COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
CENTER FOR CONTEMPORARY CRITICAL THOUGHT

SPRING 2015 SEMINAR

SECRETS

PROFESSORS RENATA SALECL & BERNARD E. HARCOURT

MONDAY THROUGH FRIDAY, APRIL 20-24, 2015
12:00 TO 1:30 PM
WILLIAM C. WARREN, LEVIEN ROOM, 10TH FLOOR

SEMINAR DESCRIPTION

Inadvertently, we tell our secrets. Sometimes, we do so to keep others, or hide them. Occasionally, we listen to others tell their secrets—we might desire to know their secrets or we are horrified by them. The very telling of secrets might give us joy or might cause others and us enormous pains. Often, others can’t tell us what we want to know. Sadly, we kill people for their secrets. Sometimes, it’s because they know ours. Secrets do a lot of work. The question, in the end, is what do secrets want? Or what do we want from them?

In this special seminar, we will explore the work that secrets do, through readings of texts by Freud, Foucault, Lacan, and others. We will experiment with ideas and theories, and create a space, perhaps a secret space, for our imagination and intellectual experimentation.

NOTICE

This special seminar is open to graduate students in law and in the arts and sciences at Columbia University at the consent of the instructors and will be capped at 12. The seminar will meet five times during the week of April 20th through 24th, 2015. The seminar cannot be taken for credit, only for intellectual growth. If you would like to attend, you will be expected to attend all five meetings of the seminar. If you would like to participate, please send a paragraph to Claire Merrill at cm3325@columbia.edu before April 10th. Please explain your interest, your background, and whether you will be able to attend all five seminars.
By way of background, it may be helpful to read Foucault’s main work on confessions, his Louvain lectures from 1981, Wrong-Doing, Truth-Telling: The Function of Avowal in Justice (Chicago, 2014). In addition, we would like you to read, before the start of the seminar, two short works of fiction:

O’Henry, *The Memento*, available here:  
http://www.readbookonline.net/readOnLine/14947/

Henry James, *The Figure in the Carpet* available here:  
http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/645

**SCHEDULE**

I. **SUBJECTIVITY AND SECRETS**

The first seminar will explore a range of texts on the question of secrets and subjectivity, focused on the place of truth-telling, of confessions, and of psychoanalysis.

**READINGS:**


Sigmund Freud, “The Question of Lay Analysis” (1926), Standard Edition XX


II. **TO SAY ALL IS NOT TO TELL ALL**

The second seminar will explore the private realms protected by secrets. How is it that we can tell so much about ourselves, and in the process hide things? What is the relationship
between telling all and keeping secrets? Also, how has this all changed in the digital age? What is the confessional dimension of social media today?

**READINGS:**


III. SEEING TOO MUCH. THE SECRET IN THE BODY            WEDNESDAY APRIL 22, 2015

In this seminar, we will explore the search for secrets in the body: How we try to find truth with the help of genetic testing and the brain sciences.

**READINGS:**


IV. THE POWER OF SECRETS            THURSDAY APRIL 23, 2015

This seminar will explore the role of secrecy in ideology, in state security, and in the surveillance apparatus.

**READINGS AND FILM:**

Steven Lukes, “In Defense of False Consciousness,” *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 2011

Laura Kurgan, *Close Up At A Distance: Mapping, Technology, and Politics* (2013)


V. **THE RIGHT TO IGNORANCE. THE RIGHT TO KEEP SECRETS**  FRIDAY APRIL 24, 2015

In the final seminar, we will explore the right to keep secrets from oneself, the right to remain ignorant of our own secrets and traumas.

**READINGS:**

Sigmund Freud, “Negation” (1925), Standard Edition XIX
