

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK

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

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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:

- Adorno, Theodore. *Negative Dialectics*. 1966.
- Althusser et al. *Reading Capital*. 1965.
- Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. 1958.
- 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].
- Freire, Paolo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. 1968.
- Horkheimer, Max. “Traditional and Critical Theory.” 1937
- Lorde, Audre. *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*. 1982
- Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. 1978.
- 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>

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for the formal seminars. This seminar will function as an advanced graduate research seminar.

We will be holding the formal 13/13 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

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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

Adorno, Theodore. *Negative Dialectics*. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 1966.

Allen, Amy. *The End of Progress: Decolonizing the Normative Foundations of Critical Theory*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2016.

Althusser et al. *Reading Capital*. New York: Verso, 2015.

Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958.

de Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex*. New York: Random House, 2011.

Du Bois, W.E.B. *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil*. Dover Publications, 1999.

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- Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York: Grove Press, 2008.
- Foucault, Michel. *Les Avenux de la chair*. Paris: Gallimard, 2018.
- Freire, Paolo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Seabury Press, 1968.
- Lorde, Audre. *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*. New York: Crossing Press, 1982.
- Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York: Random House, 1978.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, Volumes 1 and 2. New York: Verso, 2004.

Articles and Resources On-Line

- Adorno, Theodor W. "The Actuality of Philosophy." *Telos* 1997, no. 31 (1997): 120-133.
- Harcourt, Bernard E., "The Illusion of Influence: On Foucault, Nietzsche, and a Fundamental Misunderstanding" (May 24, 2019). Columbia Public Law Research Paper No. 14-627 (2019). Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3393827>
- Horkheimer, Max., "Traditional and Critical Theory, in Horkheimer, Max. *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*. New York: Continuum, 1992.

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 2:30 – 4:30 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.

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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.

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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:

Allen, Amy. "Preface" and "Chapter 1" (pages 1-6) and page 230, in *The End of Progress: Decolonizing the Normative Foundations of Critical Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).

Harcourt, Bernard E., "The Primacy of Praxis: A Manifesto," in *Praxis and Critique: A Manifesto*, book manuscript (forthcoming, Columbia University Press).

Wednesday, September 11, 2019 6:15 – 8:45 pm at Columbia University

With Professor Amy Allen

Please read:

Foucault, Michel. "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History." In *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow, 76-100. New York, Pantheon Books, 1984.

_____. "Nietzsche, Freud, Marx." In *The Essential Works of Michel Foucault: Power*, ed. James D. Faubion, trans. Robert Hurley et al., 277-278. New York: New Press, 2000.

Harcourt, Bernard E., "The Illusion of Influence: On Foucault, Nietzsche, and a Fundamental Misunderstanding" (May 24, 2019). Columbia Public Law Research Paper No. 14-627 (2019). Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3393827>

Wednesday, September 25, 2019 6:15-8:45 pm at Columbia University

With Professor Axel Honneth

Please read:

Horkheimer, Max. "Traditional and Critical Theory, in Horkheimer, Max. *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*. New York: Continuum, 1992.

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Adorno, Theodor W. "The Actuality of Philosophy." *Telos* 1997, no. 31 (1997): 120-133.

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

With Professor Judith Revel

Please read: de Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex*. New York: Random House, 2011.

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

Please read: Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Seabury Press, 1968.

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

With Professor Étienne Balibar

Please read: Althusser et al. *Reading Capital*. New York: Verso, 2015.

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

Please read: Foucault, Michel. *Les Avenx de la chair*. Paris: Gallimard, 2018.

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

With Professor Martin Saar

Please read: Adorno, Theodore. *Negative Dialectics*. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 1966.

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Wednesday, January 15, 2020 in Paris

Please read Harcourt, Bernard. *La Societe de l'exposition*. Paris: Le Seuil, 2020.

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

With Professor Seyla Benhabib

Please read: Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958.

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

With Professors Noreen Khawaja and Jesus Velasco

Please read Sartre, Jean-Paul *Critique of Dialectical Reason*

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

With Professor Homi Bhabha

Please read: Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York: Random House, 1978.

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

Please read: Lorde, Audre. *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*. New York: Crossing Press, 1982.

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

With Professor Brandon Terry

Du Bois, W.E.B. *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil*. Dover Publications, 1999.

Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York: Grove Press, 2008.