INTRODUCTION

Elizabeth S. Anker and Rita Felski

It would have been hard to imagine, only a few years ago, that the idea of *postcritique* would be gaining significant traction in literary and cultural studies. We are currently in the midst of a recalibration of thought and practice whose consequences are difficult to predict. There is little doubt that debates about the merits of critique are very much in the air and that the intellectual or political payoff of interrogating, demystifying, and defamiliarizing is no longer quite so self-evident. Even those who insist on the continuing salience and timeliness of critique are now often expected to defend and justify what was previously taken for granted. Meanwhile, we are seeing the flourishing of alternatives to a suspicious hermeneutics. In this respect, the "post-" of postcritique denotes a complex temporality: an attempt to explore fresh ways of interpreting literary and cultural texts that acknowledges, nonetheless, its inevitable dependency on the very practices it is questioning.

This volume, then, offers perspectives by well-known scholars on the past, present, and future of critique in literary studies and beyond. Located in American studies, queer theory, postcolonial studies, feminist criticism, and related fields, our contributors draw on these intellectual and political commitments, while sharing an interest in rethinking established methods. One aim of the volume is descriptive: What does critique look like as a style of academic argument? What kind of rhetorical moves and philosophical assumptions does the activity of critique deploy? Does critique entail a distinctive disposition, tone, attitude, or sensibility? And, if so, does postcritique require a different ethos or affect? In literary and cultural studies, critique is widely invoked but less frequently examined as a specific set of interpretive conventions, expectations, and orientations; by looking closely at critique and recasting it, our authors shed fresh light on what have become ubiquitous ways of reading. While some contributions to this volume focus on critique as a contemporary genre and mood, other essays take a more historical approach, tracing the eighteenth-century origins of critique or explaining its recent evolution in terms of the lingering influence and mentality of the Cold War. And finally,

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/chapter-pdf/577549/9780822373049-001.pdf
by guest

our authors all reckon with both the benefits and the shortcomings of critique as a mode of reading and analysis. What has critique made possible, and what are its most salient achievements? Where are its oversights or liabilities located, and what are their consequences for literary studies and for the humanities more generally?

These questions in turn inspire a number of the volume's contributors to reimagine the aims and practices of literary and cultural studies. Some of the different topics addressed in the following pages include: the promise of ordinary language philosophy; Bloch's notion of utopian thought; the significance of tragedy and translation; the force of cliché; and the need to endorse, rather than just to complicate or dismiss, notions of objectivity. While all the essays raise questions about critique, most of them are less concerned with hammering home a "critique of critique" than with testing out new possibilities and intellectual alternatives. In this sense, the collection as a whole captures a rethinking of literary studies that is currently taking place: one that involves new conceptions of literary value, of the critic's interpretive labor, and of the public role of the humanities. While individual essays take varying perspectives on the continued merits of critique, they all agree on the need to reassess styles and approaches to reading that have become routine over the past few decades, along with the histories and justifications devised to support them.

This volume therefore carries out a threefold project: it offers an assessment of the legacy and status of critique; it explores a range of alternative methods and orientations; and it presents multiple perspectives on the value of a post-critical turn. Our hope is that the collection will serve as a valuable resource and reference point for readers interested in the "method wars" in which many areas of literary and cultural studies are currently embroiled. A tendency has arisen in some quarters to portray—or rather to caricature—any ambivalence about critique as inherently conservative or anti-intellectual. The following essays offer a different picture of the political and institutional bearings of postcritique, conceiving it as linked to, rather than at odds with, progressive commitments. In the rest of the introduction, we set forth a framework designed to help readers make sense of current debates about critique. We begin by cataloging the recurring qualities of critique as a distinct academic genre in order to then examine three alternate, if intersecting, angles from which critique is now being questioned: affect, politics, and method. These insights will enable a reflection on the larger intellectual and historical contexts that have motivated a rethinking of the aims of literary and cultural studies. Finally,

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/chapter-pdf/577549/9780822373049-001.pdf
by guest

we conclude by sketching out some future directions and agendas for scholarship today.

Critique as Genre

It is important to note that the meanings and uses of critique vary dramatically across intellectual fields, disciplines, and schools of thought. These permutations render a comprehensive account of critique an impossible task, even if we limit ourselves to key debates in the humanities over recent decades. Within literary studies, for example, some scholars see critique as synonymous with literary and cultural theory, due to a shared emphasis on the values of destabilization and estrangement. Thus Jonathan Culler, in his widely read primer, defines the main practical effect of theory as a disputing of "common sense," such that the reader is schooled to become suspicious of whatever is identified as natural and taken for granted.[1] Other scholars, however, are more inclined to underscore critique's debts to specific philosophical genealogies. Paul Ricoeur offered what is perhaps the most widely cited account of critique's historical origins when he identified Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud as its primary architects, whose imprint on contemporary scholarship remains indelible. Nonetheless, virtually every field in literary and cultural studies—from American studies to animal studies, from feminist theory to New Historicism—has developed local inflections of, and variations on, critique, whether in relation to its central terms of reference, in-house debates, or styles of argument.

So if critique is, for some scholars, shorthand for theory itself, what exactly are its critics objecting to? And if critique is too multiform to be grasped via a single definition or a unified account, how are we to gain an understanding of its modes of operation? We have adopted two strategies to delineate some of its especially salient features. In a later section of this introduction we catalogue some influential objections to critique, offering a point of entry into its various functions and meanings. That these objections come from diverse angles testifies to the many-sidedness of how scholars have understood critique as both an intellectual project and a style of interpretation.

We want to start, however, with a consideration of critique as genre, in order to register some of its most distinctive aesthetic, affective, and analytical components. Critique is, among other things, a form of rhetoric that is codified via style, tone, figure, vocabulary, and voice and that attends to certain tropes,

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/chapter-pdf/577549/9780822373049-001.pdf
by guest

motifs, and structures of texts at the expense of others. Genre theory, meanwhile, has developed sophisticated ways of conceptualizing similarities and differences across large groups of examples. Rather than signaling a set of core criteria to which all models must conform, genre is now widely understood via the Wittgensteinian idea of family resemblances: individual instances of a genre may be related in disparate ways, but without necessarily possessing any single set of features that are common to all.[2] A genre, in other words, is not an exclusive or internally homogeneous class, but a fluid constellation of discontinuous as well as overlapping modes. In highlighting some characteristic modalities of critique, then, we are not implying that they are present in every case. Nonetheless, attending to the diagnostic, allegorical, and self-reflexive facets of critique will allow us to better understand why it has proven such an enduring as well as gratifying approach.

The *diagnostic* quality of critique is often unmistakable. Diagnosis, of course, has its origins in the practice of medicine, even as the term is frequently applied to other domains (the mechanic examining a defective car, the pundit weighing in on the state of the economy). In a clinical context, diagnosis refers to the act of identifying an illness by investigating and interpreting symptoms. Three aspects of diagnosis seem especially pertinent: the presence of an *expert* (doctor, scientist, technician) who is engaged in the *scrutiny* of an object in order to decode certain *defect*s or flaws that are not readily or automatically apparent to a nonspecialist perspective. A diagnosis is both a speech act and a stance or orientation: one that is predicated on the revelatory force of an examining gaze. To diagnose is to look closely and intently, in the belief that such scrutiny will bring problems to light that can be deciphered by an authoritative interpreter. The stance is one of judicious and knowledgeable detachment.

Psychoanalysis, above all, played the role of mediator between a clinical context and a literary one. From the 1970s onward, critics trained themselves to read as Freudian analysts, even when their own commitments were political rather than purely psychoanalytical. Treating the text as a patient, the critic sought to identify buried symptoms that would undercut explicit meaning and conscious intent. For the Freudian reader, what defines the symptom is its unintended or involuntary status: the text unwittingly reveals an often shameful or scandalous truth that it would prefer to deny. In classic Freudian interpretation, repression is the mechanism by which such truths are hidden from view, creating a contrast between manifest meaning and what lurks beneath. This schismatic model has frequently been combined with more political, and often allegorical, analy-

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/chapter-pdf/577549/9780822373049-001.pdf
by guest

sis: a text's "symptoms"—such as puzzling plot elements, stylistic incongruities, startling motifs, or other oddities—are traced back to social inequities or ideological struggles that cannot be openly acknowledged.

A subsequent generation of Lacanian critics challenged this spatial topology of the self, with its dichotomy of surface and depth, deceptive façade and hidden truth. Yet they retained key elements of the diagnostic model, underscoring a text's unawareness of its own contradictions, slippages, and elisions. It is a fundamental premise of this line of thinking that a patient cannot adequately diagnose herself; the third-person perspective of the critic/analyst will always trump the self-understanding of the text/patient. For Lacanian theorists, another key property of the symptom is its resistance to remedy or cure: hence Slavoj Žižek famously enjoined his readers to "Enjoy your symptom!" in the title of his 1992 study of Hollywood cinema. This fundamental incurability of the symptom also renders the labor of critical interpretation an infinite task; the result can be what Tim Dean describes as a universalization of the symptom, which subsumes anything of interest into its explanatory grid.[3]

The broad impact of Foucault on literary and cultural studies, especially via New Historicism, had the effect of both questioning and reinforcing such a diagnostic impulse. Foucault's work inspired an acute awareness of the entanglement of knowledge with power, showing how the human as well as medical sciences have normalized behaviors and legitimized truths via regimes of classification and categorization. After Foucault, it was no longer possible to overlook the role of the "clinical gaze" as a modern technology of perception that shapes the very objects it claims to interrogate or discover. At the same time, however, Foucauldian scholars internalized and reproduced the characteristic qualities of this same gaze in their own methods of analysis, tracing out hidden capillaries of power in the dispassionate manner of clinicians diagnosing the pathologies of the social body. For the Foucauldian critic, like the scientific expert, critical insight relies on a stance of equanimity and judicious neutrality.

That Marxist criticism in the United States became so closely associated with the diagnostic gaze of symptomatic reading speaks to the exceptional influence of Fredric Jameson: other key figures in Marxist aesthetic theory—Georg Lukács, Walter Benjamin, Raymond Williams—rely, after all, on quite different orientations and methods. In a vast body of commentary on literature, film, visual art, and popular culture, Jameson reads texts as fragments of social totalities that crystallize, often involuntarily, the defining elements of such totalities. In *The Political Unconscious*, Jameson describes his own approach

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/chapter-pdf/577549/9780822373049-001.pdf
by guest

as the "diagnostic revelation of terms or nodal points implicit in the ideological system which have, however, remained unrealized in the surface of the texts, which has failed to become manifest in the logic of the narrative, and which we can therefore read as what the text represses."[4] Meanwhile, yet another reason that Jameson's work has often served as a lightning rod for recent debates lies in his unapologetic embrace of allegorical and homological modes of reading.

Diagnosis defines a relationship between text and critic; *allegory*, however, speaks to the links between text and world. In allegory, the specific gestures or alludes to the general; characters, narratives, or poetic figures are freighted with, and held to stand for, broader philosophical meanings or social structures. Here, allegory overlaps with metaphor. However, while metaphor sees, allegory thinks, having much closer ties to conceptual or abstract thought. In this respect, allegory also claims kinship with homological readings that explain literary forms as echoing the structures of larger sociopolitical realities. Such modes of analysis often contend that literature helps to naturalize or lend ideological support to real-world institutions and practices due to shared genealogies and underlying conceptual structures.

One major contribution of ideology critique was to uncover and demonstrate how allegory can operate in literature as a manifestation of larger social hierarchies and inequalities. Subjecting the literary canon to scrutiny, feminist and minority critics maintained that members of certain groups were far less likely to be depicted in terms of their complex particularities, serving instead as abstract ciphers and bearers of negative symbolic meaning (the demonic, the primitive, the nonrational). We might think here, for example, of Abdul JanMohamed's critique of Manichean allegories in colonialist fiction or Judith Fetterley's evisceration of representations of women in the mainstream U.S. literary tradition.[5] Racial and sexual differences, these critics argued, commonly translate into moral and metaphysical inferiority via a continuum of pejorative associations.

Critique, however, not only discovers previously unnoticed and politically pernicious allegories in literary works; it also brings allegorical modes of analysis to bear on texts so as to unearth what Jameson refers to as their "repressed" meanings. As Angus Fletcher points out, allegory is intrinsically double-sided: while it can be created by the author, it also requires an act of interpretation by the critic. Yet in their desire to establish parallels between individual works and social structures, critics can risk imputing layers of generality even in the absence of clear textual warrants. In its less happy forms,

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/chapter-pdf/577549/9780822373049-001.pdf
by guest

allegorical interpretation can thus devolve into an all-too-predictable style of reading, where characters in novels or films are reduced to the indexical function of signaling some larger social injustice (sexism, imperialism, heteronormativity). In this context, Jameson's claim that all Third World literatures function as national allegories triggered considerable resistance by postcolonial theorists who complained that Jameson oversimplified the social meanings and thereby discounted the formal complexities of non-Western art.[6] Likewise, Žižek's tendency to explain everything from caffeine-free Diet Coke to characters from popular films in allegorical terms inspired objections to the reductive nature of such analysis.[7]

The dissemination of deconstructive ideas in the 1970s and 1980s led to an intensifying skepticism about such modes of political interpretation, which were condemned for presuming, in naive fashion, a clear parallel between a signifier inside and a signified outside the text. Allegory became a cause for suspicion, accused of imposing false unities and hierarchical structures onto literature: the allegorically minded critic, it was argued, did not know how to read. Gordon Teskey, for example, hailed allegory as "the logocentric genre par excellence": one that strives to subdue the ambiguities and incoherencies of literature by yoking it to a transcendental structure of meaning.[8] Yet allegory did not disappear in deconstructive readings; rather, it shifted from the realm of identity politics to that of language and rhetoric. What defines literature, in this line of thought, is its capacity to engage in self-conscious commentary on the indeterminacies and aporias of language, thereby eluding the overconfident reader. By staging refusals of closure, resolution, or truth, literary works serve, in Paul de Man's words, as "allegories of the impossibility of reading."[9]

Meanwhile, allegory also persisted in literary studies at another level: in prevailing accounts of the role of the critic. In the mid-1980s, Evan Watkins described a recurring ethical allegory in which the critic's role is one of "heroic resistance to all the social pressures toward conformity, mass culture homogeneity, utilitarian demands and the bureaucratization of knowledge within the university."[10] In recent decades, such allegories of the defiant critic have become increasingly influential, especially in highly politicized fields such as American studies, queer theory, and postcolonial studies, where the hermeneutic project is often conceived in terms of an ethical disclosure of structures of Otherness or oppression. The novel ideas, insights, and perspectives emerging from these fields were accordingly tied to a trust in the transgressive or oppositional impact of critique. Indeed, Fletcher's observation that allegory

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/chapter-pdf/577549/9780822373049-001.pdf
by guest

relies on narratives of progress as well as the schismatic, adversarial logic of battle is often confirmed in the tenor of such criticism. Meanwhile, the current questioning of critique, as we will see, extends from growing doubts both about such claims of political efficacy and about the romantic image of the critic as heroic dissident.

Finally, the influence of poststructuralist ideas helps explain a third generic feature of critique: its strong investment in modes of *self-reflexivity*, in terms of both methodology and the critic's preferred objects of analysis. While the association of critique with self-questioning extends back to Kant, it is heightened and intensified in the "dramas of exposure" that characterize contemporary forms of interpretation.[11] Whatever is natural, taken for granted, essentialized, or transparent become the critic's target: such qualities are seen as not only theoretically inadequate (in failing to acknowledge the linguistic and cultural construction of reality), but also politically troubling (in "naturalizing" social phenomena and thereby rendering them immune to criticism and change). As a result, critique has encouraged a recurring preoccupation with second-order or meta-analysis and a seemingly inexhaustible relay of skepticism and disclosure: hermeneutic insight emerges only to become the object of further suspicion, lest it fall prey to the stable, authentic, or authoritative knowledge that critique seeks to challenge. Demanding a hypervigilance on the part of the critic, critique thus requires stringent self-critique and continued attempts to second-guess or "problematize" one's own assumptions.

This self-reflexive dimension is evident in the proliferation of suspicious readings of suspicious readings; poststructuralism, especially, has helped transform critique into a condition of metacritique. Whereas Freudian, Marxist, and feminist thought were once the preferred mechanisms of hermeneutic unmasking, they were unmasked in turn, disparaged for being insufficiently attuned to the complexity or otherness of their objects and themselves invested in metanarratives, logocentrism, or a will to power. In *Gender Trouble*, for example, Judith Butler reproaches feminism for failing "to understand how the category of 'woman,' the subject of feminism, is produced and restrained by the very structures of power through which emancipation is sought."[12] This tendency toward metacritique manifests itself in a favored vocabulary: a rhetoric of defamiliarization that underscores its distrust of anything that does not persistently call its own assumptions into question. As a result, analysis often proceeds through a "hide the ball" structure; rather than espouse stable terms or conclusions, the critic undermines his or her own claims at the very moment when they might

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/chapter-pdf/577549/9780822373049-001.pdf
by guest

appear to reach a stopping point. In its resistance to normative assertions, critique thus unfolds through a spiraling loop of self-complicating questions and reservations. The use of scare quotes, italicization, and qualifiers like *so-called* or *self-styled* can thus highlight the critic's awareness of the constructed and artificial nature of representation.[13]

This tendency for critique to transmute into self-critique has often lead to a penchant for the "new," as theory has revised and reinvented itself through a series of frequently exuberant movements and "turns." Homi Bhabha, for instance, begins *The Location of Culture* by reclaiming the "beyond" of the "post" as an invitation to dwell in the borderlines of a present that marks a revisionary time of invention and intervention.[14] For Bhabha, the "post-" of postmodernism, postcolonialism, and posthistory signals not belatedness or impossibility but the opportunity for creative openings and interstitial discoveries. Yet the modernist impetus toward the new underlying this self-reflexivity has also imbued much critique with an overwhelming mood of self-doubt, contributing to a posture of vigilant self-scrutiny, as the critic scours her own thought processes to expose their lurking ideological biases and limitations. Gayatri Spivak thus prefaces *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* with multiple reminders of the need to productively acknowledge one's own complicity: we need, she writes, to "look around the corner, to see ourselves as others would see us."[15] Self-critique is one necessary response to the constant risk of co-optation, such that even fields like postcolonial studies can become an alibi for political inaction unless subjected to a "persistent dredging operation" that, for Spivak, derives its methodology from deconstruction.[16]

Critique's propensity for self-reflexivity has also influenced its choice of texts in arguably restrictive ways, as a number of critics have noted. Especially in the fields of contemporary literature and culture, critics are often drawn to texts that exhibit levels of self-consciousness mirroring their own. Within postcolonial studies, for example, critics were often enthralled with texts that "wrote back" to empire, foregrounding their own compromised position within literary history while subverting the ideological biases of their literary forebears.[17] More generally, the self-reflexive mode has led to an entrancement with works of metafiction; highly self-referential texts and allusions probe the nature of the author's and critic's labor, exposing the various pretensions and fantasies (of mastery and redemption) informing those endeavors. Needless to say, this preference for the self-reflexive and metafictional has often gone along with a cult of formal as well as philosophical difficulty.

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/chapter-pdf/577549/9780822373049-001.pdf
by guest

Mood, Tone, Affect

Given this inherently self-critical dimension of critique, what exactly is new or distinctive about its current reappraisal? How do recent debates differ from a long-standing tradition of self-scrutiny in theoretical inquiry? One difference, we would suggest, is a striking shift in the sensibility, as well as the scope, of current reassessments of critique. It is no longer just a matter of engaging in critiques of critique—thereby prolonging the very style of thinking that is at issue. Rather, influential arguments over the last two decades suggest that the language game of critique may have played itself out: that there is a need not just for different kinds of thinking but for an alternative ethos, mood, or disposition. In what follows, we offer a tentative taxonomy of these various objections to critique. Rather than homogenizing what is increasingly referred to as postcritical thought, we seek to emphasize the diverse range of arguments, attitudes, and reservations that are in play.

Some reassessments of critique have been informed by the recent "turn to affect" that has influenced not only literary and cultural studies but also such disciplines as anthropology, history, sociology, geography, and political theory. Accounts of feelings and emotion, of course, have a long history, whether in the eighteenth-century philosophy of Hume or Smith, the writings of nineteenth-century sentimentalists, Freudian and Darwinian accounts of the emotions, or a substantial body of twentieth-century philosophy from Nietzsche to Jean-Paul Sartre to Martha Nussbaum. However, recent theories of affect, while drawing on these precursors, have typically been skeptical about traditional notions of empathy, sympathy, and shared or universal emotions. In addition, the new affect studies often include attempts to push beyond the psychoanalytic framework that, for a number of decades, was the dominant approach to theorizing drives, desires, and emotional or visceral registers of experience. Psychoanalysis, its critics argue, is limited by its reliance on a logic of depth and repression, its emphasis on etiology and the psychic dramas of early childhood, and its insufficient attention to the phenomenological texture and complexity of feelings.

Eve Sedgwick's 1995 essay "Shame in the Cybernetic Fold: Reading Silvan Tomkins," coauthored with Adam Frank, represents an early and influential example of a turn to affect grounded in pointed objections to critique—objections that continue to inform much affect studies scholarship.[18] The essay begins by rehearsing the antiessentialisms, antibiologisms, and antinaturalisms that define much theory after poststructuralism, with its emphasis on the

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/chapter-pdf/577549/9780822373049-001.pdf
by guest

social construction of subjectivity. For Sedgwick and Frank, constructivism remains caught up in the very dualisms that it strives to oppose. They therefore draw out the less salutary aspects of the linguistic turn, with its absolutizing of a semiotic model of analysis, its dismissal of biology and physiology, and its flattening out of the thickness, complexity, and unpredictability of affective life. In the work of psychologist Silvan Tomkins, by contrast, the authors find a model of exemplary and patient attention to the distinctiveness of, and qualitative differences between, specific affects—shame, interest, surprise, joy, anger, fear, distress, disgust, and contempt—as well as to the "combinatorial complexity" of their interactions.

Sedgwick and Frank's essay voiced reservations that have been echoed by other affect theorists who challenge the rationalism of critique and its frequent neglect of emotion, mood, and disposition. Such scholars have looked to—and in some cases looked back to—a range of intellectual traditions. Phenomenology—frequently dismissed as a naive or outdated form of philosophical thinking—has experienced a dramatic renaissance, as we see, for example, in the work of intellectual historians such as Michael Gubser and Knox Peden. Within film studies, the work of Vivian Sobchack and her followers has been highly influential, triggering a range of inquiries into the experiential and embodied dimensions of the viewing experience. Meanwhile, literary studies are seeing a growth of interest in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Henri Bergson, and other phenomenological thinkers. Here, of course, we should acknowledge that feminist thinkers continued to highlight the importance of feeling and embodiment even when such approaches fell out of favor; key examples would include Iris Young's work in political theory and the phenomenology of the body; Donna Haraway's work on the intertwining of love and knowledge; Jane Tompkins's emphasis on the affective dimensions of reading; and bell hooks's focus on the raced as well as gendered aspects of emotional life. Such approaches have recently been revitalized by critics like Sara Ahmed, who appropriates and extends phenomenology as a valuable resource for elaborating the affective textures of personal and transpersonal experience, or what Ahmed calls "economies of touch" that unfold "*the social experience of dwelling with other bodies*."[19]

Recent work on affect often defines itself against what it describes as the pervasive pessimism of academic thought. The chronic negativity of critique has been widely noted, whether in Jacques Rancière's argument that critique is predicated on shame in critics about their own culpability and denials or in Eve Sedgwick's influential discussion of paranoid reading.[20] In response to this

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/chapter-pdf/577549/9780822373049-001.pdf
by guest

perceived cynicism or fatalism, some scholars have sought to reclaim negative emotions, drawing out their creative or generative force. This, for instance, is the thrust of Ann Cvetkovich's study of depression, which seeks to "move past the work of critique or the exposure of social constructions" by depathologizing negative feelings and demonstrating their productive role in engendering political action and agency.[21] Other affect theorists are more invested in stressing the reparative or productive value of positive emotions such as hope, joy, or happiness. Jonathan Lear, for example, argues in his analysis of the collapse of the Crow civilization that "radical hope" is the only appropriate stance in the face of cultural devastation.[22] Another influential example of this embrace of the affirmative is the late Jose Muñoz's galvanizing *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*; for Muñoz, idealism, utopia, and "the anticipatory illumination of art" serve as much-needed antidotes to the tone of fatalism and disappointment that is often endemic to critique.[23]

To be sure, not all affect theorists see themselves as working outside or against the tradition of critique. In *Cruel Optimism*, for example, Lauren Berlant explores how affective attachments structure common fantasies of upward mobility, job security, political equality, and durable intimacy. Linking her study of present-day affects to a tradition of Marxist theory, for Berlant an emphasis on the notion of crisis offsets the overly buoyant or celebratory tenor of many recent appeals to affect, maintaining what she describes as a necessary realism about the more problematic costs of attachment. Likewise, Ahmed's phenomenology of affective states remains firmly tied to a critical analysis of the social dimensions of emotion, even while she defends the political importance of embodied experience. And in her influential analysis of "ugly feelings" as well as more recent work on the zany, cute, and interesting, Sianne Ngai situates changing affective states in relation to larger social forces such as those of late capitalism.[24] There is thus a noteworthy divergence between those thinkers who hail the turn to affect as a means of breaking with critical or skeptical modes of analysis and others who insist on the inescapable entanglement of power with affective life and a resulting need for ongoing critique.

Critique and Politics

What, then, are the *political* stakes of the current reassessment of critique? What are its relations to capitalism, democracy, radicalism, revolution, or social change? If critique is political, what are its politics? And is it possible to question the legitimacy of critical analysis without forsaking a concern with

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/chapter-pdf/577549/9780822373049-001.pdf
by guest

the social dimensions of art, theory, and interpretation? Critique is, of course, deeply intertwined with political and philosophical thought, being closely linked to the diverse traditions of Kantianism, Marxist thought, the Frankfurt School, and post-'68 French theory. Long before its importation into literary and cultural studies, critique encompassed a lengthy history of debate about governance, freedom, conflict, and the relations between the individual and the state, even as it has taken on fresh meanings with reference to an array of new social movements. The twentieth century, moreover, witnessed an intensifying affinity between critique and the ethos of the avant-garde: that is to say, an ever greater emphasis on critique's oppositional, marginal, and embattled status and a concomitant distrust of any form of institutionalization as a sign of co-optation.

This history is reanimated in one recent objection to critique: the claim that critique has been normalized, domesticated, or defanged through its own popularity. The sheer success of critique in disseminating and reproducing itself, in this line of thought, is a sign of its ultimate failure: no longer marginal, it is now part of the mainstream, at least within academia. Safely housed in the Routledge anthology and the freshman composition class, critique has become just another familiar pedagogical tool and research method in the neoliberal university. For Michael Hardt, critique has become "the primary mode of practicing theory"; yet this very dominance has deprived theory of both its militancy and its urgency.[25] Likewise, for Robyn Wiegman, American studies confronts a conundrum—namely, that it continues to look to critique for social and political transformation despite the wholesale institutionalization of critique as a methodology.[26] Such objections, while forceful and impassioned, also reveal a continuing commitment to the ethos of critique: contemporary forms of reading and reasoning are called to account for being insufficiently radical or oppositional. The ideals of critique are thus invoked in order to accuse critique of licensing or being oblivious to its own compromised and co-opted status.

Another complaint is that critique's methodologies and commitments betray a Eurocentric bias. The rationalism of critique, it is argued, reveals its roots in a particular tradition of Enlightenment thought,[27] often causing critique to reproduce the logic that has historically supported Northern hegemony, albeit in subtle ways. For Talal Asad, critique is thus tied to the logic of modernity, with its goal of the progressive expansion of human freedom; such an equation, meanwhile, reinforces the status of non-Western populations as deficient in the qualities needed for moral and political autonomy. While critique purports to be secular and value-neutral, Asad argues, it produces specific

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/chapter-pdf/577549/9780822373049-001.pdf
by guest

(Judeo-Christian) versions of truth while destroying competing conceptions of meaning.[28] In this context, one important standpoint for challenging the Eurocentrism of critique has been work on the postsecular. Saba Mahmood, for example, argues that the "semiotic ideology" informing critique has produced an "impoverished understanding of images, icons, and signs": one that denies or underestimates the crucial role of affective and embodied practices in creating spiritual meaning.[29] As Mahmood further suggests, echoing the concerns of Frank and Sedgwick, critique's indebtedness to linguistic models ties it to a particular epistemology: one that privileges analytical modes of interpretation while paying scant attention to vectors of experience that resist or exceed such an explanatory frame. This rationalist orientation means that critique is poorly equipped to engage seriously with spiritual beliefs, sacramental practices, and attachments to the sacred that remain central to the lives of countless individuals, especially in the global South.[30]

In a related vein, there is dissatisfaction with critique's frequent rendering of the thoughts and actions of ordinary social actors as insufficiently self-aware or critical. This concern helped inspire the emergence of British cultural studies, which took issue with the mass culture theory associated with the Frankfurt School and its assumption that ordinary readers or viewers are dupes or dopes, prisoners of their own naïveté, gullibility, and false consciousness. A related line of inquiry has recently been reanimated in the work of the French pragmatist sociologists Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot, who claim critical thinking as part of the everyday experience of individuals forced to negotiate between conflicting spheres of value in complex societies.[31] Such arguments call into question the mistrust of ordinary language and thought endemic to critique, as well as the frequent assumption that public speech is invariably reactionary, opportunistic, or commodified. As these debates suggest, suspicion of the commonplace and everyday risks entrenching the notion that critical thinking is the unique provenance of intellectuals—enclosing it within the rarefied space of the academy.

The perception that critique is automatically aligned with the Left—a sine qua non of progressive thought—has also been shaken up in recent decades. One early argument along these lines was made by Peter Sloterdijk in the 1980s in *Critique of Cynical Reason*, where Sloterdijk attributed the dissolution of the 1960s student movements to the "metamorphosis of hope into realism, of revolt into a clever melancholy."[32] For Sloterdijk, a pervasive mood of irony and world-weariness has impeded rather than furthered radical social change; cynicism has become a form of "enlightened false-consciousness" in its end-

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/chapter-pdf/577549/9780822373049-001.pdf
by guest

less tactics of problematizing and self-questioning. Modes of unmasking are widely practiced, Sloterdijk notes, but they seem to make little or no political difference. To similar ends, in his much-cited essay in *Critical Inquiry*, Bruno Latour contends that a hermeneutics of suspicion has become the preferred weapon of conservative thinkers and conspiracy theorists alike. Tactics forged by the Left—skepticism about the status of facts, exposure of the problematic motives of scientists—now drive the arguments of the Right, evident in positions such as climate change denial. It is time, Latour declares, to adopt new tools; to move from a spirit of debunking to one of assembling, or from critique to composition.[33] Meanwhile, Stefano Harney and Fred Moten's complaint about the reactionary nature of critique, or its tendency to "endanger the sociality it is supposed to defend," responds to similar fears that an overreliance on critique can become self-sabotaging. In its place, Harney and Moten underscore the urgent need to safeguard what they term the "sociopoetic force" of the undercommons.[34]

It is no longer feasible, in short, to assume that critique is synonymous with leftist resistance or that rethinking critique implies a retreat to aestheticism, quietism, belle-lettrism, or other much maligned "-isms" of literary studies. Indeed, the shift away from suspicion may conceivably inspire a more nuanced vision of how political change comes about. As a form of "strong" social theory (Sedgwick), critique can encourage a paranoid vision that translates every possible phenomenon into yet another sign of the ubiquity of ideology or disciplinary power. It leaves little room, in short, for attention to contradictions or qualitative differences in social or political conditions. Impatient with incremental or piecemeal political change, critique insists that real-world, pragmatic progress is nothing but a strategy for disguising the persistence of structural inequality, rendering any form of optimism at best overly credulous or misplaced and at worst a craven capitulation. At the same time, critique's commitment to exposure can exaggerate its own power to transform the social world, a tendency that is especially evident among many literary and cultural critics.

The Method Wars

Recent efforts to rethink critique have often emphasized method: the ways in which established practices of reading limit the inquiries, experiences, and insights available to the critic. Critique, it is argued, implies a methodological orientation that encourages certain kinds of interpretation while leaving little room for others. In particular, a persistent concern with drawing out

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/chapter-pdf/577549/9780822373049-001.pdf
by guest

shadowy, concealed, or counterintuitive meanings can lead to a neglect of the formal qualities of art and the sensual dimensions of aesthetic experience. In what might appear to be a reprise of Susan Sontag's well-known argument in "Against Interpretation"—a stirring manifesto for an erotics rather than a hermeneutics of art—critics have questioned the value of reducing art to its political utility or philosophical premises, while offering alternative models for engaging with literary and cultural texts.

For example, Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus argue that symptomatic reading, as one of the most influential forms of critique, relies on questionable metaphors of depth, concealment, and hiddenness. Against this assumption that the essential meaning of a text resides in a repressed or unconscious content that requires excavation by the critic, they urge greater attention to what lies on the surface—the open to view, the transparent, and the literal. Along related lines, Heather Love contends that the very idea of interpretation, whether in critical or affirmative mode, relies on misguided assumptions about concealed truths that the critic is expected to retrieve. By contrast, Love calls for a model of what she calls "thin description" and for renewed attention to empiricism "after the decline of the linguistic turn."[35]

Other critics emphasize the need to adopt a more generous posture toward the text. Eve Sedgwick's account of paranoid reading, for example, culminates with an acknowledgment of the value of a reparative impulse that is "additive and accretive," aiming "to assemble and confer plenitude."[36] In a similar vein, Sharon Marcus's *Between Women* questions how a suspicious hermeneutics has been enlisted to expose a hidden reality of repressed lesbian sexuality in Victorian England. Instead, Marcus develops a model of "just reading" that attends carefully to what is given by a text, "without construing presence as absence or affirmation as negation," as it seeks to discover a vibrant and complex history of female affective and sexual bonds.[37] Meanwhile, Ann Laura Stoler argues that historians have tended to treat archives as inherently skewed and biased sources. By contrast, Stoler asserts the need "to explore the grain with care and read along it first," being attuned to what she terms its "watermarks" and productions of common sense.[38] In spite of their differences, these critics are all committed to treating texts with respect, care, and attention, emphasizing the visible rather than the concealed in a spirit of dialogue and constructiveness rather than dissection and diagnosis.

Jacques Rancière's thought is also salient in this regard. Like the foregoing critics, Rancière insists on art's resistance to established modes of political analysis. For Rancière, aesthetics is a capacious category that extends

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/chapter-pdf/577549/9780822373049-001.pdf
by guest

beyond literary or artistic texts to involve broader reconfigurations of seeing, doing, and sensing. At the same time, the differentiation of art as a distinct regime of meaning cannot be undone; art and politics, he insists, embody two different "distributions of the sensible" that are related yet far from identical. Works of art thus allow for specific configurations of perception and experience that resist translation into the norms or calculus of political strategy, even as art has its own unique metapolitics. There is, Rancière argues, "no criterion for establishing a correspondence between aesthetic virtue and political virtue."[39] While Rancière rejects any idea of emancipation based on the intellectual's unmasking of ideology, for instance via endless demonstrations of the secret machinery of capital, he shows how instances of aesthetic dissensus can reshape established capacities for political expression—enabling disagreement and disruption that may emerge in the most unexpected places.[40]

Another common feature of the methodology of critique involves a tendency to read individual texts as reflections, indices, or symptoms of larger cultural or social wholes. The appeal of such a style of interpretation is evident: it allows literary critics to reconcile the spheres of literature and politics, enlisting their expertise and training in close reading in the service of combatting social injustice. Yet it is not at all obvious that literary analysis offers a direct conduit to a sharper understanding of the social, or that individual texts can be seen as microcosms of broader ideological structures or cultural forces. Objections to this approach have been voiced by critics such as Lawrence Grossberg, who has long lamented the literary-critical practice of "reading the world in a grain of sand," as he calls it. By contrast, the cultural studies notion of "articulation" provides for Grossberg an alternative way of grasping the social lives of texts: one that emphasizes the radically contingent and changing relations between texts and social constituencies and contexts, as well as the need for empirical analysis, multiple forms of evidence, and the willingness of the critic to be surprised.[41] A similar line of argument has been raised by scholars affiliated with actor-network theory, who replace the notion of "society" with an emphasis on networks of associations, conceiving of the artwork as embedded within multiple chains of mediation rather than serving as a microcosm of a social totality. Close reading, in this line of thought, will reveal very little about the social life of works of art. The politics of a text are not dictated by its form, structure, or internal dynamics; rather, they are forged in the history of its various and diverse entanglements.[42]

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/chapter-pdf/577549/9780822373049-001.pdf
by guest

Contextualizing Postcritique

To be sure, this emphasis on the contingencies of how texts circulate in the world does not sit well with some scholars' insistence on the big picture: namely, the increasingly pervasive influence of neoliberalism and economic rationality in recent decades, both within and outside the academy. Current debates about method and interpretation, they insist, must be situated and understood within this larger historical framework. We are witnessing, after all, an extended assault on the autonomy of universities: a growing emphasis on profit and utility at the expense of humanistic inquiry, declining state support for the liberal arts, the adjunctification of the professoriate, and the quantification of scholarly thought and research. Within such a context, the "postcritical turn" is read by some as an ominous sign of defeatism, exemplifying a failure of nerve on the part of intellectuals who are no longer prepared to embrace the role of gadflies and oppositional figures. Offering a stirring defense of universities as centers of critique, Terry Eagleton declares: "There is no university without humane inquiry, which means that universities and advanced capitalism are fundamentally incompatible."[43] In this line of thought, there would seem to be only two options: a stance of opposition, negation, and critique, or else the consent to, and co-option by, a larger system.

Hal Foster, for example, has recently expressed his alarm at the postcritical turn within art history. He concedes that there is a growing sense of fatigue with critique, admitting that "its moral righteousness can be oppressive, and its iconoclastic negativity destructive."[44] Ultimately, however, the turn away from critique is explained by Foster not in terms of its own internal problems or intellectual limits, but as a direct and unmediated reflection of larger political trends. He traces the growing interest in affirmation back to the politics of the Bush administration and its suppression of oppositional thought: "Bullied by conservative commentators, most academics no longer stress the importance of critical thinking for an engaged citizenry."[45] Appraising the influence of Rancière, Foster condemns him for encouraging passivity and wishful thinking ("the new opiate of the art world"); meanwhile, Latour is taken to task for a fetishism that treats objects as quasi-subjects and emphasizes the agency of nonhumans. Insisting on the increased necessity of critique in bleak times, Foster concludes that the contemporary moment is a very inopportune time to go postcritical.

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/chapter-pdf/577549/9780822373049-001.pdf
by guest

There are, however, other ways of framing the historical meanings of the current reassessment of critique: viewing it not as an unwitting symptom of current exigencies but as an active and purposeful response to them. At a time when higher education is under siege, it seems urgent to articulate more compelling accounts of why the humanities matter and to clarify to larger audiences why anyone should care about literature, art, or philosophy. Accustomed to a rhetoric of dismantling and demystification, critique lacks a vocabulary and set of established rationales for mounting such defenses. Meanwhile, it has often encouraged an antagonistic and combative attitude toward the public world; in the wake of poststructuralism, especially, critique has often been synonymous with a pronounced aversion toward norms and an automatic distrust of instrumentality and institutions. One result of this spirit of marginality is to keep serious thought sequestered in the ivory tower, thereby working to ensure its lack of impact or influence on the public sphere.

Rethinking critique can thus forge stronger links between intellectual life and the nonacademic world. Such links are not simply a matter of capitulation or collusion, but can offer a vital means of influencing larger conversations and intervening in institutional policies and structures. In this respect, much recent talk of a "public humanities" differs in tone and tenor from the more familiar model of the radical public intellectual, whose public stance entailed a uncompromising indictment of a "neo-liberal culture of idiocy and illiteracy."[46] That the political ambitions of critique have not led to a more prominent public voice for literary critics is surely not unrelated to such rhetoric: a presumption—undergirded by prevailing theories of ideology or language—that the attitudes of the majority require diagnosis or denunciation rather than thoughtful engagement. As long as critique gains its intellectual leverage from an adversarial stance, it will continue to presume a populace deluded by forces that only the critic can bring to light. Such a mind-set, however, is hardly likely to influence or persuade that same populace.[47]

In this context, we are seeing a greater willingness to work within, while striving to modify, institutional structures both inside and outside the university; a recognition that scholars have much to learn from engagement with nonacademics, even those who do not share their convictions; and a more variegated sense of the current intellectual-political landscape. Some critics have also called for a language that better communicates the specific contributions of the arts and the power of imaginative innovation to the public.

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/chapter-pdf/577549/9780822373049-001.pdf
by guest

"Art's work in the world," writes Doris Sommer, "is not yet a core concern for an academic field that remains skeptical and pessimistic."[48] Social change, she suggests, is unlikely to be brought about by political sermonizing or the jaundiced rhetoric of high theory. Rather, a more productive path lies in yoking political involvement to the forms of value, play, and pleasure cultivated by an aesthetic education.

Where, then, do these arguments leave us? And what do they suggest for the future of criticism? A recurring theme in discussions of postcritique is the urgency of crafting new rationales—and updating our old ones—for the value of the arts and humanities. We can no longer assume that a stance of negativity and opposition is sufficient to justify the aesthetic or social importance of literature or our practice as critics. Rather, we are in urgent need of more powerful and persuasive justifications for our commitments and endeavors. The current moment in literary and cultural studies, as this volume shows, thus involves a broad interest in exploring new models and practices of reading that are less beholden to suspicion and skepticism, more willing to avow the creative, innovative, world-making aspects of literature and criticism. What gets built and shaped when a critic reads? What affordances and opportunities does literary form and experience open up?

Meanwhile, our authors share a continuing concern with the social and political work of both literature and criticism, challenging the frequent assumption that any defense of literary value must be a sign of belle-lettrism or an apolitical formalism. These and other attempts to craft new accounts of the value of art and literature often insist on the role of affect in criticism: that interpretation and argument are a matter not just of better or worse insights, but also of ethos or disposition. The concern is that a pervasive mood of suspicion, ennui, or irony, in this regard, can easily become debilitating, both intellectually and politically. In response, some recent scholarship not only discusses affect as a theme but itself models and explores differing affective styles and tonal registers of writing—as we see, for example, in the work of both Latour and Sommer.

It seems undeniable that the ethos of critique is losing its allure for a significant number of younger scholars as well as many established critics. On the one hand, this disillusionment is unfolding hand in hand with a larger sense of crisis in the humanities and of institutional retrenchment. On the other hand, the current moment in literary and cultural studies is also one of significant energy, excitement, and revitalization, as scholars confront and reimagine the reigning paradigms of the field. This volume, we hope, will help

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/chapter-pdf/577549/9780822373049-001.pdf
by guest

harness and direct this energy, as both an introduction to and a sustained exploration of the merits of critique and postcritique.

The collection opens with a set of essays that explore various counterhistories and "countertraditions of critique" that have been neglected in the mainstream of literary and cultural studies. Contemporary critique, Moi observes, often implies a specific vision of language and reading: namely, the assumption that texts have hidden meanings to be uncovered by the critic. Drawing on Wittgenstein and Cavell's thought, Moi challenges such a view. Just as there is no "approach" to language, there is no method in literary criticism. Whereas the suspicious critic is convinced that texts lead us astray, for Wittgenstein the fault lies in our own propensity to get lost in our unacknowledged assumptions. Moreover, because Wittgensteinian thought treats a text as an utterance—an action rather than an object—its meanings cannot be understood via metaphors of surface or depth. Instead, the key question for criticism now becomes "Why this?" We are thus inspired by our puzzlement to look more closely at how and why words are being used. Turning to two exemplars of suspicious readers—the detective and the psychoanalyst—Moi argues that the surface/depth distinction tells us nothing about how Sherlock and Freud actually engage in interpretation. Meanwhile, Kierkegaard offers an example of strenuous thinking that takes place outside the hidden/shown parameters of the hermeneutics of suspicion. The "Why this?" question, Moi concludes, opens up a much wider range of affective as well as interpretative possibilities, allowing for forms of admiration as well as critique.

In another reassessment of the history of critique, Heather Love's "The Temptations: Donna Haraway, Feminist Objectivity, and the Problem of Critique" begins by reflecting on the polarized responses triggered by Latour's widely cited "Has Critique Run Out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern." While evincing conflicting visions of the politics of critique, these responses index larger fractures within academia, including disciplinary prejudices about the relative merits of humanistic versus scientific scholarship. A return to the work of Donna Haraway allows Love to negotiate those tensions, given Haraway's interest in mixing methodologies from different disciplines as well as her simultaneous commitment to both critique and care. Haraway's embrace of a robust and self-reflexive notion of objectivity, especially, has often been overlooked by feminist critics. As Love argues, Haraway's writing offers an exceptionally rich resource for bridging current methodological divides, in particular the frequent stand-offs between proponents of critique

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/chapter-pdf/577549/9780822373049-001.pdf
by guest

and defenders of empiricism. As Love asserts: "Critique need not be only corrosive, but it can also represent a commitment to tracing social arrangements in-the-making; and the careful examination of the world as it appears does not imply a capitulation to *the way things are*."

Looking back to the eighteenth century, Simon During offers a revisionist account of the origins of critique. During first explains Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* as exhibiting a number of the features associated with critique: its reliance on standards or criteria, its scale, and its style or affect. Within Nietzsche's writing, moreover, the tone of critique is one of combined skepticism, denunciation, and prophecy, while Nietzsche also enlists satire. Nietzsche's thought thereby suggests an alternate genealogy of critique that challenges its typical alignment with the enlightenment project of reason and progress. During subsequently turns to an analysis of Reinhart Koselleck's narrative of the historical fortunes of critique as a gradual degradation—a vision often echoed in critiques of critique today. Finally, the concluding section of During's essay examines two specific episodes in eighteenth-century British letters that further illustrate the many parallels between contemporary critique and Nietzsche's thought. He focuses, first, on a pamphlet war between Richard Steele and Jonathan Swift in 1713–14 and, second, on parson John Brown's 1757 book criticizing social conditions. For During, these varied texts draw attention to underrecognized aspects of critique that characterized its eighteenth-century presence: namely, its grounding in polemic, irony, insult, and even laughter

The next section of this volume turns to questions of interpretation and to different "styles of reading" associated with both critique and postcritique. In "Romancing the Real: Bruno Latour, Ian McEwan, and Postcritical Monism," Jennifer L. Fleissner stages a dialogue between Bruno Latour's thought and Ian McEwan's 1997 novel *Enduring Love*. McEwan's novel, she proposes, offers an allegory of competing styles of reading, pitting suspicious or symptomatic interpretation versus surface and fact-based reading. In particular, one of McEwan's characters favors literal readings and justifies his preference through appeals to chemistry and biology. For Fleissner, this link raises questions about whether the backlash against critique should also be explained as a turn to science and realism—in other words, as deeply antiromantic. Like Love, Fleissner attributes this shift to science in part to the increasing influence of Latour. While Latour seeks to collapse what is often termed the "two cultures" divide, he also complains that humanists have enforced this split and failed to recognize what the humanities can gain from the sciences. An

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/chapter-pdf/577549/9780822373049-001.pdf
by guest

analogous conflict plays out in *Enduring Love*, which demonstrates the need for the continuing coexistence—and also the difference—of the sciences and the humanities. Here, Fleissner affirms her sympathy with certain veins of Eve Sedgwick's thought, namely her attention to the productive limits of both critical-pessimistic and reparative or reformist projects.

While a postcritical turn might seem to signal the waning of symptomatic reading, Ellen Rooney robustly defends such an interpretive approach as involving far more than a hermeneutics of suspicion. Rather, styles of symptomatic reading ultimately require a particular kind of engagement with form, a term that for Rooney extends beyond the literary. She notes that Althusser credited Marx with devising a new mode of reading that views all interpretations as bringing their own problematics to bear on a text, in ways that both render them guilty and invariably focus attention on other possible readings or counterreadings. Moreover, for Althusser the "reading effect" of form confounds both interpretation and writing to entail a play on words: a style that Althusser enacts through his own writing with its frequent use of puns, paradox, doubling, and irony. These various tactics add up, for Rooney, to an account of symptomatic reading that is predicated on its receptiveness to surprise, with consequences for both subjectivity and history.

For C. Namwali Serpell, cliché provides a helpful category for thinking about the styles of both critique and postcritique. Typically, cliché denotes instances of repetition, predictability, and unoriginality: the familiar targets and adversaries of critical thinking and reading. But cliché is also an indispensable component of both literature and criticism that cannot be wholly eschewed. Serpell thus canvasses cliché's origins, history, and forms in order to grasp its centrality. Rather than either defending or deriding cliché, Serpell's essay stages an appeal to phenomenologically informed habits of reading as an approach best geared to engaging with it. In this respect, cliché involves a materialist, manifest *experience* of language, which she theorizes by drawing on both Barthes's *A Lover's Discourse* and reader-response theory. The essay then moves to a reading of Jim Thompson's 1952 noir thriller *The Killer inside Me*, which Serpell analyzes both to demonstrate the limits of existing critical insights into cliché and to model an alternative style of engagement with the material and affective affordances of the text.

For Elizabeth S. Anker, J. M. Coetzee's oeuvre—particularly his 2013 novel, *The Childhood of Jesus*—serves to illustrate key features of critique, as a style not only of interpretation but also of fiction writing. As a novelist, Coetzee

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/chapter-pdf/577549/9780822373049-001.pdf
by guest

frequently engages in self-conscious dialogue with theoretically minded readers and critics, and Anker asks whether his fiction itself aspires to the status of theory. This blurring of the boundaries between literature and theory is reflective of a growing body of contemporary writers who have absorbed and creatively responded to the lessons of critique. In particular, Anker explains *The Childhood of Jesus* as an "allegory of reading" that both problematizes certain conventions of interpretation and illustrates why critique can devolve into a kind of hermeneutic game. One favored approach to Coetzee's fiction has been via deconstructive ethics, leading Anker to challenge many of the assumptions underlying ethics-based approaches to literary analysis. Although a deconstructive ethics might appear distinct from critique, Anker shows how an ethics-based framework can nevertheless be understood as an unexpected style and modality of critique.

The final section addresses affects, politics, and institutions. In the first essay, Christopher Castiglia focuses on the disposition of critique: a distinctive and widespread attitude of mistrust, indignation, and complacency that he dubs "critiquiness." The effect of critiquiness, Castiglia argues, is to promote an automatic skepticism about ethical ideals and utopian imaginings, a disposition he traces back to the era of Cold War politics and the state's explicit cultivation of vigilance, suspicion, and distrust. A revitalized critique, he insists, must be willing to embrace hopefulness, idealism, and imagination. And here literature can be a valuable ally, as a training ground in the unreal that expands our vision of what is possible. Invoking the thought of Deleuze as well as Rancière to support this notion of critical hopefulness, Castiglia also turns to the past for examples of its actualization: nineteenth-century spiritualism and stories of divine visitation, in which the otherworldly serves to validate existing possibilities. Literary studies, in short, needs new dispositions that can take us not beyond "critique," but beyond critiquiness.

In his essay, Russ Castronovo examines the relations between academic critique and a broader sphere of politics. Juxtaposing the works of Edward Said and Matthew Arnold, he shows that they share, despite obvious differences, a commitment to criticism and a common vision of the intertwining of politics and culture. And yet critique as an intellectual practice, ironically, is often attacked on two opposed fronts: it is simultaneously accused of being too political (with scholars reproached for overstepping their areas of scholarly expertise) and of not being political enough (in relation to more urgent and immediate real-world struggles). This fraught position, Castronovo suggests, may actually be the point: the status of critique is inherently contradic-

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/chapter-pdf/577549/9780822373049-001.pdf
by guest

tory, its effects uncertain. What he describes as the weak messianic power of critique thus resists a narrative of progress or a clear-cut telos. It is only by miscalculating, mistaking, or missing out on the political, Castronovo concludes, that critique retains its political promise.

John Michael's "Tragedy and Translation: A Future for Critique in a Secular Age" offers an account of the politics of critique in a context where secularism and rational thought are increasingly under siege. On the one hand, he argues, modern narratives of social transformation and emancipation have lost much of their power; on the other hand, there is a sharpened sense of the inescapability of belief and the limits of disenchantment. Meanwhile, art plays an increasingly marginal role in either reproducing or subverting the social order, such that the usual political justifications for critique seem increasingly tenuous. In the work of Whitman, Michael finds inspiration for an alternative vision of criticism-as-translation: a practice of reconstituting and redescribing meanings and experiences by moving them from one context to another. Attending to questions of aesthetic pleasure as well as social use, this practice of translation also possesses a tragic aspect in its recognition of the inevitable limits of criticism.

Eric Hayot's chapter, "Then and Now," concludes the volume by meditating on the past, present, and future of critique, especially in terms of its institutionalization. The essay first maps the diverse intellectual currents and political ambitions that came together to inaugurate the theory era in the academy. Hayot thus aims to capture the excitement and bold promise of theory in its heyday. However, these reflections are a prelude to the essay's attempts to reckon with the profound disappointment that has come to characterize the current intellectual climate. Hayot zeroes in on the historical arguments commonly invoked to explain what he identifies as a crisis in criticism, which he contrasts with other temporal arcs and patterns: those of the lives both of institutions and of human biology. These competing time frames operate according to different scales, rhythms, and logics of succession, Hayot argues, and call for new and more complex modes of historicizing. The essay accordingly advocates a "beyond" to critique, although one predicated on both greater attunement to the contemporary and an abandonment of the logic of crisis and temporal succession that has, for too long, underpinned practices of criticism.

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/chapter-pdf/577549/9780822373049-001.pdf
by guest

Notes

1 Jonathan Culler, *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 4.
2 Alastair Fowler, *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 41.
3 Tim Dean, "Art as Symptom: Žižek and the Ethics of Psychoanalytic Criticism," *diacritics* 32, no. 2 (2002): 22.
4 Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982), 48.
5 Abdul R. JanMohamed, "The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature," *Critical Inquiry* 12, no. 1 (1985): 59–87; Judith Fetterley, *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981).
6 Fredric Jameson, "Third-World Literature in the Age of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text* 15 (1986): 65–88; Aijaz Ahmad, "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the 'National Allegory,'" *Social Text* 17 (autumn 1987): 3–25.
7 See, e.g., Slavoj Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute* (New York: Verso, 2000).
8 Gordon Teskey, *Allegory and Violence* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 3, 23.
9 Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982), 205.
10 Evan Watkins, "The Self-Evaluations of Critical Theory," *boundary 2*, nos. 12/13 (1984): 366.
11 The phrase comes from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is about You," in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 7.
12 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 10th anniv. ed. (New York: Routledge, 1999), 5.
13 See, for instance, Judith Butler, "Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire," in *Gender Trouble*; Dipesh Chakrabarty, introduction to *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 112–13; Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994).
14 Bhahba, *Location of Culture*, 1, 7.
15 See *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, xii–xiii. Indeed, it is this tendency toward shame that, for Jacques Rancière, has divested critique of "any hope" of real-world payoff. *The Emancipated Spectator* (London: Verso, 2009), 40.
16 Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 1.
17 For a helpful discussion of the postcolonial canon, see Neil Lazarus, "The Politics of Postcolonial Modernism," in *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond*, ed. Ania

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/chapter-pdf/577549/9780822373049-001.pdf
by guest

Loomba, Suvir Kaul, Matti Bunzl, Antoinette Burton, and Jed Esty (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 423–38.

18 Adam Frank and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Shame in the Cybernetic Fold: Reading Silvan Tomkins," *Critical Inquiry* 21, no. 2 (winter 1995): 496–522.

19 Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 47–49; and see also her *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

20 Jacques Rancière, "The Misadventures of Critical Thought," in *The Emancipated Spectator* (New York: Verso, 2009); Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading."

21 Ann Cvetkovich, *Depression: A Public Feeling* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), Kindle location 69, 219.

22 Jonathan Lear, *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

23 Jose Estaban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 292. See also Michael D. Snediker, *Queer Optimism: Lyric Personhood and Other Felicitous Persuasions* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

24 Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011); Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*; Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

25 Michael Hardt, "The Militancy of Theory," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 110, no. 1 (winter 2011): 19.

26 Robyn Wiegman, "The Ends of New Americanism," *New Literary History* 42, no. 3 (2011): 385–407.

27 See Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 4–5.

28 Talal Asad, "Free Speech, Blasphemy, and Secular Criticism," in *Is Critique Secular?*, Kindle location 989, 623.

29 Asad, "Free Speech," 841–42.

30 See also Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

31 Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thevenot, *On Justification: Economies of Worth*, trans. Catherine Porter (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

32 Peter Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, trans. Andreas Huyssen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 89.

33 Bruno Latour, "Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern," *Critical Inquiry* 30, no. 2 (2004): 225–48, and "The Compositionist Manifesto," *New Literary History* 41, no. 3 (2010): 471–90.

34 Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (New York: Autonomedia, 2013), 19.

35 Best and Marcus, "Surface Reading," 1–21; Heather Love, "Close Reading and Thin Description," *Public Culture* 25, no. 3 (2013): 404.

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/chapter-pdf/577549/9780822373049-001.pdf
by guest

36 Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 149.
37 Sharon Marcus, *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 75.
38 Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 50. For another version of the "with the grain" motif, see Timothy Bewes, "Reading with the Grain: A New World in Literary Criticism," *differences* 21, no. 3 (2010): 1–33.
39 Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 62.
40 Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, trans. Steven Corcoran (New York: Continuum, 2010).
41 See Lawrence Grossberg, *Bringing It All Back Home: Essays in Cultural Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 107; see also Rita Felski, "Modernist Studies and Cultural Studies: Reflections on Method," *Modernism/Modernity* 10, no. 3 (2003): 501–18.
42 See, e.g., Antoine Hennion, "Pragmatics of Taste," in *The Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of Culture*, ed. Mark D. Jacobs and Nancy Weiss Hanrahan (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005).
43 Terry Eagleton, "The Death of Universities," *The Guardian*, December 17, 2010.
44 Hal Foster, "Post-Critical," *October*, no. 139 (2012): 6.
45 Foster, "Post-Critical," 3.
46 Henri Giroux, *Neoliberalism's War on Higher Education* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2014), 8.
47 Jeffrey Wallen, *Closed Encounters: Literary Politics and Public Cultures* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).
48 Doris Sommer, *The Work of Art in the World: Civic Agency and Public Humanities* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 6.

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/chapter-pdf/577549/9780822373049-001.pdf
by guest