

Critique and Its Discontents

HUM 599: Interpretation

Autumn 2011; Wednesdays, 9:00-11:50

D. Graham Burnett (History/History of Science) and Jeff Dolven (English)
Princeton University

Modern criticism is preoccupied with what is behind the curtain or inside the box: we are a generation of unmaskers and disabusers, whose self-appointed task is to protect audiences from naïve belief, delusion, and enchantment. This course will ponder that project of critique in some of its paradigmatic instances, and will examine the history of this pervasive and influential intellectual project. Our main interest, however, will be in alternatives: What else can we do with our minds? How else can we approach the objects of inquiry? Are there other ways to engage works of literature and art? (And what about the works of nature?) Possibilities will include imitation and forgery; appreciation and praise; observation and description; repetition, performance, memorization, meditation, consumption, even ingestion—not to mention the full range of affective responses. In the service of these explorations we will read a wide variety of theorists (and consider a number of specific works of art) with the aim of formally experimenting with the non-critical modes we consider. We intend the course both as an occasion for thinking about the latitudes of criticism, and as a laboratory in which to test its limits.

F I R S T T E R M
C R I T I Q U E
“ p r a c t i c a l c r i t i c i s m ”

WEEK 1: Introduction and Organizational Meeting (no reading)

WEEK 2: Critique and the Modern Constitution

Latour, Bruno. *We Have Never Been Modern*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993.

Sontag, Susan. “Against Interpretation.” In her *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*. New York: Picador, 2002.

Examine:

Latour, Bruno, and Peter Weibel. *Iconoclasm*. Karlsruhe, Germany: ZKM/Center for Art and Media, 2002.

WEEK 3:
Kantian Critique, Formalism, and Teleology

- Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Greenberg, Clement. "Modernist Painting." There are several versions of this essay, the earliest of which appears in *Forum Lectures*. Washington, DC: Voice of America, 1960.
- de Duve, Thierry, "Kant after Duchamp." Chapter 5 of his *Kant After Duchamp*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996.

WEEK 4:
Hegel and Dialectical/Historical Aesthetics

- Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*. New York: Penguin, 2004.
- Danto, Arthur. "The End of Art." Chapter 5 of his *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1984
- Danto, Arthur. "Cy Twombly." In his *The Madonna of the Future: Essays in a Pluralistic Art World*. New York: FSG, 2000.
- Geulin, Eva. "Hegel Without End." Chapter 2 of her *The End of Art: Readings in a Rumor after Hegel*, translated by James McFarland. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006.

WEEK 5:
Marx, Marxists, and Critical Theory

- Adorno, Theodor. "Lyric Poetry and Society" and "Cultural Criticism and Society." In *The Adorno Reader*, edited by Brian O'Connor. London: Blackwell, 2000.
- Geuss, Raymond. *The Idea of a Critical Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.
- Adams, William. "Aesthetics: Liberating the Senses." Chapter 10 from *The Cambridge Companion to Marx*, edited by Terrell Carver. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

WEEK 6:
Freud and Psychoanalysis

- Freud, Sigmund. *The Interpretation of Dreams*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008. Chapter 5.
- Freud, Sigmund. "The Moses of Michelangelo." In *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, edited by James Strachey. London: Hogarth, 1959 (Vol 13).
- Ricoeur, Paul. *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977.

S E C O N D T E R M
D I S C O N T E N T S
“ i m p r a c t i c a l c r i t i c i s m ”

**WEEK 7:
Description and Observation**

- Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing. *Laocoön: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*. Translated by Edward Allen McCormick. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984.
- Hamon, Philippe. “Rhetorical Status of the Descriptive.” *Yale Journal of French Studies* 61 (1981):1-26.
- Daston, Lorraine. “Observation as an Epistemic Genre in Enlightenment Europe.” Unpublished Seminar Paper.

**WEEK 8:
Imitation and Repetition (or Copying and Forgery)**

- Aristotle. *Poetics*. Tr. Stephen Halliwell. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987. Chapters 1-6.
- Plato. *The Republic*. Books II and X.
- Greenberg, Clement. “Towards a Newer Laocoön.” *Partisan Review* 7 (1940): 299ff.
- Deleuze, Gilles. *Difference and Repetition*. Tr. Paul Patton. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995.
- Genette, Gerard. “Style and Signification.” In *Fiction and Diction* (85-142). Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993.
- Rádnoti, Sandór. “Originality.” In *The Fake: Forgery and Its Place in Art* (35-64). New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999.

**WEEK 9:
Experience: Ordinary and Extraordinary**

- Dewey, John. *Art as Experience*. New York: Perigee, 2005.
- Cavell, Stanley. “Aesthetic Problems of Modern Philosophy.” In *Must We Mean What We Say*, 2nd ed. (73-96). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- Cavell, Stanley. “The Uncanniness of the Ordinary.” In *Quest of the Ordinary* (153-181). Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.

WEEK 10:
Ritual and Performance (or Madness and Possession)

- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Birth of Tragedy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- Foster, Susan Leigh. "Kinesthetic Empathies and the Politics of Compassion." In *Critical Theory and Performance*, edited by Janelle G Reinelt and Joseph Roach. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2007.
- Rappaport, Roy A. "The Obvious Aspects of Ritual." In *Ecology, Meaning, and Religion* (172-222). Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 1993.
- Plato, "Ion." Let's read the widely-available Jowett translation, available online.

WEEK 11:
Personification, Pleasure, and Desire

- Nehamas, Alexander. *Only a Promise of Happiness*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007.
- Barthes, Roland. *The Pleasure of the Text*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1975.
- Barkan, Leonard. "Praxiteles, Aphrodite, and the Love of Art." Unpublished Seminar Paper.
- Tamen, Miguel. *Friends of Interpretable Objects*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004. (We will probably only do the first two chapters... TBD)

WEEK 12:
Creation and the Critical Apocalypse

- De Vries, Hent. *Minimal Theologies: Critiques of Secular Reason in Adorno and Levinas*. Tr. Geoffrey Hale. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005.