

ENG 682 4K Contemporary Criticism and Theory

Fall 2016

Tim Watson: watsont@miami.edu

319 Ashe: office hours Tu 10-12n, W 4-5, and by appointment

Description:

This class is a survey of some recent developments in contemporary literary and cultural studies, but it makes no claim to be comprehensive in its coverage or in its choice of readings. Topics to be covered include the new formalism; surface and distant reading and the turn to “description” over interpretation; digital humanities; world literature; ecocriticism; ethnic literary studies; queer theory; and critical university studies. At least one reading each week during the first nine weeks of the semester will be selected by students; the final three class sessions are deliberately left open for now, and we will work collectively to determine the best use of our time and attention during those three weeks.

Requirements:

Each week, one student will be responsible for assigning one additional article/book chapter/excerpt to our weekly reading and then for briefly introducing and presenting their chosen reading.

We will collectively determine the best ways to organize the planning for the final three weeks of the semester; this will necessarily involve group work, either in pairs, small groups, or the full class. While obviously I won’t be grading your participation in small group work, the ethics and practice of collaborative research, writing, and presentation are crucial aspects of this class—as they will be in whatever professional endeavors you undertake after your PhD. I hope we can create a vibrant, engaging model of collective teaching and learning over the course of the semester.

You have two options for writing assignments in this class.

1. *A traditional 20-page research paper.* If you choose this option, please begin thinking about and planning this paper well before the end of the semester. I am available to help with any and all aspects of this process: developing a topic; finding materials; writing and revising the paper itself.

2. *Two shorter research and writing projects, forms to be determined in consultation with me.* Possibilities include a combination of short research/position paper; annotated bibliography; conference presentation; sample syllabus with rationale; sample or actual grant/fellowship proposal; WordPress or other blog; multimedia presentation. Due dates to be determined, but one project in each half of the semester.

Reading/class schedule (all readings will be posted on Blackboard as PDF files or distributed electronically as email attachments).

8/24 **Introductions**

Franco Moretti, “Conjectures on World Literature”; Rita Felski, “Context Stinks!”; Jeffrey Williams, “The New Modesty in Literary Criticism”

8/31 **Form**

Caroline Levine, selections from *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (2015): introduction plus chapter on *The Wire*; view *The Wire*, season 1, episode 1, “The Target”

9/7 **Description**

Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, “Surface Reading: An Introduction”; James English, “Everywhere and Nowhere: The Sociology of Literature after ‘The Sociology of Literature’”; Heather Love, “Close but not Deep: Literary Ethics and the Descriptive Turn”; Sharon Marcus, Heather Love, and Stephen Best, “Building a Better Description”

9/14 **ANT (Actor-Network Theory)**

Bruno Latour, from *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*; Latour, from *We Have Never Been Modern*; Latour, “Agency at the Time of the Anthropocene”

9/21 **Ecocriticism**

Rob Nixon, “Stranger in the Eco-Village: Race, Tourism, and Environmental Time” (from *Slow Violence*); Shital Pravinchandra, “One Species, Same Difference? Postcolonial Critique and the Concept of Life”; Dipesh Chakrabarty, “The Climate of History: Four Theses”

9/28 **World Literature**

Pascale Casanova, “Principles of a World History of Literature”; Emily Apter, from *Against World Literature*; David Damrosch, “English in the World”

10/5 **Group planning meeting** for completion of syllabus (I will be away at a conference but the rest of the group will meet)

10/12 **Critical Race/Ethnic Studies**

Saidiya Hartman, from *Scenes of Subjection*; Karla Holloway, from *Private Bodies, Public Texts*; Aisha Khan, “Material and Immaterial Bodies: Diaspora Studies and the Problem of Culture, Identity, and Race”

10/19 **Digital Humanities**

Andrew Goldstone and Ted Underwood, “The Quiet Transformations of Literary Studies: What Thirteen Thousand Scholars Could Tell Us”; selections from Lauren Klein and Matthew Gold, eds., *Debates in the Digital Humanities 2016*

10/26 **Critical University Studies**

Christopher Newfield, “The Humanities as Service Departments: Facing the Budget Logic”; Yohei Igarashi, “Statistical Analysis at the Birth of Close Reading”; Leonard Cassuto, from *The Graduate School Mess: What Caused It and How We Can Fix It*

11/2 **Queer Theory**

Jasbir Puar, from *Terrorist Assemblages*; J. Jack Halberstam, from *The Queer Art of Failure*; José Esteban Muñoz, from *Disidentifications*

11/9

11/16

11/23 **No class (Thanksgiving break)**

11/30

12/7 **Presentations?** (reading day)