

“Theory Matters”
CSLC 502: Introduction to Literary Theory
Natania Meeker
Fall 2017, Wednesday (2-4:50 PM)



Zoodram 4 (Recollection), 2011, Aquarium, hermit crab in the head of the sleeping muse (model of the Brancusi work), red lava rocks, arrow crabs, Ishikawa Collection, Okayama, Japan

Why does literary theory matter? We will explore this question as a problem not just of effect (or affect), influence, or impact, but of materiality itself. The primary and overarching aim of this course is to introduce students to some of the most significant methodological and/or conceptual approaches that have been generated and sustained within literary and critical theory. Throughout our discussions and readings we will be interested in how, why, and if theory “matters,” not just in its importance for our work as scholars, but in its ability to animate, galvanize, and mobilize materiality—to put matter to work as a concept and a thing. We will examine the role played by classic and classical materialisms—dialectical

materialism among them—in contemporary literary theory, and emphasize the work done by theories of materiality (and ideality) in structuring particular approaches to texts, including post-structuralist, psychoanalytic, anti-racist, and queer perspectives. Finally, we will pay attention to the way in which theories of media (and media ecology) are also theories of matter. The concluding segment of the course will take into account contemporary debates around “thing theory,” so-called “new” materialisms, science studies, and queer phenomenology, among other topics, as we examine the questions opened up by the entanglement of literary theory with materialist philosophy today. Authors we will study include: Karen Barad, Roland Barthes, Jane Bennett, Mel Chen, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Martin Heidegger, Bruno Latour, Sigmund Freud, N. Katherine Hayles, Donna Haraway, Karl Marx, and Plato.

This class is designed as part of the CSLC sequence on literary theory but is open to students from all departments. Please contact Natania Meeker at nmeeker@usc.edu if you are interested in joining us.