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office hours:  
Wednesdays 3-5pm  
colloquium Fridays 2-3pm  
and by appointment

## English 503: CRITICAL CONDITIONS creative labor and crisis

The project of advanced literary study today confronts interlocking crises of representation, institutions, and ecology, which occasions intensified reflections about knowledge-making, disciplinary specificity, method, and the history of the university, as well as abundant experiments in public criticism and public humanities. Our proseminar endeavors to activate introductory thinking about questions like: What is intellectual labor or creative labor? What differentiates historical phases of cultural production? What are the genres of criticism? What role does cultural writing play in the economy? What was the university?

### TEXTS

George Eliot, *Middlemarch*

Brandon Taylor, *Real Life*

Eric Hayot, *Elements of Academic Style*

assorted PDFs in our dropbox

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/t570wc94yrbph4n/AABobBEv59Au10GQrR21Ub9xa?dl=0>

(nb in some cases the files in dropbox are larger than the assigned excerpts)

### ASSIGNMENTS

#### requirements

- active seminar participation, including careful completion of assigned reading, and consistent, thoughtful contribution to discussion
- attend and participate in the department's Friday Colloquium throughout the semester
- discussion facilitation of a critical text
- close reading presentation of a literary text
- Rapid Writing; Evental Writing; Critical Argument Resumé; Pop Culture Review; Seminar Paper

Before the first day of class, for background read over **Calarco's Academic Terms** (pdf in dropbox)

## guidelines

**Readings and Discussion:** This is an intensive seminar, with a heavy reading load of complex texts. We will approach the seminar space as a laboratory for experimenting with reading practices and discovering some of the precepts of literary critical practice today. Participation is key to a strong seminar and an important basis for your evaluation.

### **Rapid Writing:**

Writing is the everyday practice that unites the different constituencies in our graduate programs. It is hard! A practice takes commitment, habit, muscle-memory, routine. Writing begets writing; the more regularly you write, the easier it is; the more you explore words and ideas, the more new projects spring in to possibility. To ease toward the writing life of the English grad student, you are assigned the following artificial structure for developing a practice, and asking you some questions useful for writers in the university today to have answered for themselves. For seven days in a row, conduct concentrated writing sessions in which you answer the following prompts, working for 30 minutes or 250 words (whichever comes first), ideally in the same place and at the same time of day. This is informal and rapid with an emphasis on cultivating fluidity. No need to revise at the end of the 30 minutes/ 250 words.

1. What did you learn in college / your MA, in general or specifically? What are some models of teaching or learning that you have appreciated and would like more of, either as a grad student or as a teacher?
2. What is a novel, poem, essay, tv show, movie, or other artwork that you love? With details and / or a sense of address, convince someone – specific or general, a person you know or a category of people or an imaginary community - to appreciate it.
3. Describe a moment when your mind was changed, or when you changed the mind of another. Did texts, images, story-telling play a role?
4. How do you participate in collectives or communities or institutions?
5. What is literature?
6. What do you want to get out of this PhD program?
7. What kind of work is writing?

**Discussion Facilitation:** for a given critical text, you will facilitate discussion, chiefly by posing three questions pertaining to the basic argument in the text, what the text helps us think about, how the text relates to other texts we have read.

**Close Reading Presentation:** oral presentation based on 2-3 pages of writing through concerted attention to the poetics of prose in a passage of no more than 10 lines; careful and deliberate reading of the syntax, rhythm, tonality, imagery, and

lettering of language; treatment of short slices as cross-sections that reveal the formal and thematic dynamics of a longer work; concluding with 3 questions for discussion. Consult the Close Reading tip sheets distributed in class. While straightforward formal oral presentation of your writing is fine, interveners are encouraged to take an interactive approach to the passage / conduct pedagogical experiments in close reading, and to facilitate discussion for a chunk of the session.

**Critical Argument Résumé:** choose any critical article or essay from the syllabus (or, alternately, from another grad seminar syllabus) that you found particularly strong and identify its key moves: What is its thesis? How does it situate itself in a critical conversation? How does it claim consequences for its contribution? What makes it memorable to you? 1-2 pages. Due at any point in the semester that the spirit strikes you.

**Pop Culture Review:** evaluative essay on literature, film, tv, music, or art in the style of a venue of your choice like the Los Angeles Review of Books, The Chicago Reader, Public Books. 2-4 pages.

### **Evental Writing**

Throughout the semester, attend (in person or on zoom) five events or meetings in addition to English Colloquium, and freewrite reflections of 250-500 words that describe the event, what you learned or thought about, and any ideas it gives you about your future research goals. These reflections must be submitted to our Evental google doc so that everyone can benefit from each other's thoughts.

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1CL02mZRxYzdqpknSdTgHV0WLbsxX96cRqpZOyIU976s/edit?usp=sharing>

“Events or Meetings” encompass:

- Colloquia in other departments
- Off-campus scholarly talks at other schools or civic institutions
- Symposia, workshops, events on our campus or other campuses
- Creative readings, performances, and exhibits
- Visiting a faculty member’s undergraduate lecture course
- Informational interviews with faculty, staff, or advanced grad students whose work interests you

**Seminar Paper:** In a 12ish page essay that incorporates research conducted using the MLA database, do one or both of the following:

- Practice a critical reading of a work of literature
- Assess critical techniques, trends in the field of English, theoretical questions, or dilemmas in literary study

## **SCHEDULE**

**25 Aug**

**who thinks abstractly?**

Karl Marx, The Real Basis of Ideology

Antonio Gramsci, The Formation of the Intellectuals

Eric Olin Wright, Intellectuals and the Working Class

Andrew Ross, The Mental Labor Problem

Stuart Hall, In Defense of Theory

Kim Stanley Robinson, The Novel Solutions of Utopian Fiction

Peter Covello, Love in the Ruins, Or Should I Go To Grad School

<https://avidly.lareviewofbooks.org/2012/11/13/love-in-the-ruins-or-should-i-go-to-grad-school/>

Kyla Wazana Tomkins, We Aren't Here to Learn What We Already Know

<https://avidly.lareviewofbooks.org/2016/09/13/we-arent-here-to-learn-what-we-know-we-already-know/>

**(rapid writing due)**

**1 Sep**

**creative economies**

Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class* intro

Ian Bogost, Hyperemployment

John Patrick Leary, Innovation

<https://keywordsforcapitalism.com/2015/04/03/keywords-for-the-age-of-austerity-1-innovation/>

Tim Brennan, Intellectual Labor

Leigh Claire LaBerge, Socially Engaged Art and Decommodified Labor

Sarah Brouillette, *Literature and the Creative Economy* intro and chapter 1

Brouillette, Academic Labor

<https://nonsite.org/academic-labor-the-aesthetics-of-management-and-the-promise-of-autonomous-work/>

**8 Sep**

**the university as environment for thinking**

Chris Newfield, *The Great Mistake Holding Back Public Colleges + The University Retreat From Public Goods*

Mark McGurl, Ordinary Doom

Eric Hayot, The Sky is Falling

Merve Emre, Better Management Through Belles Lettres

Abigail Boggs and Nick Mitchell, Critical University Studies and Crisis Consensus

Sarah Jaffe, Proletarian Professionals: Academia

Leonard Cassuto, In Search of a Usable Future  
Katrina Rogers, *Putting the Humanities PhD to Work* intro

## 15 Sep

### **what do English PhDs know anyway?**

John Guillory, Monuments and Documents: Panovsky on the object of study in the Humanities

Caroline Levine, *Forms* introduction

(*a debate in sequence:*)

Michael Clune, The Humanities Fear of Judgement

Gabrielle Starr and Kevin Dettmar, Who Decides What's Good and What's Bad in the Humanities?

Clune, The Hypocrisy of Experts

Jeff Williams, The New Critical Modesty

Joseph North, *Literary Criticism A Concise Political History* introduction

Rachel Buurma and Laura Heffernan *The Teaching Archive* introduction and conclusion

Eric Hayot, *Humanist Reason* The Humanistic Method

## 22 Sep

### **close reading and literary knowing**

James Wood, "Serious Noticing"

John Keats, Ode on a Grecian Urn

Gwendolyn Brooks, Chicago Picasso

I. A. Richards, *Practical Criticism* intro

Anahid Nersessian, *Keats's Odes* excerpt

Jonathan Culler, The Closeness of Close Reading

Jane Gallop The Historicization of Literary Studies and the Fate of Close Reading

Hayot, *Elements of Academic Style* Why Read this Book + The Uneven U

## 29 Sept

### **'this vast wreck of ambitious ideals': intellectual worldmaking**

*Middlemarch*

## 6 Oct

*Middlemarch*

Hillis Miller, Optic and Semiotic in Middlemarch

David Kurnick, An Erotics of Detachment: Middlemarch and Novel-Reading as Critical Practice

*class visit from Rithika Ramamurthy: how grad students write about big novels*

## 13 Oct

### why theory?

Theodor Adorno, Resignation

Joan Scott, The Evidence of Experience

Fredric Jameson, MetaCommentary

bell hooks, Theory as Liberatory Practice

Chris Breu, After Anti-Foundationalism

Jordan Stein, Silly Theory

<https://avidly.lareviewofbooks.org/2012/11/20/silly-theory/>

Jordy Rosenberg, Gender Trouble on Mother's Day

<https://avidly.lareviewofbooks.org/2014/05/09/gender-trouble-on-mothers-day/>

## 20 Oct

### some good theory

Marx, *The German Ideology* excerpt

Marx, *Capital* Volume 1, First Preface, Chapter 1, Chapter 25

Marx, Productive and Unproductive Labor

Raymond Williams, "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory"

Stuart Hall, Marxism without Guarantees

Colleen Lye, CD Blanton, & Kent Puckett, Financialization and the Culture Industry  
**(pop culture review due)**

## 27 Oct

### some more good theory

Sigmund Freud, The Unconscious

Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* chapter 6

Freud, The Sexual Aberrations

Eve Sedgwick, Axiomatic

Kevin Ohi, *Henry James and the Queerness of Style* introduction

## 3 Nov

### doing things with marx and freud

Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, Culture Industry

Mike Watson, Millennial Adorno

<https://communemag.com/millennial-adorno/>

Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* excerpt

Todd McGowan, *Capitalism and Desire* intro, chapter 1

Hortense Spillers, Mama's Baby Papa's Maybe

Sianne Ngai, Our Aesthetic Categories (PMLA version)

Lauren Berlant *Cruel Optimism* intro

**10 Nov**

**'would it hold them? would it last?': nobody's campus novel**

Brandon Taylor, *Real Life*

**17 Nov**

**some recent promontories**

Rita Felski, Context Stinks

Ted Underwood, The Genealogy of Distant Reading

Joshua Clover, Autumn of the System

Tobias Menely, *Climate and the Making of Worlds* intro

Kevin Quashie, *Black Aliveness* intro

Levine, The Point is to Change It

**24 Nov**

turkey day / no class

**1 Dec**

**collective creative labor as heist**

Christopher Nolan, *Inception*

Steven Soderbergh, *Oceans 8*

**lab: semester reflections, writing papers, presenting abstracts**