
Reviewed by Ellen Quandahl, University of Southern California

Chip Sills and George Jensen's ambitious two-volume collection "is an attempt to offer a useful introduction to a number of contemporary discursive models." The title of the volumes, then, refers not to a particular philosophy, but to the fact that language is now a focus of much philosophical, social, and historical writing. The "philosophy of discourse" refers to this wealth of writing and the study of it, much as the "history of science" refers to historical studies of scientific theories and debates. The editors use the term discourse to indicate language, in its ordinary sense. Yet, their preference for discourse is a reminder that specialized uses of this term (for example, those of Foucault and Habermas), often blurred and overlapped, have come to indicate some contemporary themes and preoccupations. These preoccupations the editors call "the rhetorical turn," alluding to Richard Rorty's 1967 The Linguistic Turn as well as to the stratagem of analysis explored in The Rhetoric of the Human Sciences (eds. Nelson, Megill, and McCloskey)—that of "turning" the turns or devices of rhetoric onto contemporary texts about language. Rorty is among the writers named most frequently throughout the essays, and his claim that philosophy can have no secure foundations or first principles could be called their organizing theme.

In a General Introduction which appears at the start of both volumes, Sills describes the rhetorical turn historically, as a "recrudescence of the ancient warfare waged ... between philosophy and rhetoric"; as the "confrontation of skepticism and scientific philosophy" that is a legacy of Kant; and as the recent "attempt to undermine the hegemony of positivism via a reconsideration of rhetoric." This daunting essay looks briefly at skeptical themes, tropes, and influences in rhetorical history, hermeneutics, and semiotics, ranging over vast territory and demanding familiarity with Kant, Hegel, Marx, and others.

But the volumes are intended to be introductory, "useful for the reader who has little prior knowledge of the 'rhetorical turn.'" To this end, the editors offer in Volume One focused and generally helpful introductions to each of four subsections: on science and pragmatism, the Frankfurt School, the Bakhtin Circle, and recent revivals of rhetoric. Within these sections, essays by established scholars introduce primarily individual thinkers: C.S. Peirce, Rorty, Adorno, Kenneth Burke, and others. Each offers a brief historical context, biographical data, and a reading of major concerns. In Volume Two, George Jensen introduces similarly author-centered essays on Lévi-Strauss, Lyotard, Gadamer, and others, under the headings of structuralism and poststructuralism, hermeneutics, and myth. A fourth and final
section is simply entitled "Feminism" and consists of a single, exemplary essay by Angelika Bammer on the issue of language in differing feminisms and women's movements.

Bammer's work stands as a re-reading and critique of all that has gone before in the two volumes, raising questions—questions that may be of particular interest to "the reader who has little prior knowledge"—about the construction of authority and exclusion in intellectual work. Bammer illustrates the potential for cultural analysis and resistance through the study of language, but also the ways in which authors and authority become complicit in the institutions and ideas they critique. That is, she shows concretely what difference differing theories make.

Scholars in composition studies, like and with feminists, have begun to theorize ways to use and resist authoritative philosophies, both in the pedagogical scene and in demonstrating the significance of their field. They will need to continue this creative work in approaching these volumes, which, it must be said, neither address the composition audience directly nor suggest bridges from the welter of philosophies of discourse to the culture of pedagogy. This is not the editors' intent. Four of the eighteen essays, however (including the excellent piece on Rorty by John Trimbur and Mara Holt, and a fine overview of the stages in Kenneth Burke's career by Joseph Comprone), contain notes or references to composing, composition, or composition journals. Others (especially Michael Shank and David Vampola's wonderful essay on responses to positivism), although not explicitly, provide historical contexts for terms now common in composition studies.

If the writers discussed in these volumes require introduction, it is because they are indeed authoritative voices in the humanities. But I found myself asking, for whom is the introduction—a leading in—designed, and for what purpose? Two of the essays (Charles Schuster's on Bakhtin, and Martin Donougho's on Derrida), which will repay patient reading, employ the convention of introducing by resisting introduction, showing that their theorists undermine the very notion. John Johnston, in his excellent essay on Lyotard, writes of Lyotard's interest in the way in which a text "positions the narrator, addressee, and referent." Similarly, Michael Kleine, in his essay on Walter Ong, quotes Ong's suggestion that writers must "construct—or 'fictionalize'—an audience." For me, the collection as a whole resists analysis of such positioning, and, as I read through it, I often wondered who I was supposed by the authors to be.

Some of the essays are extraordinarily well-written, even "good reading" (especially James Boon's piece on Lévi-Strauss, and Georgia Warnke's on Gadamer), while others use technical terms (deconstruction, discourse, logocentrism, the arbitrariness of the sign) without offering definitions. While explanations are usually provided elsewhere in the collection, the lack of an index makes them hard to locate. Hans Kellner, writing on Hayden White, offers a brief but much needed comment on conflicting uses of the
term discourse, which receives little direct attention throughout these volumes about discourse.

The section entitled "Russian Formalism, Prague Structuralism, and the Bakhtin Circle" contains no essay on Russian Formalism or Prague Structuralism, and its introduction focuses primarily on Bakhtin. Similarly, the section on "Myth, History and Discourse," consisting of an introduction and an essay by C.H. Knoblauch on Cassirer, slights discourse and, surprisingly, ignores current debates about the writing of history. By contrast, the section called "Science, Realism, and Pragmatism," which, I suspect, was the kernel of the whole project, forms a compelling overview and conversation, with each essay picking up issues and concepts from the others. I also admire "The Frankfurt School" (with essays by Sills, Lambert Zuidervaart, and David Ingram), which is well-placed after the section on Pragmatism.

In short, this collection is uneven, and its reasons for being a collection and for introducing are not apparent. Its uses will be varied and idiosyncratic. Composition scholars will most likely select essays—for there is much excellent work here—for graduate seminars or as bibliographic mines for their own research, according to inclination. To read the volumes straight through or as a short introductory course on theories of language, though, is unsatisfying.


Reviewed by Cynthia Haynes-Burton, University of Texas at Arlington

As the first book in the new MLA Research and Scholarship in Composition series, Writing, Teaching, and Learning in the Disciplines should hold a unique place among the histories of composition. Editors Herrington and Moran claim in their preface that writing across the curriculum/disciplines is a powerful movement, evidenced by recent surveys which found WAC/WAD programs in more than one-third of institutions surveyed. And they cite MLA's decision "to support and publish this volume" as further proof of the movement's power in higher education. And yet this may be the primary reason why this volume "should" hold a unique place among composition histories. That is, without the MLA's sanction, we are left to wonder how writing across the curriculum/disciplines or language-for-learning would ever have achieved "field" status, and we are expected to applaud MLA's move because it legitimizes an otherwise "flourishing" (read floundering), "diverse" (read fragmented) field. After reading this book, I found myself pondering the effects of institutional interests (university, state, and federal funding, and professional-association support) on writing pedagogy more than the effects of writing pedagogy on students. In fact, this book is not really