

Critical Environments: Postmodern Theory and the Pragmatics of the "Outside" (Theory Out of Bounds)

Cary Wolfe

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Argues for a pragmatist orientation for postmodern theory.

Taking up the problem that has stalled contemporary theory -- its treatment of the object of knowledge, the "outside", as nothing but what a particular discourse makes of it -- this book suggests a solution: a reinvigorated, posthumanist form of pragmatism.

Author Cary Wolfe investigates three of the most significant strains of postmodern theory (pragmatism, systems theory, and poststructuralism) and shows how each confronts the specter of an "outside" not wholly constituted by discourses, language games, and interpretive communities. He then assesses these confrontations in light of an essentially pragmatic view of theory, one that constantly asks what practical and material difference it makes, and to whom, how these issues are negotiated.

Unique in its collation of major theorists rarely considered together, Critical Environments incorporates detailed discussions of the work of Richard Rorty, Walter Benn Michaels, Stanley Cavell, Humberto Maturana, Francisco Varela, Niklas Luhmann, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Fredric Jameson, and others, and ranges across fields from feminist philosophy of science to the theory of ideology. An answer to the widespread charge of relativism leveled against postmodern theory, this work will inspire new kinds of critical thought.



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