

Distinguished Visiting Professor 2016: Prof. Richard E. Langston, PhD

Forschungsprojekt: Dark Matter – Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt

The project analyzes the philosophy of Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge in concert with Negt's theoretical writings and Kluge's literature, film, and television programs. While long recognized by many for their unorthodox collaborations, Negt & Kluge have yet to garner the sustained and probing scholarly reception necessary for establishing their rightful place on the world map of contemporary critical thought. The project is thus a critical interrogation into the valuable contributions that Negt's and Kluge's thought still has to offer the humanities today. Although primarily focused on Negt & Kluge, the project inspects foundational concepts that are of keen interest to interdisciplinary audiences throughout the humanities: concepts like subjectivity and community, power and resistance, theory and practice, and politics and aesthetics. Thought of as either separate from one another or subordinate to one another, the philosophy of Negt & Kluge and Kluge's own massive aesthetic output are treated in this project as equal and contingent on one another; philosophy for Negt & Kluge always assumes peculiar aesthetic forms, just as Kluge's art always harbors philosophic concepts. This constitutive relationship between these countervailing tendencies in Negt & Kluge's philosophy and Kluge's art shapes both the content and form of this book. Conceptually, the project advances Negt & Kluge as unprecedented liminal thinkers who inhabit the divide between schools; neither high dialecticians like their Frankfurt School teachers nor subscribers to anti-dialecticism (like Niklas Luhmann's systems theory, Michel Foucault's poststructuralism, or Gilles Deleuze's transcendental empiricism), Negt & Kluge have developed an original and coherent late-Marxian body of theory and aesthetic praxis both situated between and always in dialogue with these giants.

Thematically, the project argues that at the core of Negt's and Kluge's work lie the countervailing figures of Catastrophic modernity and the irrepressible materiality of human resilience. Again and again they ask us, What might constitute the conditions of possibility for happiness today? Again and again, Kluge's art turns our attention to the promise and shortcomings of our dark matter. Against this backdrop, the project, firstly, establishes core theoretical foundations upon which Negt and Kluge collaborate. Secondly, it delves into what I argue to be the central feature in Negt and Kluge's thought, namely their reckoning with the ongoing history of catastrophic modernity. Thirdly, the project assays three hallmarks of Negt and Kluge's obstinate politics, their defiance of this modernity. In sum, my approach to Negt and Kluge is two-pronged. On the one hand, it introduces Negt and Kluge's works as well as their concomitant contexts and concepts for English-language readers unfamiliar with their thought. While I do strive to cover the breadth of Negt and Kluge's output, I also acknowledge the unwieldy massiveness of Negt and Kluge's ideas as well as the inherent fragmentary character of their output.