Form, New Formalism, and the Problem of Reading Poetry

December 1, 2008, 5 p.m.
Herring Hall, English Department Lounge

Cary Wolfe
The Bruce and Elizabeth Dunlevie Professor of English
Rice University

This discussion forum takes up Wolfe’s recent essay “The Idea of Observation at Key West, or, Systems Theory, Poetry, and Form Beyond Formalism” (NLH 29 (2008): 259-276) and Marjorie Levinson’s “What is New Formalism?” (PMLA 122.2 (2007): 558-569) to start a conversation about how we read poetry (and literature more generally) in the wake of the rise and fall of recent literary critical approaches. If, for poets, the “new formalism” refers to the (purportedly) radical resurgence of traditional form and metrics among writers in the early 90s, critics too have been waging their own skirmishes about how literary form matters in an age dominated by strategies that often seem to displace and replace literature as an object of study. How can we think about the particularity of aesthetic objects without isolating them from historical or social concerns? To RSVP and for access to the articles (electronic or otherwise), contact Joseph Campana at jac4@rice.edu or 713-348-4316.