ENG 568 / MOD 568

Marxism and Form:
How to Read Dialectically

Princeton University. Fall 2025.
McCosh Hall Room 40. Thursdays 1:30–4:20pm.

Paul Nadal
nadal@princeton.edu | www.paulnadal.com
Office: B29 McCosh Hall, by appt.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

> "All thinking is exaggeration, insofar as every thought that is one at all goes beyond its confirmation by the given facts."
> —Theodor Adorno
>
> "For good or ill, the dialectic requires you to say everything simultaneously whether you think you can or not."
> —Fredric Jameson
>
> "The concrete is concrete because it is the concentration of many determinations, hence unity of the diverse."
> —Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*

How to read history through form—not just around it? How do we move from culture to political economy, aesthetics to politics, and back? This seminar surveys the methods of dialectical materialism and Marxist aesthetic theory. Rooted in the Greek *dialegein*—from *dia* (through) and *logos* (discourse)—dialectics involves holding oppositions and articulating mediations between aesthetic form and social process. Through exemplary models of literary criticism, students learn to historicize texts across disciplines, engaging with topics such as racial capitalism, uneven development, gender, labor, and contemporary culture.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

(I) Leading Discussion x 2

(II) Term paper—20 pages double-spaced. You may expand on your conference presentation. Or: a dissertation prospectus or dissertation chapter of similar length. Dissertation materials submitted for this course must demonstrate significant engagement with seminar readings.

Since this is primarily a seminar/discussion class, your active participation is vital. As the texts will be the focal point of class discussions, please bring them to class. Papers that are not handed in by the due date will be accepted but no written comments will be made on late papers.

EVALUATION AND GRADING

❍ Leading Discussion: 40% ❍ Proposal: 10% ❍ Presentation: 10% ❍ Final paper: 40%

Semester Schedule

Week 1 **Introductions**

Week 2 **What Is Critique? What Is It For?**

- Bruno Latour, "Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam?" (2004)
- Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, "Surface Reading" (2009)
- Rita Felski, from *The Limits of Critique* (2015): Introduction, Chs. 1, 4, 5

~

- Fredric Jameson, "Metacommentary" (1971)
- Christopher Nealon, "Reading on the Left" (2009)
- Carolyn Lesjack, "Reading Dialectically" (2013)
- Joshua Clover, "Communist Realism" (2014)

Recommended: Adorno, "Opinion Delusion Society" (1961)

Week 3 **Hegel & Marx**

- Hegel, "Sense-Certainty; Or the 'This' and 'Meaning'" *Phenomenology of Spirit* (58-66)
- Hegel, *The Science of Logic* (selections): "Preface to the First Edition" (7-11); "General Concept of Logic" (23-38); *On beginnings* p. 51 (starting with "But further, that which begins already *is*, ...") to end of p. 57; *On dialectics* p. 741 (starting with "This no less synthetic than ... ") to end of p. 753.

~

- Marx, *Grundrisse* (Introduction)
- Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach"

Recommended: Marx, *The German Ideology*, Preface and Part 1; Robert Lucas Scott, *Reading Hegel* (2025)

Week 4 **Adorno**

- Adorno, from *Aesthetic Theory*, Hullot-Kentor translation: "Toward a Theory of the Artwork," "Universal and Particular," and "Society" (pp. 175-261)
- Adorno, from *Negative Dialectics*: "Infinity" (pp .13-15); "After Auschwitz," "Metaphysics and Culture," "Dying Today" (pp. 361-373); "Self-Reflection of Dialectics" (pp. 405-408)

~

- Adorno, "Trying to Understand *Endgame*"
- Roberto Schwarz, "Adorno/Beckett"

Week 5 **Form and History / Abstraction**

- Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* (Introduction)
- Roberto Schwarz, "Objective Form"

~

- Leigh Claire La Berge, "The Rules of Abstraction"
- Phillip Brian Harper, "Black Personhood in the Maw of Abstraction"

Week 6 **Reading Totality**

- Annie McClanahan, "Behavioral Economics and the Credit-Crisis Novel"
- Anna Kornbluh, *Immediacy, or The Style of Too Late Capitalism* (selections)

~

- Sianne Ngai, *Theory of the Gimmick* (selections) (watch: *It Follows* [2015), dir. David Robert Mitchell)

Recommended: Jameson, "Cognitive Mapping"; Kevin Floyd et al., eds., *Totality Inside Out*; Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technical Reproducibility"; Adorno, "What Is Mechanical Reproduction?"; Sarah Brouillette, *UNESCO and the Fate of the Literary*; Jasper Bernes, "Character, Genre, Labor"

——— ***Fall Recess*** ———

Week 7 **Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim* (1900)**

Week 8 **Reading *Lord Jim* Dialectically**

- Jed Esty, *Unseasonable Youth* (Chs. 1-3)
- Jameson, "Modernism and Imperialism"
- Sylvia Wynter, "Novel and History, Plot and Plantation"

Recommended: Nathan K. Hensley, "Allegories of the Contemporary"; Eli Jelly-Schapiro, *Moments of Capital* (esp. "Interrelations" Ch.)

Week 9 **Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior* (1976)**

Week 10 **Reading *The Woman Warrior* Dialectically**

- Christopher T. Fan, *Asian American Fiction After 1965* (selections)
- Mark McGurl, "Autobardolatry" from *The Program Era*
- Adorno, "Punctuation Marks"

Recommended: Yoon Sun Lee, "Type, Totality, and the Realism of Asian American Literature"; Colleen Lye, "Racial Form"; Anna Kornbluh, "Writing" from *Immediacy*

Week 11 **November 20. No class — Proposals Due**

Week 12 **Presentations**