

Doctoral Seminar in Curriculum and Pedagogy: History and Theory

EDCP 601.031

University of British Columbia

Winter 1 2016 (W, 1.00-4.00)



Writing Activities: Commentary & Critique

Michel Foucault learned that “since the Classical age, commentary and criticism have been in profound opposition... until the connection between language and representation is broken, or at least transcended, in our culture, all secondary languages will be imprisoned within the alternative of criticism or commentary. And in their indecision they will proliferate *ad infinitum*.” Commentary “halts before the precipice of the original text, and assumes the impossible and endless task of repeating its own birth within itself.” It is a glossarial practice of drawing “copious deductions” and illuminating a text; *pia interpretatio*, reverent interpretation. Criticism questions language and the text “as to its truth or falsehood, its transparency or opacity... examines the forms of *rhetoric*: the analysis of *figures*, that is, the types of discourse, with the expressive value of each, the analysis of *tropes*, that is, the different relations that words may have with the same representative content... defines its *relation* to what it represents.” Commentary “sacralizes language” and criticism judges and “profanes it.”¹ In erudition, Foucault is careful to concede that commentary and criticism are mutually pedagogical even over time when “*commentary* has yielded to *criticism*.” Critique and criticism range from what Foucault dubbed “the high Kantian enterprise to the little polemical professional activities,” albeit too often mistakenly distinguished by differentiating between objects— criticism of works versus critique of practices and positions.²

1. **Commentary on a Historical Fragment or Quote**— Choose an ancient or medieval fragment or quote, translate/d, and provide a brief but meaning commentary on its meaning for curriculum or pedagogy. Here, we distinguish between commentary and criticism. Commentary is ostensibly “deference to the text” (Smith, 1991). Commentary generally involves annotation and interpretation, clarifying and deepening the contents of a text.

Commentary Length: 450 words (single-spaced).

2. **Criticism through Point-Counterpoint**— Point-counterpoint, at base, renders an issue symmetrical by showing, arguing, or articulating two sides. Point-counterpoint might be defined as “a vehicle for the expression contrasting views on controversial topics;” or alternatively, a vehicle to “provide the room needed to unfold arguments, counterarguments, and related evidence concerning controversial issues and, in later issues, to draw” from diverse perspectives (*Journal of Social Work Education*, 1991, p. 102; 2001, p. 2). Commonly, a result is reconciliation. How many sides does an issue, event, or statement have? How many dimensions? This ancient genre often subverts rather than reinforces what we know about or our confidence and position. The intent of this assignment is to develop criticism and critique.

Point-Counterpoint Length: 450 words + 1 high quality image (single-spaced).

Point-Counterpoint Topics:

- Is curriculum fair?
- Is curriculum a complicated conversation?

- Is curriculum cosmopolitan?

¹ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London, Tavistock, 1970), 80, 81. On commentary, see Eva Matthews Sanford, "Renaissance Commentaries on Juvenal," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 79 (1948): 92-112, on 93; Gerald Snare, "The Practice of Glossing in Late Antiquity and the Renaissance," *Studies in Philology* 92 (Autumn 1995): 439-459. Sanford quotes Conrad of Hirschau to define the practice of commentary: "to draw copious deductions from brief statements, and to illuminate the obscure words of others." Lanigan summarizes this section of Foucault as a contest between "language as grammar" and "speech as rhetoric:" "It is a contest that may be won or lost under both the semiotic guise of a *rhetoric of science* and under the phenomenological guise of a *science of rhetoric*." Richard L. Lanigan, "Foucault's Science of Rhetoric: The Contest Between Practical Discourse and Discursive Practice," *symplokē* 4 no 1/2 (1996): 189-202, on 190. See also Philip Smallwood, "Problems in the Definition of Criticism," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 36 (July 1996): 252-264.

² Michel Foucault, "What is Critique? In *The Politics of Truth* ed. Sylvère Lotringer, trans. Lisa Hochroth and Catherine Porter (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 1978/2007), 41-83, on 42. For the distinction between critique and criticism, Childs and Fowler posit that "*Critical theory* too should be distinguished from criticism, since it concerns itself with the analysis of concepts rather than works." In a helpful discussion of critique, they state: "when critique, and the forms of literary criticism associated with it, question the prevailing distribution of political power, the alarm bells start to ring. By contrast, the apolitical forms of critique are a tolerated part of the intellectual scene. But this distinction between the political and the apolitical is not itself invariable and we cannot necessarily know in advance what form of critique will strike a political nerve." Peter Childs & Roger Fowler, *The Routledge Dictionary of Literary Terms* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 38, 41.