

Sensory Rhetoric

Sample Graduate Syllabus, Justine Wells

A growing body of scholars in disciplines from history to geography to architecture are attending to sensation in a new way. While a long tradition of thought has cast sensation as a natural, unvarying human experience, contemporary work in “sensory studies” increasingly suggests that sensation is an historically variant phenomenon. For these scholars and theorists, our sensory abilities and sensory habits are produced by and productive of our social worlds—our cultural conventions and artifacts, our technologies and customs, our modes of gender, race, and national identification. The senses, in other words, are rhetorical, shaping the worlds of which we are a part. And yet the highly rhetorical perspective on sensation offered by sensory studies, and the interdisciplinary collaboration it affords, has yet to be taken up in the field of rhetoric and composition. This course invites you to do just this. I ask that you bring to the course an area that interests you in rhetoric and composition. As we read both within and beyond our field, your job is to ask how the perspective of sensory studies might inform a problem in your area of interest. As a class, we will also speculate on what rhetoric and composition studies might have to offer existing work in sensory studies.

Course Goals

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

1. Articulate an area of interest in rhetoric and composition studies and connect that area with contemporary interdisciplinary work in sensory studies.
2. Describe many of the key insights of work in sensory studies and how those insights revise the traditions of the disciplines from which they originate.
3. Speculate as to how rhetoric and composition might inform problems and areas of inquiry in sensory studies.

Assignments:

1. **Annotated Bibliography (20%):** At about midterm, students will compose an annotated bibliography of a specific theoretical or practical focus in rhetoric or composition that interests them and that they believe attention to sensation can enrich (10-12 sources, with a critical introduction). For instance, work on ecocomposition, public memory objects, community literacy, technical communication, etc. Students will approve/brainstorm the topic with me beforehand, and we’ll devote a class meeting to discussion of each person’s topic and its potential to benefit from a sensorial approach.
2. **Sensory Ethnography (10%):** Based on our readings and viewings in sensory ethnography (we will look at both methodological work and extensive examples), students will experiment with a sensory ethnography related to the area of study they identified in their annotated bibliography. This low-stakes assignment can be in any form students find suitable—written, visual, filmic, web-based. Students will compose a post that analyzes the conceptual work of their piece, and we’ll set aside some class time to discuss/explore each person’s project.
3. **Final Paper (60%):** In the final paper (10-15 pgs for MA students, 15-20 pgs for PhD students), students will draw from our readings in sensory studies to make an intervention into the area of focus in rhetoric and composition they researched for the annotated bibliography.
4. **Weekly Reading Posts (10%)**

Course Plan

Wk 1. Introduction

- Howes, David. "The Expanding Field of Sensory Studies." <http://www.sensorystudies.org/sensorial-investigations/the-expanding-field-of-sensory-studies/>
- Classen, Constance. 1997. "Foundations for an Anthropology of the Senses." *International Social Science Journal* 153: 401-412.
- McLuhan, Marshall. "Inside the Five Sense Sensorium." *Canadian Architect* 6 (1961): 49-54.
- Ong, Walter J. "The Shifting Sensorium." *The Varieties of Sensory Experience*. ed. David Howes, Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1991. 47-60.
- Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." London: Penguin, 2008.

Wks 2-4. State of the Discipline: Rhetorics Affective, Material, and Sensorial

- Kennedy, George A. "A Hoot In The Dark: The Evolution of General Rhetoric." *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 25.1 (1992): 1-21.
- Edbauer, Jenny. "Unframing Models of Public Distribution: from Rhetorical Situation to Rhetorical Ecologies." *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 35.4 (2005): 5-24.
- Hawhee, Debra. "Sophistic Metis: An Intelligence of the Body," from *Bodily Arts: Rhetoric and Athletics in Ancient Greece* (U Texas: 2004).
- Davis, Diane. "Introduction: A Rhetoric of Responsibility," from *Inessential Solidarity: Rhetoric and Foreigner Relations* (U Pitt: 2010)
- Lipari, Lisbeth. "Listening, Thinking, Being." *Communication Theory* 20.3 (2010): 348-362.
- Ott, Brian L, and Keeling, D. Marie. "Cinema and Choric Connection: Lost in Translation As Sensual Experience." *Quarterly Journal of Speech*. 97.4 (2011): 363-386.
- Gallagher, Victoria and Zagacki, Kenneth. (2005). "Visibility and Rhetoric: The Power of Visual Images in Norman Rockwell's Depictions of Civil Rights." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 91:175-200.
- Finnegan, Cara A. "Communication as Vision." *Communication As...Perspectives on Theory*. Eds. Gregory J. Shepherd, Jeffrey St. John, and Ted Striphas. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2006. 60-66.
- Finnegan, Cara A. "Doing Rhetorical History of the Visual: The Photograph and the Archive." *Defining Visual Rhetorics*. Eds. Charles Hill and Marguerite Helmers. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2004. 195-214.
- Doyle, Julie. "Seeing the Climate? The Problematic Status of Visual Evidence in Climate Change Campaigning." In Dobrin, Sidney I, and Sean Morey. *Ecosee: Image, Rhetoric, Nature*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2009.

- Syverson, Margaret A. *Selections, The Wealth of Reality: An Ecology of Composition*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999
- Palmer, Heather. "The Heat of Composition." *Pedagogy*. 10.3 (2010): 491-509.
- Dobrin, Sidney I, and Christian R. Weisser. "Breaking Ground in Ecocomposition: Exploring Relationships between Discourse and Environment." *College English*. 64.5 (2002): 566-89.
- Hawk, Byron. "The Shape of Rhetoric to Come: Musical Worlding as Public Rhetoric." *Pre/Text* 20.1-4 (2010): 7-42.
- Rickert, Thomas "Music@Microsoft.Windows: Composing Ambience," from *Ambient Rhetoric: The Attunements of Rhetorical Being* (U Pitt: 2013)

Wks 5-6. Sensory Power: The Politics of Sensation

- Foucault, Michel. "Panopticism," from *Discipline and Punish*, (trans. Alan Sheridan). New York: Vintage Books, 1977.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *Selections, Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. (Cambridge: Harvard UP): 1984.

Rancière, Jacques. *Selections, The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*. London: Continuum, 2004.

Panagia, Davide. *Selections, The Political Life of Sensation*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2009.

Howes, David. 2005. "Hyperesthesia, or, The Sensual Logic of Late Capitalism." In *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader*, 179-191.

Schillmeier, Michael W. J. *Selections, Rethinking Disability: Bodies, Senses, and Things*. New York: Routledge, 2010.

Wk 7. Annotated Bibliographies

Class devoted to discussing annotated bibliographies

Wk 8. The Senses in Time: Sensory History

Smith, Mark M. *How Race Is Made: Slavery, Segregation, and the Senses*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006.

Classen, Constance. "A Woman's Touch," "Animal Skins," "Tactile Arts," "Sensations of a New Age," from *The Deepest Sense: A Cultural History of Touch* (University of Illinois Press: 2012).

Wk 9-11. The Sensing Scientist: Sensory Ethnography

David Howes and Constance Classen, "Doing Sensory Anthropology," <http://www.sensorystudies.org/sensorial-investigations/doing-sensory-anthropology/>

Pink, Sarah. *Doing Sensory Ethnography*. Los Angeles: SAGE, 2009. Print.

Kontos, Pia. 2006. "Embodied Selfhood: An Ethnographic exploration of Alzheimer's Disease." In *Thinking about Dementia: Culture, Loss, and the Anthropology of Senility*, 195-217. Eds. Annette Leibing and Lawrence Cohen. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press.

Sensory Ethnography Lab on Vimeo, <http://vimeo.com/selab>.

Centre for Sensory Studies at Concoria University: Exhibitions. <http://www.centreforsensorystudies.org/exhibitions/>

Due wk 11: Sensory Ethnography project

Wk 12. Building Sensation: Sensory Architecture and Urban Planning

Barbara, Anna, and Anthony Perliss. *Selections, Invisible Architecture: Experiencing Places Through the Sense of Smell*. Milano: Skira, 2006.

Pallasmaa, Juhani. *Selections, The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*. Chichester: Wiley-Academy, 2005.

Zardini, Mirko, and Wolfgang Schivelbusch. *Selections, Sense of the City: An Alternate Approach to Urbanism*. Montréal, QC: Canadian Centre for Architecture, 2005.

Wks 13-15. Sensory Ecologies: Sensation in Cognitive Science and Science Studies

Noë, Alva. *Selections, Action in Perception*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2004.

Clark, Andy. *Selections, Being There: Putting Brain, Body, and World Together Again*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1997.

Caballero, Rosario, and Vera J. E. Díaz. *Sensuous Cognition: Explorations into Human Sentience : Imagination, (e)motion and Perception*. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 2013.

Haraway, Donna J. *Selections, When Species Meet*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008.

Latour, Bruno. "From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik, or How to Make Things Public." In *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*. Ed. Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2005

Barad, Karen M. *Introduction, Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. Duke University Press Books, 2007.

Chamovitz, Daniel. *Selections, What a Plant Knows: A Field Guide to the Senses*. New York: Scientific American/Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012.