CONTEMPORARY CRITICAL THOUGHT: CRITIQUE AFTER NIETZSCHE

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
2016-2017 SEMINAR

L-8866 S
(CROSS LISTED IN ICLS AND POLITICAL SCIENCE)

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THURSDAYS, 6:00 PM TO 9 PM
14 SESSIONS SPREAD OVER THE 2016-2017 ACADEMIC YEAR

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

Admission will require a paragraph statement of interest and instructor consent.
The first class will meet on Tuesday, August 30, 2016.

Seminar Description

Friedrich Nietzsche, one of the great masters of suspicion from the nineteenth century, radically challenged the way we think and engage the world. Nietzsche’s writings and thought had a tremendous influence across the disciplines, upending many—especially philosophy, political thought, philology, and critical theory—and significantly marking others, such as law, anthropology, and the humanities. A number of contemporary critical thinkers in the 20th century—Georges Bataille, Martin Heidegger, Maurice Blanchot, Aimé Césaire, Léopold Senghor, Hannah Arendt, Frantz Fanon, Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault, Sarah Kofman, Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, Jacques Derrida, Ali Shariati, and others—drew inspiration from Nietzsche’s writings and developed a strand of critical theory that has had great influence in disciplines as varied as history, law, philology, and the theory of science. These twentieth century thinkers helped forge a unique Nietzschean strand of contemporary critical thought.
Seminar Syllabus: Critique After Nietzsche (Harcourt & Velasco)

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In some disciplines, such as philosophy and political theory, the critical influence of Nietzsche’s thought has been analyzed and explored along many dimensions—epistemological, moral, political, and aesthetic, among others. In other disciplines, though, Nietzsche’s influence has been less well understood and studied. As Peter Goodrich and Mariana Valverde note, in their edited collection *Nietzsche and Legal Theory: Half-Written Laws* (Routledge, 2005), many other scholars have read Nietzsche “not so well,” “rather hurriedly, and through secondhand accounts.” As a result, certain disciplines have missed some of the central critical insights of Nietzsche—including his trenchant critique of “the timeless transcendent value of natural law theory,” as well as his equally cutting critique of “the comparably timeless Kantian ideal of freedom.” (Goodrich and Valverde, at 2).

The purpose of this seminar is to explore the rich tradition of contemporary critical thought that has emerged in the wake of Nietzsche. In other words, to explore Nietzschean critical thought in contrast, say, to the Marxian or Freudian traditions. The seminar will proceed through a close reading of the writings on or influenced by Nietzsche of Bataille, Heidegger, Blanchot, Césaire, Senghor, Arendt, Fanon, Deleuze, Klossowski, Foucault, Kofman, Derrida, Irigaray, Cixous, Shariati, and others, with the purpose of excavating critical insights across the disciplines and formulating a coherent Nietzschean strand of contemporary critical thought. This graduate student seminar will thus explore thirteen contemporary critical thinkers from the 20th century who engaged Nietzsche’s thought to challenge our critical thinking across a number of disciplines in social thought, law, and the humanities.

The graduate student seminar will be structured to frame a series of 13 formal seminars (the “formal seminars” or “Nietzsche 13/13”) at which two guests, from different disciplines, will be invited to discuss the readings and present on the themes of the seminar. Each formal seminar will host two specialists from across the disciplines, one from Columbia University and one from outside campus. It will also frame and interrelate with a Paris Reading Group that will run alongside the seminar. (See Paris Reading Group below). The graduate student seminar thus will serve as the vehicle to enrich the formal seminars and support the intellectual apparatus that will accompany the 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 for the formal seminars. It will serve as the structure that will nourish the formal seminar series. This seminar will also function as an advanced graduate research seminar. We will form four or five research clusters that will conduct on-going research in coordination with the formal seminars.
Description of the “Formal Seminar”: Nietzsche 13/13

“With few exceptions, my company on earth is mostly Nietzsche,” Georges Bataille would declare in the opening passages of his book On Nietzsche, published in 1945—adding a few lines later, “Nietzsche is the only one to support me.” Decades later, Michel Foucault would return to Nietzsche in his Rio lectures of 1973 to challenge “the great Western myth” of the separation of knowledge and power: “This great myth needs to be dispelled,” Foucault declared. “It is this myth which Nietzsche began to demolish by showing... that, behind all knowledge [savoir], behind all attainment of knowledge [connaissance], what is involved is a struggle for power. Political power is not absent from knowledge, it is woven together with it.” And a few years later, Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, and other critical thinkers would engage Nietzsche’s work from a different direction to instigate a new “écriture feminine.”

Indeed, there is a rich current of contemporary critical thought that has been nourished throughout the twentieth century on the writings and thought of Nietzsche. Most of us are familiar with the critical theory tradition of the Frankfurt School. We are familiar with the psychoanalytic tradition as well. But what of these critical thinkers who engaged with Nietzsche? Surely, they do not constitute a school. Many never belonged to anything, nor wanted to. Many tended toward limit experiences, many towards forms of anarchism, many of them were at the extremes of society and politics. Yet much of their critical thought can be glimpsed today in the interstices of recent social movements, such as the Occupy Wall Street movement or, now, in Paris, “NuitDébout.” There are even, today, eerie resonances in the non-conformity of certain political candidates in the United States and abroad. What should we make of these influential, sometimes eccentric, and surely idiosyncratic critical thinkers? Would it be possible to imagine continuities amongst the differences between them?

This 13/13 seminar will explore the currents of critical thought spawned by Nietzsche’s writings. The seminar will focus on 13 critical thinkers in particular and their surroundings—some of whom drew inspiration, others resisted Nietzsche’s thought, others conversed with yet other thinkers—including:

  Georges Bataille (Sept. 8, 2016)
  Martin Heidegger (Sept. 22, 2016)
  Maurice Blanchot (Oct. 13, 2016)
  Aimé Césaire (Oct. 27, 2016)
  Hannah Arendt (Nov. 10, 2016)
  Gilles Deleuze (Dec. 8, 2016)
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Sarah Kofman (Jan. 5, 2017)
Frantz Fanon (Jan. 19, 2017)
Michel Foucault (Feb. 9, 2017)
Luce Irigaray (March 2, 2017)
Hélène Cixous (April 13, 2017)
Ali Shariati (April 27, 2017)

Each seminar will be led by two invited scholars, one from outside and the other from within Columbia University, as well as a commentator. Each seminar will follow a similar format, beginning with a short introduction of the readings and guests, followed by two short guest presentations (15-20 minutes max each) and a commentary (10-15 minutes max), and then open discussion with the participants for over an hour. 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 outside guest
6:45pm  Presentation by Columbia guest
7:00pm  Commentary and questions
7:15pm  Open discussion and comments
8:30pm  Closing remarks of the guests
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 Foucault 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. A tentative syllabus is attached. It 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.

In addition, during the first session of the graduate seminar, we will organize students into research groups in charge of a research cluster, which will work on amplifying or modifying the readings and creating an annotated bibliography. Each research cluster will help prepare blog posts for the formal seminar, questions, and comments. In addition, we will present our work from these research clusters at a day-long conference that we will organize at the end of the year.

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.

**Tentative Research Clusters**

During the first seminar session, we will form the research clusters and determine the themes of research. You will present your research at the end of the year during a day-long conference that we will all organize together. Your work in research clusters should be guided by these norms:

- **Choose a research subject and form a balanced, cross-disciplinary research group**
- **Choose carefully your bibliographical sources.** With these sources, you can create an electronic resource (catalogue, map, timeline, etc.). For this purpose, you can contact different people across campus: specialists in digital humanities like Alex Gil, Susanna Allés, or Denis Tennen; specialists in digital curatorship and preservation, like the CDRS (Center for Digital Research and Scholarship); if you are using the materials in the Center of Oral History, work closely with the staff; similarly, if you are working at the Rare Book and Manuscript Collection, work closely with them.
● **Your sources will also be your first theoretical resource.** Study them carefully and learn to develop a sixth sense in order to harvest concepts, expressions, ideas, wrinkles that will help you think critically about Nietzsche’s influence on critical thought.

● **Discuss your theoretical approaches.** Based on the kind of sources and their conceptual richness, you may want to discuss other theoretical contributions that will help you think with your sources. The questions you may ask may vary, but perhaps instead of asking mainly “how does [insert trendy theorist] help me understand Nietzsche and/or critique?”, you can pose questions like “how do my sources help me re-think issues and questions posited by [theorists]? Aren’t these sources asking questions that those other theorists have not asked sufficiently?”, etc.

● Your work as a group is essentially that of a micro-seminar: the collection and discussion of materials is a collective endeavor; however, each of you needs to have her or his personal investment in the materials and create blogs, articles or other more personal, individual contributions.

Possible research clusters could include the following:

1. Rethinking epistemology after Nietzsche
2. Post-colonialism in the wake of Nietzsche
3. Nietzsche and Critical Approaches to the Law
4. Thinking Nietzsche’s Orientalisms
5. Rethinking Aesthetics after Nietzsche
6. Tragedy as an epistemological device: rethinking Tragedy after Nietzsche
7. Thinking and Practicing Philology after Nietzsche
8. Thinking and Theorizing Rhetoric after Nietzsche

**Required Readings**

The texts for the course will be assigned required and optional readings, mostly available on Courseworks and/or Book Culture. 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/](https://courseworks.columbia.edu/welcome/) All digital materials will be posted to the Courseworks page.
Background Readings

There are a number of key texts by Friedrich Nietzsche that you should be familiar with and that you may wish to reread over the summer in preparation for the seminar. These include, especially:

- The Birth of Tragedy (1872)
- On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense (1873)
- Untimely Meditations (1876)
- The Gay Science (1882)
- Thus Spoke Zarathustra (1883)
- Beyond Good and Evil (1886)
- On the Genealogy of Morality (1887)
- Nietzsche contra Wagner (1888)
- The Will to Power (unpublished manuscripts)

There are also a number of texts that may want to refer to should the need arise. These texts will be on reserve at the law library and they include:


Tamsin Shaw, Nietzsche's Political Skepticism, Princeton University Press, 2007

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 Claire Merrill (CMerrill@law.columbia.edu) by 10:00 a.m. of the day of the seminar.

Students will be conducting their own research and, for at least one formal seminar, will write a pre-seminar blog-post providing guidance on the topics that week, a bibliography, and a list of questions and comments. 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 4:00 – 6:00 p.m. in his office, Jerome Greene Hall 603. Please contact his assistant, Claire Merrill (CMerrill@law.columbia.edu) to schedule an appointment. Office hours are by appointment only.

Professor Velasco will hold office hours on Tuesdays, 10-12 in his office, 301 Casa Hispánica, 612 W116th Street. 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 check e-mail, send messages, surf the web, shop on-line, communicate with others, watch a video, or for any other purpose than to take notes and read class assignments. Anyone who uses a laptop for these purposes will be asked to leave the seminar and not to return with their laptop. 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 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.
INTRODUCTORY SEMINAR SESSION  

Tuesday August 30, 2016

We will meet first to discuss the seminar, to form our research clusters, and to organize the logistics and apparatus for the formal seminars. This will be a chance to explain everything, including the blog, the LST Room, the guests, etc.

We will also use this opportunity to present the substance of the seminar and discuss Nietzsche. Please do background readings at your leisure over the summer.

Also, please read background in your discipline. So, for instance, if you are in law, please read Peter Goodrich and Mariana Valverde, *Nietzsche and Legal Theory: Half-Written Laws* (Routledge 2005); intellectual history, please read Rüdiger Safranski, *Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2002); etc.

WEEK 1: George Bataille’s *On Nietzsche* (1937-1945)  
September 8, 2016

“With few exceptions, my best company on earth is that of Nietzsche,” Georges Bataille would write in 1945. Bataille would add: “I am the only one who presents himself, not as a glossator of Nietzsche, but as being Nietzsche himself.” Indeed, very early on, Georges Bataille drew on Nietzsche’s thought, finding in it a source of inspiration for his social-anarchist, anti-fascist beliefs. He resisted a narrow or ideological reading of Nietzsche, instead proposing a more holistic interpretation that would be highly influential on contemporary critical thought. In 1937, along with Jean Wahl, Pierre Klossowski, and André Masson, Bataille would edit an important collection of essays on Nietzsche in their review, *Acéphale: religion, sociologie, philosophie*. This publication would revive interest in Nietzsche’s thought on the Left in Europe during the war and post-war period.

Required Reading:


- Georges Bataille, “Reparation to Nietzsche” in *Acéphale n° 2*, janvier 1937
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● Jean Wahl, “Nietzsche and the Death of God” in Acéphale n° 2, janvier 1937

Georges Bataille, On Nietzsche, trans. Bruce Boone (Continuum International Publishing Group, 2004), which is a translation of Georges Bataille, Sur Nietzsche. Volonté de chance (1945)

Optional Readings:

François Warin, Nietzsche et Bataille. La parodie à l’infini (PUF, 1994)

Jean Wahl, Transcendence and the Concrete: Selected Writings, trans. Alan Schrift (Fordham University Press, 2016)

WEEK 2: Martin Heidegger’s Nietzsche (1936-1939) September 22, 2016

During the years 1936 to 1939, Martin Heidegger delivered a series of influential lectures on Nietzsche that would be published in a multi-volume book called, simply, Nietzsche. Despite being delivered at the time of his Nazi allegiance, the lectures nevertheless transcend fascism to develop a wide-ranging interpretation of Nietzsche’s philosophical contributions. They have been formative in subsequent readings of Nietzsche.

Required Readings:

Martin Heidegger, Nietzsche: Volumes 1 and 2 (1930s)

Optional Readings:


Dominique Janicot, Heidegger in France (Indiana University Press, 2015)

Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Musica Ficta (Figures of Wagner) (Stanford Press, 1995)
WEEK 3: Blanchot’s Nietzschean Inspiration  
*Oct. 13, 2016*

Maurice Blanchot was heavily influenced by Nietzsche early on, and wrote several works that directly and indirectly engaged Nietzsche’s thought. Like Bataille, Blanchot took a holistic approach and often focused on the fragments. This session will explore his relation to Nietzsche and how it influenced subsequent critical thinkers.

**Required Reading:** (English editions will be provided)


Maurice Blanchot, *Le Pas au-delà* (Gallimard, 1973)

**Optional Reading:**

Alexandre Kojève’s famous Hegel lectures (1933-39) published in 1947


WEEK 4: Césaire, Nietzsche, and the Struggle Against Colonialism  
*October 27, 2016*

The Negritude critique of colonial modernity in the interwar and postbellum period drew importantly on the vitalist philosophies of Nietzsche, Bergson, and Heidegger. Many of the central figures, including Aimé Césaire, Léopold Sédar Senghor, and Édouard Glissant found inspiration in these countercurrents of Western thought. Césaire and Senghor, especially, adopted the notions of the Dionysian and the Apollinean from
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Nietzsche’s *Birth of Tragedy* in their aesthetic philosophy. In this session we will explore this conversation with Nietzsche’s thoughts on tragedy.

**Required Readings:**

Aimé Césaire, “Poésie et connaissance,” in *Tropiques. Revue Culturelle*, No. 12 (Janvier 1945)


**Optional Reading:**


http://fordham.bepress.com/phil_babich/3


**WEEK 5: Arendt on Willing**

November 10, 2016

At the end of her life, Hannah Arendt was writing a series of volumes on *The Life of the Mind*, the second of which engaged the thought of Nietzsche. This session will explore her engagement with Nietzsche.
Required readings:


WEEK 6: The Deleuzian Nietzsche  
*December 8, 2016*

Perhaps more than many other critical theorists, Deleuze’s thought was highly influenced by Nietzsche, and Deleuze’s name is inextricably linked to Nietzsche’s through his two signature books. In this session, we will focus on these two important works.

We will also situate Deleuze within the context of the 1960s, which witnessed an explosion of interest in Nietzsche, infusing his writings and thought into anti-colonial and May ’68 protests. Several important markers included the 1964 international philosophical colloquium of Royaumont titled “Nietzsche,” the publication of a number of books on Nietzsche, including those of Deleuze and Klossowski and others. The 1964 gathering at Royaumont symbolized a revival of interest in Nietzsche among critical thinkers and brought together thinkers including Jean Wahl, Karl Löwith, Pierre Klossowski, Gilles Deleuze, and Michel Foucault. Several years later, in 1977, *Semiotext(e)* published an issue of its review dedicated to “Nietzsche’s Return,” with excerpts and articles by Deleuze, as well as Bataille, Cage, Derrida, Foucault, Lyotard, Lotringer, and Rajchman.

Required readings:

Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche et la philosophie* (1962)


Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (1968) (selections)

Optional Reading:

Alan Schrift, *Nietzsche’s French Legacy* (Routledge, 1995)

*Nietzsche: Cahiers de Royaumont*, VIIe Colloque, 4-8 juillet 1964 (Les Editions de minuit, 1967)
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WEEK 7: Sarah Kofman on Nietzsche  January 5, 2017

The French philosopher, Sarah Kofman, developed new readings of Nietzsche and Freud, and left us with one of the most trenchant interpretations of Freud on female sexuality. This will be an opportunity to explore her work and her legacy in Paris at the Columbia Global Center—Europe.

The session will be held in Paris, but livestreamed for faculty and students in New York City and elsewhere. Bernard E. Harcourt will coordinate the session in Paris. Jesús R. Velasco will coordinate the session in New York.

Kofman studied with Deleuze and attended Derrida’s seminars, and so we will put Derrida’s writings in the background here as well.

Journée d’étude at the Columbia Global Center—Paris
4 rue de Chevreuse, 75006 Paris, France
10:00am to 5:00pm

Required Reading:


Optional Readings:

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WEEK 8: Frantz Fanon and Critical Race Theory  

January 19, 2017

Frantz Fanon’s masterpiece, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), reflects a deep engagement with the thought of Nietzsche, especially in relation to the themes of the active and reactive, and in its engagement with the work of Alfred Adler. In this seminar, we will explore Fanon’s work and its influence on critical race theory.

**Required Reading:**

Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952),

**Optional Readings:**


WEEK 9: Foucault & Nietzsche  

February 9, 2017

In his Rio lectures in 1973, *Truth and Juridical Forms*, Foucault targeted what he referred to as “the great Western myth”: the myth that, in order to achieve knowledge,
one had to neutralize the effects of power, the illusion that it is even possible to sever knowledge from power. “This great myth needs to be dispelled,” Foucault stated. “It is this myth which Nietzsche began to demolish by showing… that, behind all knowledge [savoir], behind all attainment of knowledge [connaissance], what is involved is a struggle for power. Political power is not absent from knowledge, it is woven together with it.”

From 1952 through at least 1973, Foucault returned to and wrote about Nietzsche—a thinker who would play a central role in his work on truth, genealogy, and history. Foucault delivered at least two famous lectures on Nietzsche, as well as several conferences in his other lecture series. In this seminar, we will explore Foucault’s relation to Nietzsche.

**Required readings:**

Michel Foucault, *Nietzsche, Freud, Marx* (1967)
Michel Foucault, *Nietzsche, Genealogy, History* (1971)
Michel Foucault, *Lectures on Nietzsche* (1971)

**Optional Readings**


**Other Foucault Texts:**

Michel Foucault, “Structuralisme et post-structuralisme,” p. 436-37 tome 4 DE

WEEK 10: Irigaray and Nietzsche  
March 2, 2017

Luce Irigaray published a famous book on Nietzsche, titled *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche*, in 1980, which will give us an opportunity to explore in greater depth the
relation between Nietzsche’s thought and certain strands of contemporary critical thought.

Required readings:


Optional readings


WEEK 11: Jacques Derrida  
*March 23, 2017*

In this session, we will explore the writings of Derrida, in conversation with the 1990s writings of Deleuze.

Required Reading:


Recommended Reading:

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Press, 1978)

“Geophilosophy,” in Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s What Is Philosophy?

WEEK 12:  Hélène Cixous and Contemporary Directions   April 13, 2017

In this session, we will focus on the writings of Hélène Cixous and the emergence of what is called “écriture feminine.”

Required Readings:

Helene Cixous, Reading with Clarice Lispector (Univ of Minnesota Press, 1990)


In this final session, we will explore the writings of the Iranian critical thinker and revolutionary, Ali Shariati, as well as some more recent critical works from around the world that explore the writings of Nietzsche and may offer directions forward for critical thought.

Required Readings:


Optional Readings:


Kris Manjapra, Age of Entanglement: German and Indian Intellectuals across Empire (Harvard University Press, 2014)

Peter Sloterdijk, Nietzsche Apostle, trans. Steve Corcoran (Semiotext(e) 2013)
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Mariátegui and Vasconcelos (Vasconcelos' Nietzsche comes up in his *Ulises criollo*, but there is no translation of this text. *Cosmic Race* is also heavily related to Nietzsche, and it has been translated in English: Johns Hopkins UP, 1997)

Sri Aurobindo