

**Any Which Way But Close: How We Read Now**  
ENGL7/8702 // Contemporary Critical Theory // Fall 2017

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Professor: Donal Harris  
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Class Information:  
Wednesday, 5:30 – 8:30p

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**Course Summary:** According to Rita Felski, English and Literary Studies currently are enthralled in “method wars.” While the warring parties represent many fields within, approaches to, and definitions of “literature” and “literary studies,” for the most part they agree that the reign of “close reading” and “ideology critique” must end as soon as possible.

This course offers an overview of these wars. It has three goals: first, to introduce a range of cutting edge movements in English and Literary Studies; second, to contextualize those practices within a history of the discipline; third, to provide space for graduate students to gain skills in new methods and to practice using them. Each and every goal assumes that it is *crucial* for graduate students in English and Literary Studies to have a working knowledge of recent trends and debates in their discipline.

The course will be broken into two-week modules, each to address a specific method or reading practice. The selections will strive to be representative of large trends in the field, but they will inevitably reflect my own predilections. Possible covered areas include: surface reading, distant reading, just reading, descriptive reading, new formalisms, post-hermeneutics/post-critical reading, sociology of literature, cognitive and evolutionary theories of literature, book history, and digital methods such as data mining and topic modeling. Likely selections by Bruno Latour, Eve Sedgwick, Franco Moretti, Sharon Marcus and Stephen Best, Blakey Vermuele, John Guillory, Caroline Levine, Heather Love, Walter Benn Michaels, Richard Jean So, Rita Felski, Katherine Hayles, and Ursula Heise, among others.

\*\*\*A note: this is not a “theory” class in the strictest sense. We certainly will discuss how different methods assume or produce their own theories of literature, but the focus will be tied more closely to research methods than theory *per se*.

Course assignments: semi-regular response papers (3pp), in-class presentation, academic review (5pp), and either a polished conference-length paper (10pp) or the first draft of an article-length paper (~7000 words).

Full reading list will be available by May 1.