
Critique, Post-Critique, and The Negative

Description

Over the past twenty years (if not longer), literary study has witnessed repeated calls to dial back on critique as its central methodology: surface reading, reparative reading, the new formalism, the new modesty in literary studies, the new new historicism, actor-network theory, and cognitive literary criticism have all, with varying degrees of vehemence, denounced the predominance of critique. Yet that call isn't especially new: one can hear it in New Criticism's atavistic avatars and in the book-club lament that criticism ruins the pleasures of reading. This seminar starts with these recent calls for critical reformation and works backward, asking one pivotal question: what is critique? A method, an aim, an attitude, a style?

In addition to reading the central texts of post-critique, this seminar will then turn to pivotal theorizations of critique from Kant and the Marxist and poststructuralist traditions. The ultimate aim of the course is to familiarize students with the methodological debates surrounding this one central (but multifarious) practice and to ask whether it's worth rejecting, escaping, or reforming and, just as importantly, whether calls for its rejection amount to something more than cheerleading for the neoliberal present and its university. We'll also spend considerable time discussing the ambulatory shorthand in which critique (or its pale facsimiles) travels in modern literary criticism: think "subverting," "undermining," "resisting"—and all those subjectivities always both challenged and reaffirmed.

Books

Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Hackett, 1987).
Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford UP, 2002).
Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*, trans. Geoffrey Wall (Routledge, 2006).
Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (Columbia UP, 1983).

Selected Essays

- Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, "Surface Reading: An Introduction," *Representations* 108 (2009): 1-21.
- Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is About You," in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke UP, 2003), 123-151.
- Marjorie Levinson, "What Is New Formalism?," *PMLA* 122 (March 2007): 558-569.
- Bruno Latour, "Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam?: From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern," *Critical Inquiry* 30.2 (winter 2004): 225-248.
- Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, Introduction, *Practicing New Historicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1-19.

Requirements

Four short analysis papers, one oral presentation, one seminar paper.