



The Shape of the Signifier: 1967 to the End of History

Walter Benn Michaels

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The Shape of the Signifier is a critique of recent theory--primarily literary but also cultural and political. Bringing together previously unconnected strands of Michaels's thought--from "Against Theory" to *Our America*--it anatomizes what's fundamentally at stake when we think of literature in terms of the experience of the reader rather than the intention of the author, and when we substitute the question of who people are for the question of what they believe.

With signature virtuosity, Michaels shows how the replacement of ideological difference (we believe different things) with identitarian difference (we speak different languages, we have different bodies and different histories) organizes the thinking of writers from Richard Rorty to Octavia Butler to Samuel Huntington to Kathy Acker. He then examines how this shift produces the narrative logic of texts ranging from Toni Morrison's *Beloved* to Michael Hardt and Toni Negri's *Empire*. As with everything Michaels writes, *The Shape of the Signifier* is sure to leave controversy and debate in its wake.

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