This course explores a emerging body of theory and research on what is called the “new Materialism” in Rhetoric, Science Studies, Political Theory, and Philosophy. Our work is organized by three questions that lie at the intersection of rhetoric, science studies and Rhetoric:

--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 rhetorical opportunities and challenges within new materialist theory for engaging science more effectively in politics and policy debates? How can science become more engaged in policy and address “matters of concern” to our society?
--What are the implications and possibilities opened to rhetoric--both in theory building and in rhetorical practice--by contemporary work in science studies, political science and feminism? More specifically, how is rhetoric engaging with the theory of the “Thing” and the new forms of materialism?

There are undoubtedly many ways to approach these questions, but I am going to organize our exploration around the work of Bruno Latour and the emerging movement known as “object oriented ontology.” Latour is perhaps the most prominent scholar in science studies and, at the risk of being reductive or omitting other important strains of the discipline, I am going to use his work to represent science studies. At least two other science studies scholars of similar theoretical position are Anne Marie Mol and Andrew Pickering whose work will figure as supplements to Latour’s. After we work through (some of) Latour’s central texts, we will examine similar developments in political theory and feminism. Finally, at various points in the semester, we will look at specific ways Latour and new materialism are beginning to emerge in rhetoric and technical communication.

**Mapping the questions to the readings**

The first question above-- What does it mean to understand science as a material practice rather than an epistemic project?--is a central question of science studies over the last 20 years. And this question occupies the first half of Latour’s career from *Laboratory Life* (1979), *Science in Action* (1987) *The Pasteurization of France* (1988), to *Aramis or the Love of Technology* (1996). It also leads science studies to the argument of “multiple ontologies” and “postplural” science studies, e.g. Anne Marie Mol *The Body Multiple*, Andrew Pickering *The Mangle in Practice* and *The Cybernetic Brain*. (see Graham and Herndl TCQ 22.2 (2013)). We will explore these issues with a couple selections from *Science in Action* and in reading *We Have Never Been Modern* (1993) and *Pandora’s Hope* (1999). In science Studies and more recently in rhetoric, the interest in tracing what scientists actually do and how
they do it, is the focus of what is known as ‘Actor Network Theory or ANT. This is
beginning to be reinterpreted in rhetoric as a research methodology.

The second question above—How can science become more engaged in policy and address
“matters of concern” to our society?—emerges from Latour’s realization that science and
science studies must be concerned with politics and policy. It is part of Latour’s response to
what he calls “ecocide,” the human destruction of the ecosystem and ourselves along with
it. This concern appears most prominently in about 2004 in his essay “Why Has Critique
Latour’s work on policy has been influential in political science and we will read this
emerging work in Braun, and Whatmore’s edited collection Political Matter: Technoscience,
Democracy and Public Life (2010) and Jane Bennett’s Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of
Things (2010). This is reflected in rhetoric by scholars such as Herbert Simons who argues
for a “reconstructive rhetoric,” and by rhetorical scholars arguing for ethics, especially
working from Levinas, e.g. Davis, Rickert, and Santos.

The third question above—What are the implications and opportunities for rhetoric in this
intersection?—has heretofore been a concern mostly for scholars in rhetoric of science and
technology, but has recently emerged into wider rhetorical circles. To explore this line of
research, we will read chapters from Thomas Rickert’s Ambient Rhetoric (2013), Paul
Lynch and Nathaniel Rivers’ Thinking with Bruno Latour in Rhetoric and Composition
(2015), and Dan Richards and Kristen Moore’s Posthuman Praxis in Technical
Communication (forthcoming).

Work

Reading and talking: There is a lot of reading in the course; none of it is easy; and most of
it will be new to you. So, the biggest piece of work in the course is doing all the reading and
coming to class prepared to discuss it with the group. 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. You cannot get an A in the course if you do not talk regularly and
substantially.

Writing: 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
15-20 pages for a continuous argument; MA Students 10-15 pages. Since reading logs are
not continuous or new argument, they should be longer (in total). For reading logs Ph.D.
students 20-30 pages, MA 15-20 pages. One Caveat: all papers and logs have to be about the
materials and topics in this class. One piece of advice: the more you link the reading logs to
other readings in rhetorical theory or rhetoric of science, the better sense of the field you’ll
have. Writing contracts are due Monday 2/1/2016.
On the first day of class, we will talk about alternative electronic and collective forms of writing that we might work on as a group: a class blog, a website with documents and annotations, a video of you all singing a chapter from *Pandora’s Hope* in Gregorian chant. I’d like to take advantage of electronic and collaborative opportunities and am happy to consider some reasonable alternative to traditional writing assignments.

**Grades**

Your final grade will be determined by your participation in the class discussions and your written work in equal proportions. The last day to turn materials in will be the day scheduled for the final exam.

**Books**


**Articles and book chapters**


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Heidegger on the Thing:


Graham on non-Heideggerian materialism. (see Caroline Gotschaulk Dreuske’s ARST 2016 paper for citation.)
Reading Schedule

1/11 Coole and Frost. “Introducing the New Materialisms” (1-39)
Herdal & Graham. “Getting Over Incommensurability” (40-58)

1/18 MLK Holiday

1/25 Latour. We Have Never Been Modern
---. “Opening Pandora’s Black Box.” Science In Action. (1-17)
---. “Tribunals of Reason.” Science in Action (179-214)

2/1 Latour. Pandora’s Hope chapters 1-5 (1-174)

2/8 Latour. Pandora’s Hope chapters 6-Conclusion (175-300)

2/15 Latour. “Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam?”
Rickert. “The Rhetorical Thing” from Ambient Rhetoric (191-219)
---. “Ambient Dwelling” from Ambient Rhetoric (220-245)

2/22 Rickert. “Attuning to Sufficiency” from Ambient Rhetoric (246-70)

2/29 Latour. Reassembling the Social 1-158

3/7 Latour. Reassembling the Social 159-262.

3/14 Spring Break


3/28 Bennett. Vibrant Matter (1-122)

4/4 Coole & Frost chapters: Grosz, Braidotti, Krunks
Barad. “Getting Real” & “Posthuman Performativity”


4/25 Open
Final Exam Date: Writing Assignment Due.