in a legible long-form way when the expected patterns no longer support me, when the friction I encounter overwhelms my composing apparatus? To whom can I turn for models of disabled ways of knowledge-making?

*I write with  
every way  
I’ve ever written,  
trying to write my  
way toward  
newer, gentler  
ways.  
I compose  
with questions,  
with a yearning  
to write together,  
to nourish our  
disability insights  
in community.*



*I write with you in  
mind, dear reader.  
I can't yet see your  
face, and you can't  
see mine.  
I write with the  
hope of connecting  
with you, of  
hearing your  
thoughts, of  
learning from you.  
I write with  
gratitude for your  
time and attention.*

As Mara Mills and Rebecca Sanchez explore in their recent edited collection, *Crip Authorship*, a writer's composing apparatus is shaped by their individual experiences of disability. Disability shapes the ways we move through the world—the ways we navigate physical spaces, grapple with concepts, and relate to the assistive technologies that surround us. As a result, disability reconfigures the friction a writer encounters in the writing process, whether it be from experiencing chronic pain, physical symptoms, nervous system dysregulation, clashes between crip time and imposed deadlines, or other barriers to shaping and inscribing ideas on the page. Crip composing methods can lend access to disability insights about the seams of the writing process. For me, my experiences of disability have tuned my awareness of the ways my bodymind encounters friction in space, time, and knowledge-making, reshaping the ways I make meaning in the world. At the seams of composing, these negotiations of friction can become examples of what Arseli Dokumacı calls “microactivist affordances,” which are “disabled people's micro, ongoing, and (often) ephemeral acts of world-building” which “transform disabled people's everyday lives into pockets of site-specific performances” (493). In these small pockets of creative composing negotiation, disabled writers approach knowledge-making sideways, composing “otherwise” with the methods that are accessible. These negotiations of access may seem small or insignificant to those reading a draft; however, for the disabled writer, they can be make or break, facilitating or hindering the composing process. Learning from these disability insights about composing, a feminist ethic of seamfulness involves tailoring the ways we compose to the access needs we have rather than attempting to force a “fit” into the expected methods.

## Writing Acknowledgements as a Site for Seamfulness

How are scholars articulating their composing networks, and what is included in such claims? One place these networks are partially documented is, of course, the writing acknowledgements genre within published works. In *Acknowledging Writing Partners*, Micciche investigates the ways writing acknowledgements serve “as a site where authors store information about writing partnerships” (25). While on its face this genre claims to be a way of acknowledging networks of influence, it in fact is often a performance of obfuscation due to the pressures of publishers, power dynamics, and genre/form constraints. As Stephanie L. Kerschbaum notes, the tendency to disembodiment the scholarly writing process means that “we elide critical elements that shape emergent knowledge as well as possibilities for per-

*I write  
with, through,  
and around  
pain. Again and  
again, my body  
reminds me. The  
labor of writing  
is written into  
my body.*

ception and coming-to-know others” (141). Micciche finds most published writing acknowledgements to overwhelmingly emphasize “good feelings” over “bad feelings,” with only infrequent references to disability or illness. Instead of being a site of seamfulness, printed writing acknowledgements are often perfunctory, both “constantly overlooked by scholars of writing and rhetoric...and scorned...by readers and critics alike” (27). The writing acknowledgements section is a type of performed archive, the potential of which is constricted by its expected genre conventions, intended audience (or lack thereof), and alphabetic textual demands. Every archive is teeming with seams, as is every performance—stitched together and pulled taut to obscure tacit decision-making processes and exclusions.

*Stitching myself  
together is a  
full-time job; I  
stitch this text  
together in the  
seams.*

As Micciche’s research demonstrates, a writer’s composing apparatus expands far beyond what is commonly published in the “writing acknowledgements” section of a scholarly work; it includes people (supportive and otherwise), affect, environment, time, embodied experience, sensory input, material resources, and complex histories. While the role of disability in the writing process needs further attention in writing studies scholarship (Micciche), the field at large has an opportunity to learn from important recent work on this (e.g., Bailey; Cepeda; Mills and Sanchez; Smilges; and Yergeau, et al.).

If the standard print genre of “writing acknowledgements” fails to adequately account for the complexity of our composing apparatuses, how else might we map our process? What methods, then, are suitable for exploring the seams of our writing process—the ways we shape texts and the network of writing companions in which they form? How do we perceive, document, and negotiate the slippery aspects of our formative composing processes, including disabled people’s experiences of friction and felt sense within crip spacetime? Certainly, there are textual means of examining these processes. Yet, informed by feminist, disability, and material rhetorics and my personal experiences of disabled meaning-making, I turn to embroidery as method, as one way to attend to the seams of my composing apparatus.

*I write nourished  
by conversations  
with friends and  
colleagues: long  
walk-and-talks  
with Gabby, voice  
notes with Karisa,  
chats with Urmi,  
prompts to distill  
my thinking from  
Zak.*

*I write because  
of and through and  
with and  
alongside and  
despite revolting  
fascia, synovia,  
nerves, synapses.  
I wonder,  
I grapple, I reach  
for elusive access<sup>1</sup>.*

To explore my composing apparatus, I am working on an ongoing project of embroidering my writing acknowledgements by hand on a tote bag. As I approached this embroidery project, I wondered: What might I learn about the composing process from materializing my writing acknowledgements off the printed page, slowly working them into cloth, threading them onto a tote bag? How might embroidering my ever-growing writing acknowledgements go beyond the limits of the textual genre, opening up new possibilities for transparency, accountability, and re-orientation through a feminist ethic of seamfulness? What overlooked epistemological seams—and sites for possible feminist re-orientations—might emerge when my writing acknowledgements are circulated in public non-academic spaces, slung across my shoulder in the form of a tote bag? How might this transform my relationships with my writing partners—and the entangled world in which I am writing?

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1 Lauren Obermark writes about the role of wonder in complicating conversations about access in graduate English studies: “When I invoke and enact wonder . . . , I attempt to *resist closure* in conversations about access and disability, situating *access as a process that will never be finished*, and rethinking pedagogical misfits must be part of this ongoing pursuit. When English professors and their students wonder about disability and access, they move away from binaries positioning disability and misfits as problems to be solved, with access acting as an oversimplified savior. Wonder instead allows us to view *access as systemic and networked*, affecting everyone and thus the responsibility of all, continually flowing rather than finite, liberatory rather than solely the legal minimum” (“Making Space...” 178; my emphasis).

## Embroidery as Method for Mapping the Composing Apparatus

Recent scholarship at the intersection of feminist and material rhetorics reveals the ways textile crafts compose identity (Arola; Gruwell; Lewallen; Patterson and Hsu; Parker) while demanding attention to issues of labor (Goggin and Tobin; Clary-Lemon), survivance (Arellano; Lamberti), and relationality (Shivers-McNair; Small and Bhat; Morrill and Sabzalian). There are many cultural traditions of thread work that utilize specific materials, stitching techniques, and forms of engagement as ways of making, preserving, and circulating knowledge. Within the scope of this article, I am focusing on the ways embroidery as a method has reoriented me to the seams within my composing network through its material affordances. I'm not arguing that embroidery as method is inherently feminist—rather, that this material method has helped facilitate my process of conceptualizing and practicing a feminist seamful ethic. Embroidering by hand is a relatively “quiet” activity, occurring with small movements on a small scale in a private location. Compared to larger-scale, quicker-paced craft forms, embroidery may seem nearly static; if an onlooker were to observe me working on my embroidery project from across the room, they might mistakenly think I was doing nothing. Just as individual experiences of disability may not be legible or perceptible to bystanders, the movement (material and epistemological) of embroidery is not necessarily apparent to those who catch a glimpse of the craft. Despite being a small, subtle, and quiet method, embroidery generates significant epistemological movement through its accumulative properties. For example, as I will explore below, embroidery as method has reconfigured my relationship with time, friction, material, and audience, bringing particular attention to the often-obscured role of disabled embodiedness in the composing process. (Even the very word “embodiedness,” which I first encountered in the work of J. Logan Smilges, reflects a lesson from embroidery: that entanglement is a pressing reality, whether of body and mind or of thread and fabric.)

*I traverse  
the contours  
of disability under  
many names,  
knowing I am  
(and my texts are)  
read differently  
when I disclose my*

While embroidery itself does not consist of literal, structural “seams,” the recursive stitching practice of embroidery reflects a “seamful” orientation by repeatedly drawing the maker’s attention to negotiations of friction, accumulation, and the inextricability of process and product. It makes me slow down, asking deliberately: what is my next stitch? How does this stitch fit in relation to what has come before? Embroidery as method has prompted me to grapple with the seams of my composing process writ large in ways I cannot access in the alphabetic writing process alone, rendering the fric-

*I compose  
alongside makers  
throughout time  
and space.  
We are gathered  
together through  
the choreography  
of stitching.  
I compose in  
good company,  
overjoyed for  
serendipitous  
new connections  
with generous  
fellow makers,  
Leah and  
Rachel.*

*embodimented  
experiences.*

tion I encounter as a composer more tangible. The resulting understanding threads back into my scribal composing process to illuminate the contours of my network of writing partners. In the following sections, I will explore the ways this embroidery prompt has helped me practice a seamful ethic, facilitating a subtle feminist shift in my orientation and, over time, opening space to reconsider the seams of my composing process and the ways my own composing intersects with “louder” feminist concerns.

## Composing in Crip Time

Embroidery as method has heightened my awareness of how the seams of my composing process unfold in crip time. As Alison Kafer writes, crip time is “a reorientation to time” that “requires reimagining our notions of what can and should happen in time or recognizing how expectations of ‘how long things take’ are based on very particular minds and bodies” (27). Crip time asks us how time can stretch to fit our needs and bodies, not the other way around—an understanding of time that can support all writers in tailoring their approach to writing. As a disabled writer in a PhD program, I often struggle to differentiate between the imposed expectations for fast-paced academic writing timelines and the actual pace my disabled bodymind requires. When torn between the intense expectations to quickly generate new work and my chronically ill body’s need for a more sustainable pace, I sometimes experience a traumatic nervous system response when writing multiple projects under a deadline, sending my chronic illnesses into a flare and costing me in every other dimension of my life. It’s incredibly difficult to write at all—nevermind to constructively reflect on the seams of my writing process—when it is so physically painful. I’ve found that stepping away from the screen to work with thread has given me the distance to do so. Embroidery lends me access to my body’s sustainable composing pace; it allows me to practice spacious composing without the confusion of ableist external expectations for rapid composing. When I embroider by hand, I am able to rest in crip time, allowing my composing process to slow down significantly, stretching across hours, weeks, months at a time.

*I write  
within the  
care of my  
graduate  
student writing  
group—Andy,  
Jeff, and Zak.*

Because of its gradual, accumulative nature, embroidery as method demands a preponderance of slow time and attention in ways my neurodivergent and chronically ill body can sometimes provide—though not always in ways bound by “calendar and clock” (Anzaldúa 112). Disability has equipped me for this method. I’ve spent most of my life enduring chronic pain flares, making meaning with the material available within reach as I sit or lie down, sandwiched between heating pads or ice packs. Some days I am not able to write or stitch at all. Some days resting is my process. This

*I write in the  
active tension  
between crip  
time and the  
demands of  
academic time,  
the rapid pace of  
my ideas and my  
body’s limited  
capacity to lend  
them form, the  
time allotted to me  
for this task and  
the years my  
questions desire.*



ongoing embroidery project reminds me that this form of spacious embodied discipline—of my body holding me in place, in pain, in a seam, in crip time—is one of my writing companions.

The process of embroidering writing acknowledgements has illuminated the complexity of my other writing companions within crip spacetime (Price, “Precarity”). As I conceptualized this embroidery project, my preconceived notions of the writing acknowledgements genre fell away as this material method opened new possibilities. As a method, embroidery—in all its slowness, its portability, its customization, its invitation to concurrently listen to stories—allows me to approach the task of materializing writing acknowledgments from a new angle, seeing it from a new perspective. It disrupts some of my dis-attentions, what Kerschbaum names the ways we attend to disability as paradoxically hypervisible and unseen. Compared to digital composing, the consequences of speeding through embroidery feel immediate, feel embodied. If you rush, you may tear your fabric, snag previous stitches, prick your thumb, or sew your project to your pants. Hand embroidery slows down the formation of a “big picture,” requiring recursive negotiations between the part and the possible whole. Through this embroidery project, I have begun to viscerally recognize that my current writing process is unsustainably costly to my bodymind; my writing habits have prioritized the impossible pace of neoliberal university time (Mountz et al.) and demand for hyperproductivity (Price, “Precarity”) over my own wellbeing. Composing with thread—in all its slowness, stillness, and small scope—is teaching me to take the time that both my bodymind and the project need, to trust in the abundance of creativity and insight that emerges from a spacious seamful ethic. The pace that sustains me is the pace in which my composing apparatus can flourish (Bailey).

*I compose with  
scraps: each thread  
has a place, and I  
learn to keep  
looking for it. I  
putter along,  
looking again and  
again with the  
gentle eyes of my  
dad for means of  
frugal mending.*

### Sitting with Material Sources

*I write with the  
plants in my home,  
giving them water  
while they remind  
me to drink water,  
too. I partner  
with them in  
propagation,  
remembering  
many beginnings*

This material practice of embroidery has reconfigured my understanding of the friction at the seams of revision. Shaped by the pursuit of optimization and efficiency, digital alphabetic composing often invisibilizes much of the friction in the composing process. When this friction is invisibilized, it does not cease to act on the writer; instead, it slides out of perceptible reach, becoming more difficult to negotiate. The agential seams of the writing process begin to disappear with each comment marked resolved, each deleted phrase, each format overhaul, each revision saved over the last. Unlike screen-mediated composing, which black-boxes much of the material process, embroidery necessitates awareness of what has come before.

*are possible with  
enough time.*

The outward-facing side of an embroidered piece is inseparable from the vestiges of the process on the reverse, often quite literally entangled. Embroidery tethers the composer to the material accumulation of composing and its consequences, creating a sweat-salted material archive of labor and friction. For me, embroidering by hand re-materializes this friction, illuminating revision negotiations within my composing process and allowing me to notice where and how I get stuck just long enough to pause and consider intervening.

Because of the concentrated time and attention required, embroidery offers an opportunity to carefully consider my materials as composing companions. Spending ten, twenty, sixty, two-hundred hours with the same materials in hand prompts me to be a student of their sources and their attendant stories. My canvas is a cotton tote bag I bought on clearance over ten years ago at a craft store; I've used it unembellished for years to haul library books or food from the food co-op. As I work thread through its scratchy surface, I wonder about the people who manufactured it—their labor, their working conditions, their families, their networks. I tug at the seam of this expanding awareness, reflecting on how I did not think of the people who made this bag when I bought it on clearance. I stitch with floss from a variety of sources—some purchased new, some gifted, most of it thrifted. It all smells different—sometimes sour, sometimes faint potpourri from being stored in someone's attic, abandoned or donated or released for resale. I wonder about the people who originally bought this floss, about their intentions for its use, their visions for artistic expression, the circumstances of their parting ways with it. The thread, like my attention, snags on the material; I wax it with the beeswax block I've had since I was nine, since my mom and my grandmas, Mucka and Oma, taught me to sew—first by hand, with halting inch-long stitches, then by treadle machine, smelling of wax and oil, then by electric machine. I study the friction of these storied materials, sitting with them and learning to look for the labor invested in them before they found their way into my hands. Sitting with these storied materials subtly erodes the illusion of disconnection, expanding my awareness to include feminist concerns about labor.

*I compose in a  
shared material  
world, a world  
fruiting with  
beauty, loss,*

I consider the material concerns embroidery brings up for me about longevity, wear-and-tear, and preservation. I'm cautious to invest time and energy in embroidering a wearable piece that will necessitate repeated washes, falling apart quickly. If it's out in the world with me, how soon will the sun take back its colors? How might I design and embroider a tote bag that is dynamic and in-process without falling apart—one that will hold up through daily

*I write fueled  
by croissants  
and coffee from  
The Sweet Praxis  
bakery, iron and  
vitamin  
B-12 supplements,  
and a decade-old  
SI joint brace  
from Kelley.*

*and the promise  
of decay. I  
compose anyway.*

use without jeopardizing the labor/craft work I put into it? These questions have worked on me, causing me to slow down and sit with the design process for much longer than I'd originally anticipated. They prompt me to commit to an embroidery practice of acknowledgement while knowing full well that the artifact will decay with use. This growing material awareness causes me to reflect, in turn, on the inevitability of digital decay and to wonder about the ecological impacts of my digital composing practices. This "small" method of embroidery and the seamful ethic underlying this prompt reconfigure my understanding of the material context of my individual composing process, encouraging me to further explore the intersections of "bigger" feminist collective concerns, including environmental activism.

### **Bad Feelings and Belonging**

As I've considered what to acknowledge in thread, I must calculate what "counts" as significant enough to be stitched onto the material. This requires a lot of decisions and reconfiguring; I wonder, as time passes, what will "stick" as significant? Many of the pressures that loom over me as I write are "bad feelings" (Micciche)—by ignoring them in my acknowledgements, am I being untruthful about my process? How might I acknowledge a writing partner that caused me pain, to acknowledge loneliness, guilt, despair, grief, rage? How can I make room for what Smilges calls "crip negativity"—for "bad crip feelings felt cripplly" (8)? Threaded with affect, each stitched image, shape, and color represents an intentional decision to memorialize something—even if partially veiled through private symbolism—knowing that hand embroidery revision will not be so simple as "backspacing." Unlike a seemingly-simple edit made in a typed Word document, "deleting" a portion of embroidery requires you to unpick the entire thread, revealing the entangled stakes of each composing choice. Instead, like a tattoo modification, any revisions will be rendered as a form of accumulation, stitching over past acknowledgements—leaving them in place underneath. Each component is tied to the next, the durability of each stitch contingent on its surrounding stitches—including those I am covering up. As I continue to stitch, I cannot ignore what has come before.

*I compose with  
sorrow, anger,  
and mourning.  
I write with  
outrage at ongoing  
genocides and  
mass-disabling  
events. I don't  
know where to  
put my grief.*



*I compose  
from an appetite  
for belonging  
that exceeds my  
embodied capacity.  
My breath  
lurches—  
quarter note out,  
half note in.  
Restructuring.  
I notice.  
I turn.*

During this ongoing pandemic without structural infection mitigations in place, most public spaces and community activities remain inaccessible to me. I haven't and don't plan to give up, yet I'm weary from searching for ways to make connections that do not further compromise my health or that of my community. Even though I often stitch alone at home, I stitch in community in other ways—listening to voice notes from friends, audiobooks or academic articles read aloud, podcasts, or other media. I accidentally prick my finger, bleeding onto the cloth. I daub at the blood with a bit of saliva, a trick I learned from Mucka years ago as I sat with her as she worked on a quilt—sure enough, the stain disappears, released by my own enzymes. I marvel at the vulnerability of our bodies—at the resources they carry, at the need for stories and relationships to access them. In a meditative way, I draw close to my former, current, and potential writing partners by sitting with each word, each image, each stitch, dwelling on the acknowledgement. Even in lonely seasons, this quiet practice protects space to dream in crisp time, to remember my loved ones, the sources I'm learning from, and the affective dimensions of my writing community.

## Reorienting Circulation and Accountability

Early in the planning process for this embroidery project, I considered stitching a static art piece for my home, much like the majority of my other embroidery projects. However, after reflecting further, I realize that the seamful ethic I'm exploring in my research is one of greater transparency, of circulating one's ethic while under development, of risking the vulnerability of being in process in public: of threading one's feminist ethic beyond academic spaces, genres, and expectations for performances of "perfection." A feminist ethic of seamfulness defies compartmentalization; it spills out of the prescribed containers. It must accompany me in the world.

*I write  
to move,  
to dwell,  
to interact,  
to meet and  
love the world  
in new ways.*

*I write with the  
Onondaga Creek  
Walk, pressing my  
thinking along the  
asphalt path.  
I write with my  
leaky-soled leather  
boots, my  
multiply-mended  
wool socks drying*

The unfinished embroidered acknowledgements that live on my tote bag are "open-faced"—acting in, on, and through the world as they circulate alongside me. What are the theoretical, relational, and material implications of carrying my in-process writing acknowledgements with me every day in public—to work, to the library, to the grocery store, to the pharmacy? The intended audience is reconfigured and expanded—and along with it the possibilities for accountability. I am now accountable to be prepared to discuss the project—and my writing acknowledgements—with people outside of my field, people without any background in feminist rhetorics, people who have no relationship with academia whatsoever. The tote bag travels with me across the country and back to attend a conference and to visit

*under the desk  
by the space heater.  
I inhale the  
evaporating snow  
they carried home.*

family. How will I talk about this project with my mom and my grandmas, the people who taught me to sew? The woman walking towards me on the sidewalk who comments on my tote? The student who lingers after class to inquire about it?

As I decide which acknowledgements to embroider on my tote bag, I am also faced with pressing questions about the division between public and private. Does a seamful ethic demand I bare all, putting every influence into thready circulation? I don't necessarily want to put all of my writing acknowledgments out into the public world. This project is causing me to realize that's okay—that across-the-board disclosure of every seam is not necessarily required, that I can make a thorough accounting of my writing partners and then make agential decisions about which to inscribe in thread. Yet, given the affordances of the “genre” of textile embroidery, I wonder how might I engage with the interior/exterior “faces” of the cloth? What would it mean to stitch more intimate acknowledgements into the lining or a pocket—carrying them with me, being re-oriented by them without others being a party to that dynamic? Some acknowledgements might be best served as a private meditative totem in the lining, a prayer tucked into a pocket.

*I write in  
fragments.  
I tug at  
the threads  
that hold me,  
support me,  
constrict me.  
I map my  
entanglements,  
drawing closer to  
more and more.*

Gloria Anzaldúa challenges us to consider how we might “begin to define [ourselves] in terms of who [we] are becoming, not who [we] have been” (135). Wearing an in-progress composition out in the world is, for me, a feminist act of seamfulness as well as an act of faith in becoming. It is a way to carry my unfinished-ness with me everywhere I go, to invite conversation about and accountability for my seams. And its material circulation alongside me is not negligible—it snags on my keys and my attention, threading my awareness of my composing network through my daily movement in the world. As Sara Ahmed writes, “bodies do not dwell in spaces that are exterior but rather are shaped by their dwellings and take shape by dwelling” (*Queer Phenomenology* 9). This embroidered tote bag, circulating with my body as I move through public spaces, prompts me to re-orient my relationship with knowledge-making within a broader community, to risk “damage” and trust the possibility of repair. It's teaching me that an ethic of seamfulness means to not be precious with my compositions, but rather, to circulate them because they are precious to me, opening myself up to the possibilities of being re-written.

*I write with  
mentors who take  
care with my  
work—Patrick, Lois,  
Kevin, and Lauren. I  
write with the  
questions they ask,  
the questions that  
burrow into my  
thinking beyond  
a single project,  
accompanying  
me across  
the years.*

## Seamfulness as Epistemological Reorientation

This ongoing embroidery practice reworks my habituated posture towards composing, illuminating the contextualized network of relations in which it is happening. Nourished by my experiences of disability, this posture shapes what is epistemologically possible for me: as Ahmed writes, “what ‘comes into’ view, or what is within our horizon, is not a matter simply of what we find here or there... What is reachable is determined precisely by orientations that we have already taken” (*Queer Phenomenology* 55). My lifetime of experience with disability and crafting are equipping me to perceive what I perceive, preparing me to engage with the possibilities of embroidery as method as a lens into the seams of composing, and more specifically, my writing process.

*I see and  
see again,  
differently.  
I pull out the  
seam ripper,  
unworking  
with care.  
I vow to rest.  
I try again.  
I rest.*

*I write with doubt,  
self-critical and  
unsatisfied. I write  
with modulated  
hope. I write with  
every critique I've  
ever received,  
with the growth it  
prompted, with  
the sensitivity it  
awoke.*

When I reflect on my academic writing process in light of what this embroidery project is teaching me, I notice the impact of pressure to produce “seamless writing” in ways that don’t align with my embodied experience as a disabled person. I see that much of the friction in my writing process comes from my fear of being misinterpreted, of failing to adequately represent my intent in a legible way, of regretting what I wrote and circulated because I later learned more and revised my thinking. I worry revealing any traces of my ongoing process—the challenges of crip composing within the ableist expectations of academic spaces—will somehow discredit my writing and thinking. But embroidery teaches me that prioritizing these fears does not serve the feminist seamful ethic I am pursuing—that instead, I want my composing process to be responsive to my own disabled embodymind-ness, accountable to my writing companions near and far, and recursive. Over the course of my scholarly trajectory, I want to continue learning from others, pursuing being in more right relations with my writing companions, and re-orienting to crip ways of knowing and surviving and thriving. Taking up a seamful ethic is one way to pursue this feminist orientation towards academic composing, to resist demands for legibility at the cost of nuance, to commit to the possibilities of cyclical becoming.

## An Invitation to be Remade in the Seams

While I’ve personally used embroidery as one method to probe the seams of my composing apparatus, I believe there are many ways to enact a feminist seamful ethic, become familiar with the occluded seams of our processes, and invite intervention into those seams. To step into this orientation, I invite you to use whatever method helps you to trace the seams of your own composing process and to consider what insights they might offer emerging scholars: What have you said “no” to in order to develop a given writ-

*I write because  
I love what others  
have written,  
who they have  
become  
through writing,  
what they have*

ing project? Where has your bodymind encountered friction—in the form of embodied experiences, material constraints, access labor, institutional pressures, or “bad feelings”—in your writing process? How are you seeking insights into the friction others experience in the writing process? How have you negotiated the feedback you have received from mentors, colleagues, and editors? How does your relationship with time impact your composing process? And, importantly, how might returning to these questions again and then again reveal insights into these seams that might serve you and those you are in coalition with moving forward?

*I tie up the  
threads of my  
thinking—for now.  
I do not sever  
them.  
We will return.*

*gifted their  
readers.  
I write to revise,  
to be changed,  
to become, to  
transform.*

These embodied insights into the seams of composing can serve as a subtle prompt for feminist rhetoricians: a prompt to be re-oriented (Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*), to be re-written (Anzaldúa), and to be “remade in the work” (Restaino 93). An ethic of seamfulness is not a call to disregard the products of our composing. Rather, it is an invitation to begin a pattern of small, subtle feminist inquiries, a recursive mode of becoming. It is an invitation to inhabit crip spacetime, to let meanings unfold unforced. It is a reminder of the lurching, non-linear, asymptotic nature of epistemological endeavors—spiraling into deepening understanding(s), yet never fully arrived (Cameron). Attention to the ways our scholarship is composed—our patterns, our seams—invites opportunities for small yet meaningful feminist interventions in the ways we make and remake the world around us. By acknowledging, preserving, and sharing the seams of our composing processes, feminist rhetorical scholars can become more attuned to the friction of composing, holding more space for the insights, perspectives, and ways of knowing that emerge from crip composing practices. Through an accumulation of small and subtle turns to the seams of our composing processes, this seamful ethic can reconfigure our understanding of the world, offering feminist rhetoricians a posture towards knowledge-making that holds space for feminist interventions of all scales, both quiet and loud, small and large. It is here—in these seams—where we can be remade, one small stitch at a time.

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