

# COM 7325 | CRN 13503: Critical Methods ENG 6019 | CRN 19224: Criticism & Theory II

Tuesday 6:30-9:15 PM in CIS 3057  
with José Ángel Maldonado  
joseamaldonado@usf.edu

“Pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will”  
Romain Rolland, inspiring Antonio Gramsci  
“Understand how the bloody system works”  
Stuart Hall, referring to Gramsci

This course intersects critical methods and contemporary criticism in their mutual origin: the verb *krinein*, meaning “to discern” or “to judge.” From their common foundation, critical methods and contemporary criticism attend to varied crises (also from the verb *krinein*) with an eye toward the liberation of others and the expansion (and explosion) of humanism. Critical readers assume all forms of communication are context-specific and, therefore, imbued with the values of their time, place, and author(s). This course will survey the theoretical roots, contemporary sites, and types of analyses adopted by critics who identify, unveil, diagnose, and challenge the power relations underpinning society.

Criticism—quintessential among critical methods—originates with dissatisfaction, disappointment, and frustration toward everyday life, social order, economic crises, political systems, and more. Therefore, demystifying the grand narratives of modernity becomes a critic’s lifelong journey. It is not surprising that those encountering cultural criticism will at times label it *pessimistic*. Confronted with the term, some critics have defended their stances as constructive or misunderstood, and therefore optimistic. Others, however, champion the label, stating that the condemnation of pessimism further evinces the destructive biases sustaining quotidian life. Pessimistic criticism, the topic beneath the mantle of this course, becomes a first step beyond dissatisfaction and toward how we imagine an alternative world.

Students will read and develop research archives, immerse themselves in participatory fieldwork, creatively perform critique, and draft representations, transcriptions, and/or translations attentive to complex social relations.

Readings include: Cabrera, Benjamin, Berlant, Dienstag, Edelman, Emmerling, Fanon, Gabara, Gramsci, Hall, Hasian, Leopardi, Nietzsche, Paz, Smilges, Taylor, Thacker, Schopenhauer, Spivak, & Wilderson, among others.