Graduate Seminar/Seminar in Poetics and Theory

State of the Art: The Practice of Theory in Literary History (including review writing)
Instructor: Anselm Haverkamp
Wed. 6:20-8:20pm
ENGL-GA 2966
POET-GA 2002

Introduction into the practice of recent theory and/or methods of criticism, including the practice of review writing.

The end of theory debate underestimates systematically what remains after decades of theory hype – more than one would expect, and more than an updated historical positivism, at that. The emerging practice of theory is no longer purely or merely theoretical but a new practice of literary analysis, in which theoretical concerns have become part, and not only a pre-condition of analysis. Thus, less pure theory texts have to be read, but the theoretically informed practice of theory has to be studied. The seminar offers a review of most recent instances and case studies of literary and art history from the 16th to the 20th century – contours of an alternative genealogy of the literary in general and literary modernity in particular. The emphasis is on the applicability – or pragmatics – of theory: on new paradigms of methodology and analytical practice, as well as a new historical format of research, in which the external chronology is not to be followed, but the essentially ana-chronic nature of the work, object, event is to be acknowledged and investigated.

Instead of/ or as an alternative to the writing of a final paper (which is still possible), the conception, preparation and execution of a one book centered review is required during the semester.

Recent methodological work to begin with:


Hans Blumenberg, Paradigms of Metaphorology, Cornell UP 2011.


Julia Lupton, Graham Hammill (Eds.), Political Theology and Early Modernity, Chicago UP 2012.

To be supplemented by:

Erich Auerbach, Figura (1938), Scenes from the Drama of European Literature, Minnesota UP.

Walter Benjamin, The Arcades Project, Harvard UP, Konvolut “N.”

Paul de Man, The Resistance to Theory, Minnesota UP.