

Rhetorical Bodies

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Habeas Corpus An Introduction

Hold a minute ear to the body.

Kenneth Burke, letter to Allen Tate
August 19, 1933

"Be careful what you say / when you make talk with words," warned the speaker of a Carl Sandburg poem addressed to a young child,

for words are made of syllables
and syllables, child, are made of air—
and air is so thin—air is the breath of God—
air is finer than fire or mist
finer than water or moonlight,
finer than spider-webs in the moon,
finer than water-flowers in the morning.

("Little Girl, Be Careful What You Say" 1-9)

Sandburg's simple words and images were chosen for their appeal to a youngster (he was rarely this bathetic), but within the sentimental metaphors is a serious and stereotypical attitude towards language—a conception of language as ephemeral, fleeting, invisible. As something immaterial, in other words. This notion of language as a transparent, insubstantial, neutral medium is still something of a tacit assumption in many quarters—a truism still too often barely worthy of mention, let alone refutation.

At the same time, especially during this period of social constructionism and a heightened awareness of the power of language to mediate perception, the brute fact of materiality has been shunted a bit to the side. At least in some communities—I'll take up some notable exceptions in a moment—a respect

for how reality is constructed by language has mitigated interest in what Maurice Merleau-Ponty called “the lived world.” Without essentializing too fervently distinctions between the material and the linguistic, we are nevertheless everywhere aware of the “rhetorical turn” in the sciences and humanities. This turn has helped to make fields from anthropology to zoology increasingly self-conscious about their disciplinary practices, particularly about their language practices, and it has consequently deflected scholarly attention from material realities and toward the way those realities are represented in text. In history, textualized accounts of historical events have come to count as much as the historical events themselves; in anthropology and sociology, cultures have been understood as intangible webs of discourses more than as aggregates of people and things, the substance of tangible realities; in studies of gender and ethnicity, the emphasis has been on constructions of identity through language and other symbol systems; in science, biology and chemistry and physics are now understood as collections of texts as much as they are efforts to engage and describe the physical world through discrete material practices. Things in themselves, consequently, are sometimes being reduced to a function of language: genes, genders, jeans, and genetics have all been reconceived recently through the prism of language. Words have been mattering more than matter.

And yet there are also episodes like the following to consider—episodes that presuppose a somewhat different attitude toward language itself and toward the relationships that abide between language and reality:

The Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, a protégée of Marcel Duchamp, confounded, fascinated, and frightened the New York artistic avant-garde in the first years following World War I. Some who knew her contend that she literally prepared a “body” of poetry by inscribing original verses on her torso; everyone agrees that her “dress” provoked the traditional lines demarcating the symbolic and the material. She favored unusual colors and habiliments, sported an inverted coal scuttle on her head, and shaved and shellacked her head and painted its two halves in contrasting colors. She applied metal teaballs and other implements to her breasts, while over her nipples she placed two tin tomato cans fastened with a green string tied around her back. She hung between the tins a small bird cage (complete with canary). Her hats were reputedly trimmed with gilded carrots, beets, and other vegetables. William Carlos Williams contended in his *Autobiography* that she once created a sculpture out of chicken guts under glass, and she placed her poems not only on her body but in the most interesting and arresting magazines of her day, notably in the *Little Review*, which carried a photo of her by Man Ray in 1920.¹

As he lay dying (or so he thought), John Donne imagined his body as a text being read by his physicians:

Whilst my physicians by their love are grown
Cosmographers, and I their map, who lie
Flat on this bed, that by them may be shown
That this is my south-west discovery
Per fretum febris, by these straits to die,

I joy, that in these straits, I see my west;

For, though their currents yield return to none,

What shall my west hurt me? As west and east

In all flat maps (and I am one) are one,

So death doth touch the resurrection.

(“Hymn to God My God, in My Sickness” 6–15)

The infamous public exhibitions in London and Paris of Saartje Baartman, the so-called “Hottentot Venus” (her original name has been lost), became a ground for the way sexual differences between “virtuous” European and “corrupt” African women were imaged and inscribed for more than a century. After her death in Paris in 1815, Baartman’s body remained on exhibit—incredibly, she remains in storage today in the Musée de l’Homme—with a clear persuasive intent: her corpse was reduced to its sexual organs and then displayed in order to tie her to the orangutan and to the sexual degeneracies associated therewith. This physical synecdoche, of a body reduced horrifically to genitalia that are then used to represent the whole, was soon followed by literal ones as scientists, writers, and artists rushed to figure the alleged voluptuousness, “primitivity,” and sexual lasciviousness of the black female by exaggerating the buttocks and other physical features in support of racist premises. Having dissected her, Georges Cuvier, then the greatest anatomist in France, described the Hottentot Venus as “apelike” and “monstrous”; and his famous (infamous?) nineteenth-century American counterpart, Paul Broca, used her to defend his own conclusions on race.² In the visual arts, Edouard Manet’s *Olympia* and *Nana* assume and perpetuate the values embodied by the Venus, as do Edwin’s Long’s epic canvas *The Babylonian Marriage Market* (1882) and Picasso’s *Olympia* (1902). In literature, the aspect of the Hottentot Venus peers out of Emile Zola’s novels *L’Assommoir* (1887) and *Nana* (1880), and shadows the pages of George Eliot’s *Daniel Deronda*.

A hundred years ago or so it was conventional for professional baseball teams to employ human mascots, usually to satisfy players’ superstitions; they were the precursors of batboys and those cartoon birds and beasts and Phanatics who appear at ball games today. Peteey Powers, a street urchin, served as the Cleveland mascot in 1903, and Buck Ewing (perhaps the best player of the nineteenth century) is seated next to a boy mascot in a well-known photo. The notorious bigot Adrian “Cap” Anson,

influential in establishing the color line in professional baseball, employed what he called a “coon” mascot, one Clarence Duval, for his Chicago White Stockings; he even took Duval along as his servant during a world tour sponsored by A. G. Spalding in the winter of 1888–1889. Ty Cobb, the equally bigoted “Georgia Peach,” sponsored “Lil’ Rastus” (real name, Ulysses Harrison) as the Detroit Tigers’ good-luck charm in 1909: hitters would rub his black head for luck before going to the plate. Many mascots were hunchbacks, their humps serving as the thing to rub for good fortune. Dwarf hunchbacks were especially appreciated: Louis Van Zelt followed Connie Mack’s Philadelphia A’s for many seasons, and the Yankees’ batboy Eddie Bennett appears next to Babe Ruth in photos from the late 1920s. The most famous such mascot, the misshapen and feeble-minded Charlie Faust, “pitched” the New York Giants to the 1911 and 1912 pennants (or so manager John McGraw thought) before being bested by Van Zelt in the World Series and henceforth banished to an asylum, where he died in 1915. Faust is textualized in Christy Mathewson’s magnificent *Pitching in a Pinch* (1912), and other mascots have appeared in print as well—for instance, in Billy Boxer’s novel for boys *Yale Murphy, the Great Short* (1894), Ring Lardner’s story “You Could Look It Up,” and E. L. Doctorow’s *Ragtime*. Perhaps the most extensive verbalization of the mascot hunchback appears in Zane Grey’s *The Shortstop* (1909), a juvenile novel that features the Horatio Alger-ish star Chase Alloway and the hunchback he befriends and sponsors, team mascot Mitti-Mar. In the novel’s final episode, Mitti-Mar is installed as the team manager for the championship game (after the manager loses his wits), leads his team to a comeback victory, and is hit on the hump by a wayward throw as the hero completes a game-winning inside-the-park homer.

All of these vignettes suggest others, of course. Mitti-Mar for some reason reminds me of his physical opposites—Arnold Schwarzenegger, Sylvester Stallone, Mariel Hemingway, and those other buffed bodies who appear in sports films—or even of the fantastic cyborgs who populate science fiction and film. The real-life Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven resonates with the calligraphic lovers and other characters in Peter Greenaway’s haunting 1996 film *The Pillow Book*, all of whom take literally French feminists’ exhortation, “Write the body!” John Donne’s self-analysis of his own torso anticipates the fascination with the body that is evident in any number of poems today. Saartjie Baartman speaks on her own behalf in a striking contemporary poem by Elizabeth Alexander that is called “The Venus Hottentot”³, from a position on Cuvier’s dissecting table, she speaks back to him and to us:

If he were to let me rise up
from this table, I’d spirit

his knives and cut out his black heart,
seal it with science fluid inside
a bell jar, place it on a low
shelf in a white man’s museum
so the whole world could see
it was shriveled and hard,
geometric, deformed, unnatural.
(112–20)

Episodes like these have already begun to gather critical commentary about them, as my notes and asides suggest. Recent work in many fields, especially but not exclusively under the impulses of postmodernism and poststructuralism, have come to challenge the centering of subjectivities in the mind and have made the body and the material a focal point of their considerations. Leaders of the women’s movement during the 1970s instigated discussions of the body and its ideological deployment, and in the 1970s and 1980s their analyses broadened—often under Marxist imperatives—to account for material conditions. Those discussions persist today in the work of feminists, both French and not so French (e.g., Luce Irigaray and Helene Cixous; Iris Young and Susan Bordo); very recently Judith Butler’s work on performativity and the body, wrung out from speech act theory, deconstruction, and phenomenology, has been especially influential. In philosophy, post-Nietzscheans have been puzzling out one or another concept of the human subject and the embodied consciousness ever since Merleau-Ponty developed his version of phenomenology, and Jean-Paul Sartre in a famous passage in *Nausea* imagined one of his characters as drenched in the material: witness Elizabeth Grosz’s recent accounts of the representation of women’s bodies in texts, Nancy Tuana’s problematizations of gender distinctions, and the effort of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari to provide a positive account of the relations between bodily affect and capitalist production. Semioticians for over two decades have been reading bodies and material culture after the example of Roland Barthes’s *Mythologies* and *The Fashion System*. Sociologists, anthropologists, and those who work the terrain known as cultural studies (e.g., Dorothy Nelkin, Susan Lindee, Jennifer Terry, and Jacqueline Urla) have been capitalizing for some time on how Michel Foucault defined the body—especially in *Discipline and Punish* (1975)—as a central site for cultural inscription and social regulation, and on how he revealed the regulatory imperatives that underpin material conditions. Historians in the tradition of Foucault have been similarly interested by bodily matters recently; to cite just a few examples, I think of Charlotte Borst’s studies of the professionalization of childbirth in the decades before 1920; Robert Proctor’s accounts of the mass surveillance and control of human bodies in Nazi Germany; Londa Schiebinger’s recovery of the scientific visions of nature that embodied the sexual and racial tensions of the eighteenth century; and a fascinat-

ing study by Elizabeth Haiken of how cosmetic surgery has been shaped by the priorities of twentieth-century American culture. Scholars in law and political science (I think in particular of Nancy Fraser, but also of Vikki Bell) are uncovering the ways that discursive practices create, or fail to create, submissive and disciplined human subjects. In science studies, Donna Haraway and Evelyn Fox Keller have wondered over the issue of biological determinism and noticed how science has marked onto bodies (usually women's bodies) figures of inferiority drawn from brain size, skeletal structures, and reproductive organs. In literary criticism, scholars like Katherine Hayles and Susan Squier have exposed those figures in the fiction of this century. Scholars in ethnic and African American studies, in the visual arts, and in queer theory have offered work in the same line: I've already cited Sander Gilman and other contributors to "Race," *Writing, and Difference*, and the work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick interrogates the work of several pieces in this collection. Finally, a spate of miscellaneous and often sensational books and articles on individual body parts—buttocks, artificial hearts, noses, skin, breasts, penises, clitorises, feet, hair, and prostheses—have emerged regularly in the 1990s.

This book speaks to all of that prior work and to similar work by many other people. It is an effort to bring rhetorical studies to bear on issues of materiality and, in turn, to contribute a rhetorical perspective to work in other fields that it self has a material perspective or aim. After all, the four vignettes I presented earlier are undeniably rhetorical events of one kind or another. The Baroness presented her physical body as a rhetorical act in order to unsettle the relations between art and life; John Donne literalized a bodily experience into poetry for a devotional aim; the real-life Hottentot Venus and the real-life mascots were living bodies that came to bear ideological freight which writers then translated into text for additional social purposes. All the vignettes are material, embodied events, but they all involve language practices as well. The deployments of language—that undeniable power paradoxically regarded usually as ephemeral, Will-o'-the-wisp—in those vignettes all testify to the fact that language is not really so whimsical, so immaterial, after all. Language and rhetoric have a persistent material aspect that demands acknowledgment, and material realities often (if not always) contain a rhetorical dimension that deserves attention: for language is not the only medium or material that speaks. The factory and assembly line, the prison and the hospital and school, as Marx and Foucault have taught so well, have explicitly coercive functions that rehearse the highly persuasive if less overt ways in which other material realities, cultural practices, and physical bodies shape and persuade. And rhetoric and writing teachers, whether they have read Foucault or not, know all too well how material circumstances—their students' jobs, their institutions' regulations, their colleagues' part-time status, or the specific local imperatives that govern each ed-

ucational site—speak to their students as forcefully as their own pedagogical advice.

This recognition of the presence of a material dimension in rhetoric and of the rhetorical dimension in the material is, as I have mentioned, in large measure a consequence of postmodern and poststructural turns in rhetorical thought. As postmoderns have come to challenge the centering of subjectivities in the mind, the body has naturally become a more focal point of rhetorical inquiry. While it is true, as Burke was explaining from the first moments of social constructionism, in his *Permanence and Change* (1935), that people can never get outside the constructions and conventions of discourse, it is also true (as Burke noted in the same book) that neither can we construct ourselves outside the materiality of everyday life: "The universe is not merely the product of our interpretations. For the interpretations themselves must be altered as the universe displays various orders of recalcitrance to them. . . . Our calling has its roots in the biological, and our biological demands are clearly implicit in the universal texture" (256). Nevertheless, material moments of rhetorical action like the ones I have described have largely remained beyond the reach of rhetoricians, who have traditionally (and understandably) been most attentive to oral and written discourses, narrowly conceived. Even though rhetoric has long been concerned with the situatedness of literate acts and the real effects of discourse rather than with ideal possibilities, the relationship of rhetorical events to the material world that sustains and produces them has not often enough been fully elaborated or clearly articulated. True, there have been starts in the direction of a material rhetoric. Celeste Condit, Barbara Biesecker, Cheryl Glenn, Susan Jarratt, Jan Swearingen, and others have concerned themselves with embodiments of the feminine in the rhetorical tradition. Understanding the material conditions surrounding the production and consumption of texts has been the project of Steven Mailloux. The virtual body has come under the scrutiny of Christina Haas, Lester Faigley, and others. A number of rhetoricians, after the example of Judith Butler, are delineating the complex relations that hold between rhetorical force (persuasion) and one or another kind of body, and Carole Blair has been studying the embodiment of public memory.

Nevertheless, those starts have only been starts, and so this collection of essays attempts to steer rhetoric more firmly in the direction of those elaborations and articulations. It is a sustained meditation on material rhetoric in both senses of the term—a meditation on the material aspects and groundings of language as rhetorical action as it is traditionally conceived, and on the rhetorical nature of material realities, whether they are literate realities or not. Without opposing too firmly the material and the literate, 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 speech or some other physical form), and the book accordingly sustains two complementary general propositions. First, the contributors insist that material, nonliterate practices and realities—most notably, the body, flesh, blood, and bones, and how all the material trappings of the physical are fashioned by literate practices—should come under rhetorical scrutiny. Second, they demonstrate how literate practices—the speeches and texts that are the traditional staple of rhetoric, as well as the ads and virtual spaces and languages associated with the new media—ought to be understood in the serious light of the material circumstances that sustain or sustained them.

Drawing on and contributing to fields as various as the rhetoric of science, body studies, cultural studies, feminism, historiography, and literacy studies, the following chapters consider and reconsider many terms and issues traditionally employed in rhetorical studies. If the question of materiality has indeed been deferred in rhetoric, why is that so? What barriers have stood in the path of articulating a more material rhetoric? How would a material rhetoric permit us to rethink what is, and what is not, the province of rhetoric? How does a “material” notion of rhetoric contrast with “idealist” notions? What is the fit between particular rhetorical theories and the material, historical events that generated them? In what ways is rhetorical theory tied to the circumstances of physical embodiment? How might the articulation of a material rhetoric force us to reconceive rhetorical entities like “speaker,” “writer,” “arrangement,” and “audience”? What does it mean to speak of “deliberative bodies” or “the body politic”—especially at a time when audiences might be conceived of as porous and contingent, as consisting of multiple, temporary, even conflicting groups? If the concept of “place” (*topos*) has been important in rhetorical affairs, how might that concept be reinvigorated today in material terms, particularly when metaphors of space, place, and geography (e.g., “fields,” “domains,” “sites,” “lines of argument,” or “maps”) are so pervasive? Should something substitute for the notion of the “material” that has prevailed under the aegis of Marx? If “materialism” now takes us to bodies and to tangible physicality instead of to Marx, what happens to Marxist categories? Just what is so “corporate” about the corporation or about other contemporary sites (civic, academic, commercial) for writing and representation? Where is memory embodied in our cultures, and how is public memory shaped by material practices and structures? How do new literacy technologies, especially electronic ones, affect our understand of rhetoric and literacy? How do those technologies force us to reconceive our notions of text, author, audience, and delivery? How might postmodern notions of materiality and the body affect our understanding of pedagogical practices designed for the “student body”? And how will material rhetorics delineate ethics for a culture confronting material crises in public policy: the politics of race and ethnicity; the issues related to “family values” that revolve

around sexual and gender identities; or the choices revolving around reproduction, DNA codings and genome projects, and the spread of disease?

Contributors to this volume do not address all these questions, nor are these all the questions that might be asked. But together the chapters represent the range of work that might be possible—and the range of methodologies that might be brought to bear—on the subject of material rhetoric. Carole Blair begins by “offering some tentative openings” (in her words) to the concept of “material rhetoric” while grounding her points in a sustained rhetorical analysis of five memorial sites in the United States—the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, the AIDS Memorial Quilt, the Civil Rights Memorial, the May 4 Memorial at Kent State University, and the Witch Trials Tercentenary Memorial. Extending what might be considered “text” to physical slate and stone, she offers a method for further studies of landscape and landmark. In chapter 3, Susan Wells inquires into an unusual particular “pleasure of the body”—the satisfaction of dissecting a human cadaver—as that pleasure was enjoyed and then described by nineteenth-century women physicians. Working at the advent of modern therapeutic practices and anatomical studies, and under different ideological frames of reference from those that directed Cuvier’s dissections a century earlier, Hannah Longshore and other pioneer graduates of the Women’s Medical College of Pennsylvania satisfied an appetite for uncovering the mysteries of the body that they had developed by reading representations of the body in nineteenth-century fiction.

Wells’s chapter is the first in a series of reports on and about archival research. Picking up on Wells’s renderings of autopsy, Christine De Vinne in chapter 4 offers what she calls a “forensic necropsy.” She exhumes and anatomizes the wrenching details of the 1846–1847 Donner Party and its lapse into cannibalism—textualized as it was into letters, diaries, songs, poems, newspaper accounts, interviews, travel books, fictions, advertisements, and other genres—as a nearly inevitable expression of the discourses of territorial expansion that prevailed in the decades before and after the Civil War. In chapter 5, Karyn Hollis accounts for what she found in the records of the Bryn Mawr Summer School for women of the 1920s and 1930s: poems by summer-school students that inscribed working-class conditions, gendered identities, and a tangible sense of how working-class bodies, especially female ones, are disciplined by culture and class. Wendy Sharer in chapter 6 alerts scholars (rhetorical scholars especially) to how authoritative accounts of rhetorical history depend on materials that are currently deteriorating in precarious museum and library collections, and to how political, ideological, and social considerations govern what will persist and what will perish. Sharer’s passionate call for action, directed to scholars and scholarly associations, not simply to librarians and administrators, resonates particularly clearly given that her call follows

three chapters (and precedes another) that demonstrate what archival research can do for rhetorical studies.

The next four chapters further interrogate the figurings of bodies in texts. In chapter 7 Peter Mortensen, in a manner that parallels the work of Schiebinger and Haraway, assesses how “rustic bodies” were represented as illiterate between 1880 and 1920 in order to evidence their alleged creeping racial degeneracy. Those representations, in fiction, government reports, and popular media, through their resonances with the evolutionary sciences of their day, typically depicted illiteracy as endemic to rural life, and they had the continuing effect of undermining literacy education efforts in rural communities. Lester Faigley in chapter 8 considers the materiality of text itself. He surveys the relation of images and words in texts from antiquity to the World Wide Web—in the process problematizing the grand narrative of alphabetic literacy as a legacy of the Greeks—in order to demonstrate how literacy practices have always had a material dimension, and how that materiality is figured today in electronic media. John Schilb in chapter 9 takes up the “psychological materialities” implied by modern pharmacology. In particular, he wonders (by means of an analysis of several recent memoirs such as Susanna Kaysen’s *Girl, Interrupted*, William Styron’s *Darkness Visible* and Lauren Slater’s “Black Swans”) how the invention of Prozac and similar drugs will figure into the rhetorics and “subjects” of autobiography in the future. In chapter 10, Christina Haas shows how texts can be interpreted fruitfully in light of the material conditions that articulate them—in this case, the material conditions attendant on an urban abortion clinic. In the process she interrogates the commonly expressed distinction between “public” and “private” spaces.

Schilb’s and Haas’s chapters—his because it concerns material bodies, and hers because it turns on a thick ethnographic description of a material site—redirect the collection to an explicit consideration of the rhetoric of the human body and other specific material entities. J. Blake Scott in chapter 11 accounts for the rhetorical materialities associated with the physical assemblage known as the Confide home collection HIV testing system—the testing kit, the supporting documentation, the “needy bodies” that use the system, even the credit cards and phone calls used to pay for the kit. He develops from that account a patient cultural and rhetorical analysis of some of the literate discourses surrounding the product, including hearings and testimony about Confide and advertisements for it, that illuminates how technoscience these days is shaped, mobilized, consumed, and negotiated in different public forums. Melissa Jane Hardie in chapter 12 maps in rhetorical terms the cultural phenomenon of the “beard” (a woman or man who disguises the sexual interest of his or her partner) with reference to its instantiations in persons who bearded for Malcolm Forbes, Rock Hudson, and Liberace. The chapter discloses how the beard functions today in various media as a material signifier operating within complex

and contradictory rhetorics of disclosure and orientation. Barbara Dickson’s chapter 13 takes up a case representing the pregnant body: Did the photo of a nude, pregnant Demi Moore on the cover of *Vanity Fair* somehow liberate the feminine body, or was it just another case of exploitation of the female form? Dickson considers the matter by saturating the cover in other texts and photos and thinking carefully through the implications of “a material rhetoric.”

The book concludes with increasingly theoretical discussions of the questions related to material rhetoric that were opened by Carole Blair. Christina Haas is intrigued by theoretical formulations that have converged about terms like “public” and “private”; Scott and Hardie also extend the theoretical efforts of Nancy Fraser, Eve Sedgwick, and Judith Butler; and Dickson’s chapter is motivated primarily by a theoretical interest in what kind of “thing” a material rhetoric is and what it can do. Yameng Liu in chapter 14 offers an analysis of political advisor Dick Morris’s role as a rhetor-for-hire during the 1996 presidential campaign, but his real interest is the theoretical issue the case embodies: Can a sophistic rhetor like Morris, a person as tough to defend as Gorgias’s Helen, be exonerated on ethical grounds? Is a sophistic rhetoric possible, or even desirable, in today’s public sphere? Celeste Condit in chapter 15 explores the tension between the materiality and immateriality of rhetoric through the analogous case of DNA, itself figured as both material and not; she attempts to bridge materiality and idealist notions of language and rhetoric. The ambitious exploration takes her into encounters with contemporary language philosophers and poststructuralists (e.g., Derrida and Foucault), experts in science and science studies (e.g., Richard Lewontin and Evelyn Fox Keller), and rhetorical theorists (e.g., Kenneth Burke and Michael McGee); ultimately she arrives with a use of DNA coding as a model for how material rhetoric might be understood to incorporate both gross physical corporeality and the social and material act of “coding.” Finally, Sharon Crowley concludes the book with a reflection on the contents that focuses on the slippery difficulties of mediating between body and identity. She and Condit, as well as the other contributors, offer no small opportunities for further work on the subject, both theoretical and applied. Their aim is to invigorate rhetorical studies with their theoretical and material stories and with their various methodologies and approaches, and to demonstrate concretely what rhetorical studies might offer to others who are interested in corporal works and in the webs of literate renderings that surround them.

That mention of the web brings me full circle. When Carl Sandburg figured language in the poem I quoted to begin this chapter, he used the metaphor of a spider’s web because he wished to convey a sense of language’s immateriality. But the metaphor can cut another way. In a well-known and eloquent paragraph (at the beginning of chapter 3 of *A Room of One’s Own*—“Shakespeare’s Sister”), Sandburg’s contemporary Virginia Woolf used the same metaphor.

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After wondering pointedly about "the conditions in which women lived"—conditions that, she felt, ground the invention of discourse—she too compared writing to "a spider's web, attached ever so lightly perhaps, but still attached to life at all four corners. . . . When the web is pulled askew, hooked up at the edge, torn in the middle, one remembers that these webs are not spun in midair by incorporeal creatures, but are the work of . . . human beings, and are attached to grossly material things, like health and money and the houses we live in" (43–44). Webs of discourse and their anchors in the material, the work of human beings: these are the subjects of *Rhetorical Bodies*.

Notes

1. Freytag-Loringhoven's life is summarized accessibly by Cary Nelson (267–68); Williams's account of her is on pages 164ff. Born Elsa Ploetz in Germany in 1874, she came to the United States about 1910 with her second husband, who abandoned her. In 1913 she married Baron Freiherr Freytag von Loringhoven and resettled in Germany; she removed to New York City about 1920. In 1923 she returned to Germany; she moved to Paris in the mid-1920s, and then died suddenly, perhaps a suicide, in Paris in 1927. Her papers, which include an autobiography and records associating her with Djuna Barnes, are housed in the McKeldin Library, University of Maryland. I also noticed several unusual 1922 letters from her to Joseph Freeman (then editor of *The Liberator*) in the Freeman Papers at Stanford, a fantastic archive of materials related to the American political Left.
2. Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man*, 85–87. My account of the Hottentot Venus and her cultural impact derives from Gould, from Schiebinger (160–72), and especially from Sander Gilman's remarkable "Black Bodies, White Bodies," which also shows how the Hottentot Venus became literalized in works by Freud and Darwin.
3. For drawing my attention to the Hottentot Venus and pointing me to the poem "Venus Hottentot" by Alexander, I thank Linda Selzer.

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