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.

**FIRST TERM**

**CRITIQUE**

“practical criticism”

**WEEK 1:**

Introduction and Organizational Meeting

(no reading)

**WEEK 2:**

Critique and the Modern Constitution


Examine:

WEEK 3:  
Kantian Critique, Formalism, and Teleology


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.


WEEK 4:  
Hegel and Dialectical/Historical Aesthetics


WEEK 5:  
Marx, Marxists, and Critical Theory


WEEK 6:  
Freud and Psychoanalysis


SECOND TERM

DISCONTENTS

"impractical criticism"

WEEK 7:
Description and Observation


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


Plato. The Republic. Books II and X.


WEEK 9:
Experience: Ordinary and Extraordinary


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

Plato, “Ion.” Let’s read the widely-available Jowett translation, available online.

WEEK 11:
Personification, Pleasure, and Desire

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