CONTEMPORARY CRITICAL THOUGHT
CRITIQUE 13/13
2019-2020 SEMINAR

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WEDNESDAYS 6:00 PM TO 9:00 PM
14 SESSIONS SPREAD OVER THE 2019-2020 ACADEMIC YEAR

This seminar will be cross-listed in Law, Political Science, and ICLS

Seminar Description

This seminar will focus, each year, on a different set of topics at the heart of contemporary critical thought in law, politics, and social inquiry. During the 2015-2016 academic year, the seminar focused on Michel Foucault’s Collège de France lectures and produced the Foucault 13/13 series. During the 2016-2017 academic year, the seminar focused on critical readings of Friedrich Nietzsche and produced the Nietzsche 13/13 series. During the 2017-2018 academic year, the seminar focused on modalities of uprisings and produced the Uprising 13/13 series. During the 2018-2019 academic year, the seminar focused on the relationship between critical theory and praxis, and produced the Praxis 13/13 series.

The upcoming seminar for 2019-2020 will return to brilliant texts in critical theory: to reread Adorno, Althusser, Arendt, de Beauvoir, Du Bois, Fanon, Foucault, Freire, Horkheimer, Lorde, Said, Sartre, and others, in order to examine the current state of critical theory and ask how contemporary critical thought and practice function in these troubled times. We will approach these texts from a critical perspective: as objects of experimentation, of manipulation—of study in furtherance of our own critical projects. The idea, in essence, is to see how today we can use these critical texts.

Our critical method in rereading these texts will be guided by the idea that we, critical
theorists, are never “influenced” by authors or texts and are never “-ian”, but that instead we deploy and manipulate critical texts for our own political projects. In approaching these texts again today, the idea will be to find new ways to use them, not to tear them down and criticize them for their faults, but to discover what we can do with them today. We will not care about what has been done with them in the past. We will look forward, to see what can be done with them now. We often refer to “Adorno” or “Foucault,” but they do not exist and those terms do not have coherent meaning. Those terms are shorthand for their various written traces, often internally contradictory. It may well be that we typically anthropomorphize philosophers, books, or their oeuvre; but that is just human weakness, not a critical method. The only way to do justice to our critical task of writing, theorizing, and more importantly, engaging in critical praxis, is precisely to put these critical texts to work in furtherance of our own political projects.¹

That is what we will do this year in Critique 13/13 on the following works:

de Beauvoir, Simone. The Second Sex. 1949.
Du Bois, W.E.B. Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil. 1903.
Fanon, Frantz. Black Skin, White Masks. 1952.
Foucault, Michel. Les Aveux de la chair. [1984].
Lorde, Audre. Zami: A New Spelling of My Name. 1982
Sartre, Jean-Paul. Critique of Dialectical Reason. 1960

The graduate student seminar will be structured to frame a series of 13 formal seminars at which a guest, from different disciplines, will be invited to discuss the readings and present on the themes of the seminar. Each formal seminar will host a contemporary critical theorist from across the disciplines. It will also frame and interrelate with a Paris Reading Group that will run alongside the seminar. The graduate student seminar thus will serve as the vehicle to enrich the formal 13/13 seminars and support the intellectual apparatus that will accompany those formal seminars. It will also prepare entries for the blog of the formal seminars, host the scholars invited to participate in the formal seminars, and prepare questions and comments

¹ I develop these ideas for a critical method in “The Illusion of Influence: On Foucault, Nietzsche, and a Fundamental Misunderstanding” (May 24, 2019). Available at SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=3393827
for the formal seminars. This seminar will function as an advanced graduate research seminar.

We will be holding the formal seminars on Wednesday evenings this coming year, from 6:15pm to 8:45pm, all at Columbia University (except those marked). Students will be expected, though, to be seated and in discussion with the other participants from 6pm to 9pm. Tentatively, the seminars will be scheduled for:

- September 4 (introductory seminar just for enrolled graduate students)
- September 11
- September 25
- *October 16 (in Paris)
- *October 22 (in Rio)
- November 13
- December 4
- *December 18 (in Frankfurt)
- *January 15 (in Paris)
- January 29
- February 19
- March 11
- April 8
- April 29

The seminars will follow a modified format from previous years (Foucault 13/13, Nietzsche 13/13, Uprising 13/13, and Praxis 13/13), beginning with a short introduction of the readings and guest, followed by a guest presentation (15-20 minutes) and a commentary (15 minutes max), and then open discussion with the participants for over an hour. The formal part of the sessions will begin promptly at 6:15pm and will end promptly at 8:45pm. The format, then, will be as follows:

- 6:15pm Introductions
- 6:25pm Presentation by guest
- 6:45pm Commentary and questions
- 7:00pm Open discussion and comments
- 8:30pm Closing remarks of the guest
- 8:45pm End of the seminar

**Description of the Paris Reading Group**

In addition, there will be a graduate student reading group in Paris that will be spearheaded by Loren Wolfe at the Columbia Global Center—Paris that will meet regularly to participate virtually in the formal Critique 13/13 seminar and to run a parallel reading group
to discuss the readings. These sessions will invite leading experts from various disciplines to discuss the readings at the Paris reading group.

Assignments

For each seminar, there will be assigned readings (one book and optional additional materials). The readings may be updated and revised, in which case any changes will be posted on our Courseworks page. You should consult the Courseworks page regularly to get updates and information about the seminar.

Each student, in coordination with the others, will be responsible during one of the formal seminars for the Live Streaming and Twitter (LST) room. The LST room is a dynamic, interactive virtual space that will be run simultaneously alongside the formal seminars. The idea of the LST Room is to virtually extend participation beyond the seminar room and create a virtual space for our public to not only watch our guests speak, but also to formulate questions that will directly inform the seminar discussion. Questions arising in the LST room will be transmitted to our guest speakers during the formal seminar itself via email and Twitter. So being in charge of the LST room means communicating with others, who are not physically present in the formal seminar but watching the livestream, to pose their questions or comments.

Books and Texts

The texts for the course will be assigned readings, mostly available at BookCulture or on Courseworks. In order to access the readings and syllabus on-line, please go to the Courseworks page and login using your UNI and password here: https://courseworks.columbia.edu/welcome/. All digital materials will be posted to the Courseworks page.

Required books


Seminar Syllabus: Critique (Bernard E. Harcourt)

2019-2020


Articles and Resources On-Line


Requirements

Graduate students are expected to read the assigned materials prior to the formal seminar and should be prepared to offer public comments to facilitate seminar discussion. There should be no absences. If a student has an excused absence, please e-mail Ghislaine Pagès (gmp2142@columbia.edu) by 10:00 a.m. of the day of the seminar.

Students will conduct their own research and prepare, for each semester, (a) one ex ante 5-page book review or pre-seminar blog-post providing guidance on the book we will be reading that week, and (b) one ex post 5-page blog-post discussing and elaborating on the intellectual discussion at one of the 13/13 seminars. In addition, this work will form part of a final paper for the seminar of about 20 pages.

Professor Harcourt will hold office hours on Thursdays from 3:00 – 5:00 p.m. in his office, Jerome Greene Hall 603. Please contact his assistant, Ghislaine Pagès (gmp2142@columbia.edu) to schedule an appointment. Office hours are by appointment only.
Laptop Policy

You are discouraged from bringing a laptop to the formal seminar. Should you choose to bring one anyway, you may only use your laptop for two purposes: (1) as a word processor to take and read notes; or (2) as a reader to consult assigned course materials that are on-line or saved on your hard drive. You may not use your laptop in the seminar, ever, to write emails, shop on-line, or for any other purpose that is not seminar related. If you are the kind of person who cannot resist temptation, please leave your laptop at home. It is very distracting to one’s peers when someone else is shopping on-line. Please respect your peers and this policy.

There is one exception: if you are responsible for the Live Streaming and Twitter (LST) room. See assignments above. When you are responsible for the LST room, you will be on-line throughout the designated seminar.
TENTATIVE SEMINAR SCHEDULE AND READINGS

September 4, 2019 6:15-8:45 in the Jerome Greene Annex
Introductory seminar for enrolled graduate students.
Please read the following writings, all available on Courseworks:


Wednesday, September 11, 2019 6:15 – 8:45 pm at Columbia University
With Professor Amy Allen

Please read:


Wednesday, September 25, 2019 6:15-8:45 pm at Columbia University
With Professor Axel Honneth

Please read:

Seminar Syllabus: Critique (Bernard E. Harcourt)

2019-2020


Wednesday, October 16, 2019 6:00 pm Paris Time – in Paris and On-Line

With Professor Judith Revel


Wednesday, October 22, 2019 6:00 pm Rio Time – in Rio, Brazil


Wednesday, November 13, 2019 6:15 – 8:45 pm in the Maison Française at Columbia

With Professor Étienne Balibar


Wednesday, December 4, 2019 6:15 – 8:45 pm at Columbia University


Wednesday, December 18, 2019 at 6:00 pm Frankfurt Time at the Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main

With Professor Martin Saar

Seminar Syllabus: Critique (Bernard E. Harcourt)

2019-2020

Wednesday, January 15, 2020 in Paris


Wednesday, January 29, 2020 6:15 – 8:45 pm

With Professor Seyla Benhabib


Wednesday, February 19, 2020 6:15 – 8:45 pm at Columbia University


Wednesday, March 11, 2020 6:15 – 8:45 pm at Columbia University

With Professor Homi Bhabha


Wednesday, April 8, 2020 6:15 – 8:45 pm at Columbia University

With Professor Brandon Terry

Please read


Wednesday, April 29, 2020 6:15-8:45 at Columbia University

Conclusion – Readings TBA