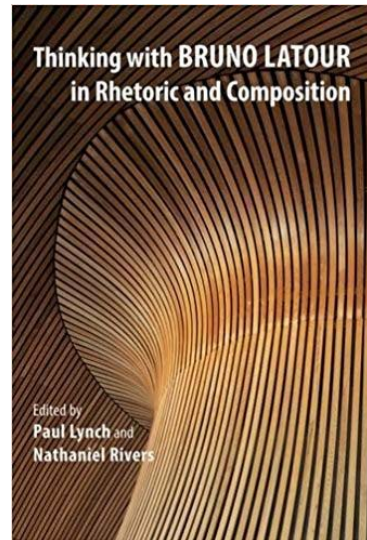


Paul Lynch and Nathaniel Rivers (Eds.), **Thinking with Bruno Latour in Rhetoric and Composition**, Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2015, 360 pp., \$45.00 (paperback).

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For Bruno Latour, writing is a mediator. It is an experience. Thinking is found through the process of writing, and thus writing is not merely notation, nor is it representation. It is humans, nonhumans, and the betweens that Latour invites us to pass through. In associations with no given shape, the various writers in this book each lay out a method. What joins them is writing, not as recording, but as flitting between text and knowledge. The book is set up as a listening and offering, a symmetrical encounter whose methodology demands that nonhumans are called up along with human actors. If until now Latour's view can be, at times, excessive, we find a ladder out when subject and object do not lie flat and cling to the rhetoric of incommensurability. Editors Paul Lynch and Nathaniel Rivers welcome the reader to this collection of essays contributed by 22 authors. They introduce themselves modestly, with a Latourian provisionality that begs for the participation of future scholars to address any shortcomings. Having come to Latour through *We Have Never Been Modern* (1991) and *Politics of Nature* (1999), as had authors of several of the essays, the networks breached in their selection of essays beg that those outside of Latourian scholarship critique the continual "under construction" modus operandi of Latourian research. Diplomacy does not prevent the charting of new territory.



Critique

"Latour reminds us that the religious modes ask not that we speak *about* religion but speak religiously, just as the political mode of existence requires us to speak not about politics but politically, not about science but scientifically" (p. 14). The book organizes 17 essays into five sections, each one titled around assemblages: constituting, conceiving, convening, composing, and crafting. Clay Spinuzzi proposes genre ecologies, to think about writing and how one might need a particular combination of texts to write: Some can be substituted, some associations cause disruptions, and so on. Such a methodology emphasizes how it is the texts themselves that mediate activity, rather than the other way around. Many of these essays center on writing and education or lay out case studies that demonstrate Latourian thought. The texts are not closed into a set system, and interrelations occur on varying levels.

Carl G. Herndl and S. Scott Graham assess Latour's nonmodern and materialist rhetorical theory in the context of new materialism and object-oriented ontology. Latour's rejection of epistemology in favor of an ontology that differs from other new materialists, given its inessential identity, collapses "the traditional distinction between substance and accident" (p. 45). Revisiting the distinction between "things"

and “objects,” Herndl and Graham look at the divide between Harman’s receding “risk-free” objects, in contrast with Latour’s “tangled objects” that belong to a flat topos of distributed agency. The risk-free objects lack a common measure—in other words, are incommensurable—hence Latour’s rejection of a metaphysics of substance. Their identity is changed through actants and occurrences in the collective, and there is no distinction between an essential identity and changing manifestation. For Latour, manifestation is identity, and an entity cannot be reduced to a prior essence. This foray contributes to the essay’s larger goal of accounting for the role of diplomacy, which involves engagement, an obligation to all in the collective. This obligation is one that sees that science and politics are not separate. Such a wager asks for a shared effort in valuing rhetoric as much as science or politics, through continued work to develop a rhetorical theory robust enough to face policy, democracy, and demonstration.

Given the commitment to blurring the lines between academics and politics, Santos and Zoetewey Johnson review the relationship between education, tenure, and promotion. In the tension of keeping job security while sustaining political protection, Latour’s nonmodern constitution is charted along with its relationship to Kant and higher education. The risks of integrating academic labor into the public sphere still demand that academics commit to political action. Laying out Kant’s framing of reason as public and private, Latour pivots a Kantian framework of Kant’s higher and lower orders: Higher faculty are seen as agents of government that must sanction research, while lower orders, Kant argues, should have autonomy over their research. For Latour, in the contemporary institution, these become enmeshed. Strategies are offered in a close look at an interdisciplinary college at the University of South Florida. Here, Twitter is used as a tactic that positions scholars of rhetoric to bring to action Latour’s project of integrating academics into life. Although merging theory and practice is a well-worn path, this essay provides a carefully written case study that takes on the difficult and familiar attempt to live and enact Latour’s project beautifully, as it performs itself the sacrifice of the purity of any modern constitution, to transform how we see the roles of the academic in the public sphere.

In the second section of essays, “Conceiving Assemblages,” Scot Barnett lays out a counterrevolutionary analysis of rhetoric, focusing on Aristotle’s discussions of *techné* and *phusis*. This dovetails with Latour’s positing of art and the natural not as segregated, from which it follows that a being’s kind is not easily discernible from another. Rather than positing nonhumans as a limit for rhetoric, Barnett activates Aristotle’s role as crucial in establishing a generative nonmodern approach in rhetoric’s history. Ehren Pflugfelder’s analysis opens deeper questions alluding to nothingness, as it concludes—following its titular question, “Is No One at the Wheel?”—that indeed “no *one* is ever at the wheel.” Agency is examined in line with Carolyn R. Miller’s work that sees kinesis as providing a productive way to see how agency is shared across humans and nonhumans, and hosted in various “constellations” of agents.

In part 3, “Convening Assemblages,” Thomas Rickert examines context and how Latour’s *dingpolitik* makes politics accessible to nonhumans along with humans, allowing room to consider better forms of decision making. Taste and wine are each an assemblage rather than an object, actants that “make claims upon us, in what we might consider a very subtle rhetoric” (p. 147; citing Miller, 2007). Taking on the persistent challenge of rhetoric and composition studies in the face of digital technology, in terms of knowledge and actants, Jeremy Tirrell’s essay considers the implications of memory, the benefits of forgetting, and cognitive shifts arising due to digital technology.

The essays of part 4 are most relevant for theories of writing as a practice. Marilyn M. Cooper examines Latour's guidance on writing, which interposes James and Whitehead, and posits his stance on writing as experimental—meant not to report, but as provisional and productive for new knowledge. Cooper asks, "What if they thought of their goal in writing as the direct perception of reality, rather than as defending a point of view?" (p. 193). Stripped of goal-oriented defense, writing becomes more than a tool for constructing. Cooper outlines an example of a student in research, and how the student might approach the assignment, creating an arena upon which statements are mediators involved in a path toward knowledge, rather than deciding factors in constructing an argument. Time is given ample room. There is no "final" or "complete" "story."

Casey Boyle's essay centers around writing studies as an ontological practice that unfolds not through "tracing things per se but through a kind of attitude or orientation toward what it traces" (p. 206). Writing as the most accessible form of composing is an opportunity to become a practice, a "rehearsal or performance of the ontological politics that compose a building" (p. 209). Writing exists here as a practice of relations repeating.

In "Flexible Assembly: Latour, Law, and the Linking(s) of Composition," Mark A. Hannah activates the argument by examining Latour's description of cases, those built by court reporters. These establish what is authorized and delimits the underlying connection between what allows a document to be activated and valid in purporting any claim. By focusing on what is useless information and what has been mobilized with a legal form, Hannah then compares this to how one can approach discovering other venues through which to put forward an argument. By stepping back to the first phase, where information itself is validated—into the building up of writing, of a report, of information, and preparatory stages—the author shows how these tasks involve demands for specific forms of behavior and language, for instance, documents that are consulted in tandem. The passing-through process of a case is instructive: "A case must walk like a case and talk like a case for it is only through language, form and operations of legal discourse that a case and its attendant texts can have any impact in a legal context" (p. 228).

In the same sense, he holds an expectation that students in research are attentive to how cases speak and travel in transdisciplinarity. While this may require more carefully examining data, and what surrounds them, how they come to be, and are built, it enables practitioners to find more possibilities for action and knowledge—a process of "problem setting" rather than solving, which is done collaboratively by "humans and non human actors in the system" (p. 226). The last section, "Crafting Assemblages," examines methodologies within Latour's Actor Network Theory (ANT) and cases of these in action across both social movements and field sites.

Of all the essays, the contribution by Sarah Read is singular in its demonstration of translation, of tracing associations as methodology, as in Latour's ANT, as she charts the work of a woman named "Judy," introducing in her actions, qualities, and intentions within a role neither commonly examined nor validated. For decades, American states have been asked to develop quality rating and improvement systems to raise the quality of child care above the minimum required for a license to operate a day care center. The official discourse within the state-sponsored model for child care quality rating and improvement is incompatible with the material experience of learning, as caretakers' identities and differences. The

nuances of each learning environment are diluted and abstracted by the official model. Read values and draws out the implications of Judy's role on the communications campaign: Among other accomplishments, she translated the text of the flyer into multiple languages, which was fundamental in reaching community members of diverse socioeconomic backgrounds—unlicensed caregivers outside of any system. Judy's textual resources and community events were not centered around formal curriculum and development but basic pillars of care, such as safety, health, play, interaction, and opportunities within these for "teachable moments." The brochure defines quality child care, enacted in Judy's meeting groups, which provided real applicable approaches for unlicensed caregivers to learn from the more official codes. Read brings light to the value in Judy's work, which could only have come from Judy's unique position in her community. We are touched by Read in turn, whose rhetoric is an unwavering and unrivaled contribution to the book. "Being connected, being interconnected isn't enough. It all depends on the sort of action that is flowing from one to another hence the words net and work" (p. 272). It is the work and the movement, and the flow, and the changes that should be stressed.

Conclusion

The relations between these texts may demand further scrutiny, which is difficult, given the caliber of some contributions that stand alone. While this summary does not account for the diligence of each of the essays, this book is fundamental for anyone who is up for its dense and generous activity.

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