Rhetoric and Democratic Theory
COMM 6360/Social & Cultural Theory

Spring, 2016
Tuesdays, 3:30-6:00: Hellems 77

Prof. Peter Simonson
Department of Communication
University of Colorado Boulder

peter.simonson@colorado.edu
Hellems 95, 303-492-0718
Office Hours: T: 11-12/Wed 3-4 and by appt.

Since the first decades of the 20th century, the study of communication, rhetoric, and media have articulated themselves to democratic theory. These linkages have taken multiple forms, with democratic theory variably functioning as normative guide, critical resource, and ideological self-justification for communication inquiry. This seminar investigates and re-animates the longer conversation through historically informed readings of contemporary democratic theory and extensions of it in rhetorical studies. We will focus on four thematic clusters: crises of democracy and their communicative dimensions; pluralism and commonality as conditions and achievements; the constitution of publics and counterpublics through multiple rhetorical modes; and the bodily senses, sensibilities, and structures of feeling through which democracy takes shape.

The seminar will proceed on broadly historicist grounds, attuning itself to ways that formalized scholarly thought expresses wider ethico-political and cultural sensibilities of a given moment. It also operates with the understanding that democratic and rhetorical theory are part of ongoing intellectual conversations with present and past authors and texts. To those ends, we will devote the first four weeks of the class to revisiting the pragmatist-influenced, anti-foundational, modernist democratic theory of the first third of the twentieth century. Taking shape within contexts marked by both progressive hope for social reform and ideological and philosophical crisis, democratic theory advanced through figures like Mary Parker Follett, John Dewey, Alain Locke, and Walter Lippmann. To varying degrees, their writings have shaped intellectual conversations across a series of subsequent crisis and reform moments since 1968—from the challenges to authority and liberal consensus brought about by the New Left through the loss of faith in public institutions and grander metanarratives of progress, the rise of neoliberalism, the fall of Eastern European communism, and the ongoing challenges of addressing differences across lines of gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, religion, species, and ontology. In the final 10 weeks of the course, we will pick up this complex story in the 1980s, reading from influential political theorists and extensions of their work in contemporary rhetorical studies.
The course has several goals. For one, it aims to provide a general literacy in key problematics at the intersections of democratic and rhetorical theory. In so doing, it aims to deepen and enrich the invention resources through which students in rhetoric, communication, media studies, and allied fields conduct their critical, empirical, historical, and theoretical studies. Related, the course aspires to help graduate students prepare for comprehensive exams, move forward with thesis and dissertation projects, carve out freestanding conference papers and journal articles, and develop future courses to teach.

**Course Requirements**

Course requirements involve weekly participation and a final paper or comprehensive-style take-home exam.

a. **Participation** (40% of your final grade) means coming prepared to discuss the readings and engage in give-and-take dialogues with classmates. I like for everyone to be involved every class period. We will initially focus on understanding the texts and summarizing them in a charitable manner. From there, we’ll move on to evaluating and applying ideas. Always look for ways to draw attention to particular key passages in the texts and focus the group’s attention on these shared objects for the week.

Each class period, come in prepared to answer the following questions:

*For individual texts:*
- What is the project? (identify genre, scope, aspirations, assumptions, style, politics)
- What is the argument? (summarize claims, supporting reasons, evidence—be ready to do so in a way that you could
- What is useful in it? (imagine applications or uses of it—to what kinds of projects, in what ways, and to you specifically)
- What are its limitations? (conceptual, empirical, rhetorical, political, ethical, aesthetic—what criticisms can we make of it?);
- How does it compare to other works (put it into conversation with other texts and authors, draw out comparisons and contrasts).

*For the readings as a whole:*
- What are the key issues and concepts that cut across all the works? (if you were to boil down the week’s readings to their basic essence, what would you say? How would you complete this sentence: This week’s readings focus on _______.)
- What ideas particularly interest you this week? (come in with a question or topic for discussion to help set our agenda)
b. **Seminar Paper or Comps-Style Exam Question** (60% of your grade: 5% abstract, 5% final presentation, 50% paper). You will need to speak with Simonson (in February) and submit an abstract (by March 4). You’ll also be presenting it to the class, conference-style, during our last meeting in finals week. *(Note: the class will not meet during the last week of classes, giving you time to focus exclusively on your paper/take-home.)*

- **Option 1:** A 25-page seminar paper that meaningfully engages with issues and texts from the class. This can take multiple forms:
  - An *empirical paper or critical case study* that focuses on a particular object of interest to you and brings ideas from course readings (and perhaps beyond) to engage and makes sense of it.
  - An *interpretive paper* that aims to explicate the ideas of one or more authors and draw out their implications for your field of study.
  - A *theoretical paper* that takes up one concept or issue (e.g. pluralism, participation, dissensus, deliberation) and critically engages one or more authors in the service of developing a conceptual framework that could be applied to various objects of study.
  - A *literature review* focused on an issue or subfield broadly related to the class but including additional sources that prepare you for a thesis, dissertation, or comprehensive exam area.

- **Option 2:** *Comprehensive exam-style question.* Here, the Week 1 readings plus at least seven other weeks of your choice will serve as your “comps reading list.” In conversation with me, you will identify a thematic focus to guide a comps-style question about that list. I will give you that question the week of April 18 and you will have two weeks to write a 25-page answer to the question.

- **Abstract:** Write up a 250-word proposal (not counting bibliography) for your final project that does all of the following:
  - Identifies the central question and scope of your project
  - Discusses the significance of the project and what you hope to achieve in it
  - Sketches your tentative main claims, working argument, or hypothesis (if you are pursuing Option 1)
  - Provides a working bibliography of primary and secondary sources you will be drawing upon
Required Books


Articles will be available as PDF’s on the D2L site for the course.

Course Schedule

Introduction: Crises of Democracy in the Twentieth-Century United States

January 12: Democratic Crisis and the Study of Rhetoric in Two Eras


Modernism, Non-Foundational Democratic Theory, and Communication

January 19: Pluralism, Public Opinion, and the Interwar Crisis of Democratic Theory:

Walter Lippmann


January 26: Face-to-Face Communication, Communities, and Democracy as a Way of Life: Mary Parker Follett and John Dewey

Introductory material to the republication of Mary Parker Follett, *The New State: Group Organization the Solution of Popular Government* (1918; State College, PA: Penn State University Press, 1998), xii-lix:
- Benjamin Barber, “Mary Parker Follett as Democratic Hero”
- Jane Mansbridge, “Mary Parker Follett: Feminist and Negotiator”
- Kevin Mattson, “Reading Follett”


Dewey, “Creative Democracy: The Task Before Us” (1939)


February 2: Race, Art, and Democratic Politics: Alain Locke and W.E.B. DuBois


**Contemporary Currents I: Publics, Deliberation, Trust, & Listening**

February 9: On Publics and Counterpublics


Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” in Calhoun, ed., *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, 109-142.


**Meet with Simonson this week (Feb 8) or next (Feb 15) to talk about your final project for the course.**

Feb 16: Deliberative Democracy and Rhetoric


Week of Feb 23: NEED TO RESCHEDULE (Simonson in Germany) Civic Friendship, Trust, and Race in America: Danielle S. Allen


March 1: Democratic Listening: Andrew Dobson


**By 5:00 pm, Friday March 4: Submit a 250-word abstract of your seminar paper or a reading list for your comps-style question.**
Contemporary Currents II:
Agonism, Dissensus, and Radical Democracy in a Neoliberal Age

March 8: Agonistic Democracy and Hegemony: Chantal Mouffe
   Kevin Deluca, “Articulation Theory: A Discursive Grounding for Rhetorical Practice” (1999)
   Chantal Mouffe, The Democratic Paradox (London: Verso, 2000), xi-22, 80-107, 129-140:
   “Introduction: The Democratic Paradox”
   The first section of “Democracy, Power, and ‘The Political’”
   “For an Agonistic Model of Democracy”
   “The Ethics of Democracy”
   Mouffe, Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically (London: Verso, 2013), xi-18,
   “What is Agonistic Politics?”
   “Agonistic Politics and Artistic Practices”

Also: Brief presentations of final projects to the class.

March 15: Disagreement, Conflict, Aesthetics: Jacques Rancière

March 22: Spring Break

March 29: Democracy in a Neoliberal Age: Wendy Brown

Contemporary Currents III: Deep Pluralism and the Politics of Things

April 5: Deep Pluralism, Existential Faith, and Democratic Politics of Becoming:
   William Connolly
April 12: The Politics of Things and Animals: Bruno Latour, Jane Bennett, and others

Bringing it Together: On Rhetorical Citizenship in Light of Our Readings

April 19: Visions of Rhetorical Citizenship: A Forum Discussion

April 26: No Class—Work on Final Papers

Monday, May 2: Papers due to Simonson by e-mail by 12:00 noon.

May 3: Oral Presentations of Final Projects