LIT 6934 “Rhetoric and the New Materialism” Spring 2020

3:30-6:15 in CPR 257

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Office Hours: Tuesday 2:30-3:30 and by appointment

**About the Course**

In the last few years rhetoric has engaged with a number of ideas from the intellectual movement known as the “new materialism” and developed what many in rhetoric call “object-oriented rhetoric.” This movement has challenged basic rhetorical assumptions such as the assumption that rhetoric is a uniquely human project and that the rhetoric of science is focused on epistemic questions. New materialism has strong roots in political theory and philosophy, (e.g. Jane Bennett and Heidegger) and in materialist science studies (e.g. Latour, Barad, Pickering, Mol), and we will read from these fields. This course begins with some of the early texts that most clearly articulated the theory of new materialism and then explores the theoretical and practical opportunities opened to rhetoric through reading recent articles and collections in rhetoric. The course is organized by a series of questions that lie at the intersection of rhetoric, science studies and new materialism:

-- How does a renewed interest in the material and in “things” alter our understanding of rhetoric, of rhetorical ethics and of the rhetoric of place or “dwelling”?

-- What does it mean to understand science as a material practice rather than an epistemic project? As a *doing* rather than a *finding* or *discovering*?

--What are the implications and possibilities opened to rhetoric (both in theory building and in rhetorical practice) by various versions of new materialism?

--How has the object-oriented rhetoric associated with new materialism shifted what rhetoric does and what we study?

**Work**

**Reading and talking (45%)**: There is a lot of reading in the course. None of it is easy, and most of it will be new to you. So, your biggest single piece of work in the course is doing all the reading and coming to class prepared to discuss it with the group. While there are specific things I want to say about each reading, a lot of our discussion will be guided by your questions, comments and interests. For that to work, you all need to have done the reading, have questions or ideas you want to discuss, and be willing to share ideas and insights with the other students. I think you learn best by talking about the materials rather than passively listening to me lecture.

I expect everyone to be in class and to talk every week. Missing classes and being silent in class will lower your final grade significantly. If you are always present, but do not talk, or talk only very rarely, your participation grade will be B. That makes it very difficult to get an A in the course if you do not talk regularly and substantially**.**

**Writing (45%)**: The second part of your work will be a substantial piece or pieces of writing. Since some of you are completely unfamiliar with this material while others will have read greater or lesser parts of it, I will let each of you determine what purpose and form your writing will take. Think about what form of writing is going to be most useful for you and write me a proposal in the form of a “writing contract”: what will you write? What purpose does it serve for you? how long will it be? when will I get it? Ph.D. students should aim at 15 pages for a continuous argument; MA Students 10 pages. Since reading logs are not continuous or new argument, they should be longer (in total). Reading logs Ph.D. students should run 20-30 pages. For MA students they should run 15-20 pages. One Caveat: all papers and logs have to be about the materials and topics in this class. Writing contracts are due Tuesday, 4 February.

(Reading logs are a way to clarify and organize your understanding of the texts, establish connections between the reading and other readings both in this course and elsewhere, and create a resource to which you can turn later should you return to the topic or text. A reading log should

1. identify and explain the major ideas and concepts in a text or group of texts,

2) establish connections between these ideas or theories and other things we read, and

3) build some form of meta-discursive perspective on the theory, author, concepts: what kind of theory/idea is this? What can I do with this idea? What are its implications or consequences? How does it fit into the field generally?

Not every reading log entry will do the second and third of these things, but you should work toward this, especially as we get further in the semester and you have more background.

You can organize your reading logs however you find most profitable. You do not need to write about everything we read. Concentrate on things you find interesting, relevant or useful. **Reading logs are due within a week of our discussing the material in class.**  That way the material is fresh in your mind and in mine. I will read every log and give you written feedback.

**Class Presentation (10%):** Each member of the class will lead the class discussion on a reading of their choice once during the semester. You may choose from any of the readings listed on the syllabus. Typically, we will organize this at the beginning of each class before we start discussing the day’s assigned reading. The length and style of the presentations will vary depending on the length of the reading selection and the presenter’s preferences. That said, each presentation should do the three things described above for reading logs as much as possible, and it should place the author or work in context for the class. If you want to present on one of the longer books, you can concentrate on a specific chapter or chapters as long as you put them in the context of the rest of the book. You should expect to answer questions and guide the class discussion of the reading. You should also prepare a one-page (500 word) handout for the class that summarizes your presentation and presents possible discussion questions. **Do not read your handout to the class as your presentation.** The handout is a resource for you and the other students. It is not a script. People will learn more from informal discussion than from being read at.

**Grades**

Your final grade will be determined by your participation in the class discussions (45%) your class presentation (10%) and your written work (45%). I will give you brief feedback and a grade after your class presentation, and I will be happy to talk about how your participation is going at any point. The last day to turn materials in will be the day scheduled for the final exam. Also, I assign “plus” and “minus” final grades.

**Course Policies**

**Inclusion Statement.** I believe in the value of diverse learning spaces. As such, this class will value and respect those of diverse backgrounds including but not limited to: gender, sexuality, disability, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, culture, and religion. Please be sure to inform me of what name and pronoun you want to go by. I will make every effort to ensure that an inclusive environment exists for all students. If you have concerns or suggestions for improving the classroom climate, please do not hesitate to speak with me.

**University policies:** <https://www.usf.edu/provost/faculty/core-syllabus-policy-statements.aspx>

**Attendance** I expect you to be in class and engaged in discussion every week. This is often difficult material, and you’ll learn more if you are in class working at it every day. Everyone has a complicated life and missing one or even two weeks of class is unfortunate, but won’t hurt your grade if you are participating well otherwise. After you miss two classes, I’ll lower your course participation grade by a full letter for each absence. If you have a medical situation that causes you to miss a lot of classes, please talk with me and we’ll see how we can accommodate your situation.

**Students with a disability** and thus requiring accommodations are encouraged to consult with the instructor during the first week of class to discuss accommodations. See Student Responsibilities: http://www.sds.usf.edu/Students.htm. Each student making this request must bring a current “Memorandum of Accommodations” from the office of student Disabilities Services. I will accommodate your specific needs as much as possible and keep these arrangements confidential. If you have a disability that makes it difficult for you to leave the building in case of emergency, please let me know.

**You are excused from class** for major observances of your religion. Inform the instructor at the beginning of the term when you expect to be absent for these events.

**Plagiarism** See http://www.usg.usf.edu/catalogs/0405/adap.htm for *USF Undergraduate Catalog's* definitions and policy, and consult with the instructor if you are uncertain. Essentially, plagiarism refers to using another writer's words or ideas without proper citation. This boils down to doing your own work and giving credit to others when you copy and use their words. You can’t copy and paste materials from the web into your writing without acknowledging the source of the materials. And buying a paper off the internet is the equivalent to an academic felony. **If I catch someone plagiarizing, I will give them an “F” in the course and turn them over to the university’s disciplinary mechanism.**

**Electronics in class** Many of you will work on a laptop computer in class; it is a useful tool. People take notes and do on-the-spot research during class discussion on their computers. Use your computer as a in-class resource and please be considerate of those around you.

Similarly, please observe cell phone etiquette. If you absolutely have to take an emergency call during class, please go outside the classroom. I realize that you guys have lives and emergencies do happen. Some of you have kids (I do) or take care of elderly parents or an ill partner. But, please, don’t disrupt class with personal phone calls or a lot of texting. There will be at least one class during which my sixteen year old daughter will be walking home from school to an empty house, and I ask her to text me both when she leaves school and when she is home. I’ll minimize the disruption and I apologize in advance.

**Schedule**

Tuesday 1/14 Coole and Frost. “Introducing the New Materialisms” (1-39)

 Herndl & Graham. “Getting Over Incommensurability” (40-58)

 Graham. “Introduction” *Politics of Pain* (1-22) (81 pages)

Tuesday 1/21 Latour. *We Have Never Been Modern* (146 pages)

Tuesday 1/28 Bennett. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (134 pages)

Tuesday 2/4 Latour. “Why has Critique Run Out of Steam?”

Heidegger “Building Dwelling Thinking.” In *Poetry, Language, Thought*. (1971) pp. 143-161.

---. “The Thing.” In *Poetry, Language, Thought*. Pp. 163-186. (76 pages)

Tuesday 2/11 Rickert. *Ambient Rhetoric*: Introduction

(1-37), chapter 2 (74-98) chapter 5 (159-190) (94 pages)

Tuesday 2/18 Rickert. *Ambient Rhetoric* Chapter 6, 7, 8 & Conclusion (191-285)

Herndl & Zarlengo “Matters of Dwelling” *Social Epistemology.* 32.1 (2018) 41-62.

(117 pages)

Tuesday 2/25 Latour. *Reassembling the Social* Part I (1-156)(156 pages)

Tuesday 3/3 Latour. *Reassembling the Social* Part II (159-262) (103 Pages)

Tuesday 3/10 Barad. *Meeting the Universe Halfway*. Introduction, Chs. 1 & 3 (105 pages)

Tuesday 3/17 **Spring Break** 😎

Tuesday 3/24 Barad. *Meeting the Universe Halfway*. Chapter 4 & 5 (89 pages)

Tuesday 3/31 Haraway “Manifesto for Cyborgs”

 Haraway. *Staying With the Trouble (1-69)*  (102 pages)

Tuesday 4/7 Barnett & Boyle. *Rhetoric Through Everyday Things*. Introduction (1-14); Ch 3, Teston (42-54); Ch 5, Sackey & Hart-Davidson (69-82); Ch. 8, Graham (108- 122);

 Ch 13, Nicotra (185-196); Afterword, Rickert (226-231)

(78 pages)

Tuesday 4/14 McGreavy et al. *Tracing Rhetoric and Material Life*. Introduction (1-36) Ch 8, “Making Worlds with Cyborg Fish” (197-221);Ch 13, “Afterword: Working in an Ecotone” (343-354) (74 pages)

Tuesday 4/21) Cooper *The Animal Who Writes* Introduction (3-18); Ch 1 “Enchanted Writing” (19-44) Ch 5 “The Agency of Writing” (127-156); Ch 7 ‘Ethical Persuasion” (189-220)

(104 pages)

Tuesday 4/28 Class Cancelled for writing time