
Jack Selzer and Sharon Crowley, eds. *Rhetorical Bodies*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1999. 406p.

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The sixteen essays comprising *Rhetorical Bodies* emerged from the Fifteenth Penn State Conference on Rhetoric and Composition in 1997. Editors Jack Selzer and Sharon Crowley have furthered this collection beyond any mere conference proceedings: the essays read like fully developed articles on the material conditions, embodiments, and technologies of rhetoric. According to Selzer, “the contributors together consider what it might mean to take very seriously the material conditions that sustain the production, circulation, and consumption of rhetorical power (whether that power is in a text or some other physical form)” (9-10). From the assessment of shifting political ideologies in Washington, DC, to the study of home HIV testing kits, *Rhetorical Bodies* illustrates the material dimensions of traditional literary practices while advocating new ways of thinking about literacy, embodiment, and rhetorical dynamics for the next century and beyond.

Readers will find careful investigations of unlikely sites, combining academic concerns with popular sensibilities. Contemporary subjects include U.S. memorial sites, *Vanity Fair's* cover nude of a pregnant Demi Moore, and Elizabeth Taylor's public “bearding” for Malcolm Forbes as a means to disguise his homosexuality. Other subjects delve historically into the boundaries of corporeal life, such as Susan Wells' recovery of dissection narratives from nineteenth-century women physicians, and Christine DeVinne's return to the notorious cannibalism of the ill-fated Donner Party. More traditional studies of rural literacy, working class student poetry, and archival deterioration are perhaps less provocative, but nonetheless breath new life into the complex relationships between textual artifacts and physical bodies, suggesting that these rhetorics of materiality apply equally to traditional as well as cultural notions of text.

Particularly intriguing in this collection are the corporeal implications of science and politics, prompting complex inquiry handled with analytic precision. For example, John Schilb explores the impact of psychotropic drugs on autobiography, and Christina Haas considers how the notion of space is created, defined, and regulated at abortion clinics. The most useful contributions to *Rhetorical Bodies*, however, are essays that stand to challenge our future thinking about materiality and rhetoric. Lester Faigley challenges notions of literacy that denigrate the visual, and Yameng Liu questions how the shifting ideologies of Dick Morris (and Bill Clinton) reflects a disruption of the connections between political loyalty and the work of rhetoricians. As a striking coda to this collection, Celeste

Condit offers an incisive critique of ultra-structuralist theory for its neglect of materiality, offering the coding of DNA as a model for future consideration of material rhetorics.

The contributions to *Rhetorical Bodies* are well-researched, accessible, and theoretically stimulating in their treatment of materiality. Many contributors attend to the intricate details of their studies, offering extensive analyses of their material subjects with pithy theoretical reflections that circulate throughout the book. However, while the individual essays comprise a coherent whole, some of them could have been much more concise. Several essays belabor the analyses, burying readers in excessive details without counterbalancing commentary—raising tacit questions about the precarious tension between matter and meaning. Even more stunning, however, is the ironic absence of the writers in *Rhetorical Bodies*. There are some clues that these noteworthy scholars occupy a place in the worlds they study (especially Wendy Sharer's research on the preservation of research materials), but by and large, the presence of the researcher is elided in these essays, giving us the sense that some of these rhetorical bodies are indeed haunted by ghosts. Despite its few shortcomings, *Rhetorical Bodies* will likely provoke readers to think, ultimately making this collection a welcome contribution to consider how our lives are steeped in rhetoric and the material world. ✨