Spring 2016

**ENGL 7011 NA: Studies in Criticism, *Aesthetics in a World of Prose***

Professor Jonathan Farina

Fahy 245, Th 7:35-9:45

Office Hours - Fahy 365 T/Th 1:45-3:45 and by appointment: jvfarina@gmail.com

**Course Description:**

Early in the nineteenth century Hegel influentially characterized the modern era—its modes of existence, its values or structures of feeling, and its proliferating objects—as “a world of prose.” Starting with his *Aesthetics*, this seminar will pursue that claim in a variety of manifestations, including structuralist and poststructuralist analyses of prose as well as various theorizations of everyday life, disenchantment, the bourgeois, paraphrase, ordinary language philosophy, banality, the quotidian, objects, and the affects, emotions, and aesthetics of late capitalism and empire. Because modern “criticism” and philosophical “critique” emerged in the late eighteenth century as reactionary attitudes to the culture of complacency, utilitarianism, pragmatism, homogenization, and moderation that Hegel dubbed prosaic, we will conclude the semester with a metacritical consideration of the limits of critique aided by Rita Felski’s recent book of that title. Our treble-fold goal will be to solidify your understanding of the major strands of 20th-century theory, develop a nuanced knowledge of the philosophies of everyday life, and empower you with a sensitivity to the postures and epistemological assumptions that animate our discipline now.

**Objectives:**

This course will: 1) familiarize you with major modern trends in literary theory and practical criticism; 2) improve your skill in all processes of composing academic research papers; 3) improve your skills at close textual analysis.

**Texts:**

Henri LeFebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, vol 1 (Verso 2008)

Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Richard Miller (Hill & Wang 1975)

Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics* 2nd edition (Routledge 2002)

Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Stephen Randall (UC 2011)

Franco Moretti, *The Bourgeois: Between History and Literature* (Verso 2014)

Sianne Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (Harvard 2012)

Saikat Majumdar, *The Prose of the World: Modernism and the Banality of Empire* (Columbia 2015)

Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago 2015)

All readings not included in the books above will be available on Blackboard. Print them and bring them to class.

**Assessment:**

A formal **paper proposal** (1-2 pages) with a tentative thesis, title, primary evidence, and clearly identified critical interlocutors (10%). You should be well into research on your paper by the time you compose your proposal.

A strictly **15-minute research presentation** (7-page titled script printed and submitted) that identifies, contextualizes, and analyzes a piece of criticism pertaining to our subject but not on our syllabus. Topics might include: Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*; Max Weber on disenchantment and bureaucratization; Freud on *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, Ordinary language philosophy by J. L. Austin and Stanley Cavell; Henri Lefebvre’s *Critique of Everyday Life*; theories of realism by Auerbach, Moretti, or Barthes; Adorno and Horkheimer’s *Dialectic of Englightenment*, Bourdieu’s *Distinction* and *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Raymond Williams’s “Structure of Feeling” or *Keywords*, Barthes’ *Mythologies*; work by Maurice Blanchot, Guy Debord, Georges Perec, or a study of the quotidian in your field. Students must consult me for approval for each topic. (10%)

**Research paper** (50%) 20-25 pages. Must engage at least 6 peer-reviewed sources and at least one text from the readings. It could be a metacritical analysis of one or more of the readings OR an interpretive application of one or more of the readings to a text or other cultural artifact. I highly recommend you to consult me several times during the composition of the paper. You might generate ideas by browsing recent TOC of *Critical Inquiry*.

**Final Exam** – short answer responses to questions about class discussion and to quotations from the readings (20%)

**Participation (10%):** This is a seminar, albeit a large one, so active and regular participation in class discussion is requisite. If you fail to contribute on more than one occasion, your maximum grade for the course will be a B+.

**Schedule of Readings:**

Thurs., January 14: Introductions, syllabus review,

Thurs., January 21: Hegel, from *Aesthetics*, Vol. I, part I, chapter III, II. “Action”: <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/works/ae/part1.htm#c3-b-II>

and Vol. II, part III, section III, chapter III, “Poetry,” from “Introduction” up to “Dramatic Poetry”: <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/works/ae/part3-section3-chapter3.htm>

Thurs., January 28: Geertz, “Thick Description”; Shklovsky, “Art as Device”; Georg Lukacs, ch. 3, 4, 5 from *The Theory of the Novel*

Thurs., February 4: Culler, Preface, 7, 8, 9

Thurs., February 11: LeFebvre, from *Critique of Everyday Life,* pp. 101-38, 201-52

Thurs., February 18: Barthes, *Mythologies*

Thurs., February 25: De Certeau, Preface, General Introduction, Parts I and II

Thurs., March 3: Spring Break – NO CLASS

Thurs., March 10: De Certeau, Parts III, IV, V and “Indeterminate”

Thurs., March 17: Majumdar, *Prose of the World: Modernism and the Banality of Empire*

Thurs., March 24: Holy Thursday – NO CLASS

Thurs., March 31: Moretti, *The Bourgeois: Between History and Literature*

Friday, April 1: PAPER PROPOSALS DUE

Thurs., April 7: Ngai, Introduction, 1

Thurs., April 14: Ngai, 2, 3, Afterword

Thurs., April 21: Felski, Introduction, 1, 2, 3

Thurs., April 28: PAPERS DUE; Felski, 4, 5, and “In Short”