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S '15

**M/W 1:10-2:30,
German House, 172 College Ave.**

Marx, Nietzsche, Freud (R)

Statement:

I suspect that we'll never overcome the difficulty and complexity of the ultimate question driving this course: What is the relation between politics and literature? On first glance, this issue should not be daunting: in their referential dimension, works of literature can hardly avoid the political and ideological formations comprising a segment of their overall cultural "surround." But a number of ancillary questions, all impenetrable, emerge from this simple relationship of mutual encompassing or implication. What is the relationship between political components of the artwork and other elements? What is the relationship between literary expression and prevailing ideologies? Confirmation? Reduction? Cooption? Translation? Allegory? Transference? Distortion? Dissimulation? The evasion of censorship? An intimate tango that breaks apart at a certain point? Is close cultural exegesis, in its mindfulness and appeal to thought, political in its own right? If so, how?

As we mutually process a sequence of readings held together by explicitly systematic attempts (whether in philosophy, socio-cultural criticism, psychology, or literature) to delineate and dramatize the role of the political, we need to keep our eyes on that broader prize: the meditation into the rapport between the political and the literary. Indeed, for a variety of reasons, socio-political and administrative as well as cultural, the 19th century was the heyday of systematic inquiries and efforts to open the gates of knowledge and illumination, and it seems that German culture had geared itself up as systematically as any other to undertake this labor on a broadband of frequencies. The course will not be long underway before we take up the inevitable interconnection between the inquiry into the political dimensions of literature and systems theory. (We presuppose to some degree that political aspirations entail systematic dimensions and spheres of endeavor.)

In this brief context, the program of readings will perhaps make sense: a brief foray into Nietzsche's early deconstruction of culture; Marxian readings indicative both of the earlier parameters of the project and its mature "delivery" (*Capital*, I); Derrida's surprisingly sentimental evocation of Marx as an ongoing site of critique, and as an

instance of the abyssal scene of representation, in *Specters of Marx*; the vicissitudes of the Freudian project as it extends itself to the domain of cultural critique; and, last—but far from least—the literary instances serving as a proving ground for the relevance of the other readings. In this latter respect, two 20th-century artifacts, Brecht's drama (as exemplified by *The Threepenny Opera*, *St. Joan of the Stockyards*, and *Mother Courage*) and theory (e.g. the “alienation effect”) rush to the fore in their relevance. We close with a snapshot of the overall 20th-century cultural landscape and ecology that owed so much to the radical thinking and experimentation of our four “protagonists.”

Wherever possible, students will be encouraged to read primary texts in German.

Readings--(ordered at the University Bookstore):

Nietzsche, *The Twilight of the Gods and The Antichrist* (Penguin or in German)
 --*Human All Too Human* (Cambridge University Press or in German)
 --Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act I (on Sakai)
 --Marx and Engels, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert Tucker (W.W. Norton)
 (Selected passages on Sakai)
 Marx, *Capital*, I (Penguin or in German)
 --Derrida, *Specters of Marx* (Routledge)—Selected passages on Sakai
 Freud, *The Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay (W.W. Norton)
 (additional selections on Sakai)
 Brecht, *Baal, A Man's a Man, The Elephant Calf* (Grove Press or in German)
 --*The Threepenny Opera* (Arcade or in German)
 --*Mother Courage and her Children* (same as above)
 Willett, John, ed., *Brecht on Theatre* (Hill & Wang)

Assignments:

Written coursework will either assume the form of two essays on the subject matter or cultural issues extending directly from it (#1, 5-7 pp.; #2, 8-10 pp.) or a single term paper (c. 18 pp.). It is assumed that students relatively new to philosophy and theory will choose the two-paper option, in order to maximize the possibilities of feedback and collaboration with the instructor. The first paper called for by this option will be due at the end of the Nietzsche and Marx segments, during the 8th week of the semester. The final paper, whether a single term paper or a second essay, will be due one week from the close of classes.

There will also be an adaptation-project related to any one of our major figures, due before the last week of classes. It will consist of output in some form or medium *different* from the standard academic essay. It needn't be long. It should be accompanied by an explanatory statement, ranging from a paragraph to 2-3 pp. It could take the form of a poem, story, or scene from a play; it could be a blog or a folder of online resources; it could be a portfolio of photos or some diagrams, or a spreadsheet; it could be a musical composition or compilation of existing music. What this is all about is the transcription (or translation) of conceptual material into various media.

It is assumed that the quality of the readings we will be undertaking will be slow, minute, and detailed, with careful attention to such factors as ambiguities in terminology, style, and the design of the prose. Students are encouraged at the same time, especially once they've selected their focal points for the course, to carry the course material as far afield as they need to in order to make it alive to ongoing concerns and issues. With readings on the order of Nietzsche, Marx, Freud, and Brecht, students have enormous leeway in making this material illuminating and relevant. In completing the assignment(s), the students are in effect calibrating an intervention compelling for them to make. They share in this sense the position and posture of the cultural critic. The project is compelling both in terms of their immanent intellectual development and something in the external environment that isn't quite being said, or isn't being said quite right. Assignments, at least in their grounding premises, will be discussed in advance with the instructor.

Course Schedule:

- Wk# 1B Introduction. Rationale for Course & Sequence.
Relation: Systems thinkers (Nietzsche, Marx, Freud) to system theory. *Relation:* critical philosophy (Nietzsche), Marxism, and psychoanalytical discourse to criticism.
Relation: critico-systematic discourse to literature.
 Introduction: selected passages from Nietzsche.
- # 2A & 2B Nietzsche, *The Twilight of the Gods and the Antichrist*: the Philosopher amid an adversative configuration of morality, religion, and social convention.
- # 2B Nietzsche, *Human All Too Human* (Vol. I; Ch. 1, 4, 7, & 8): socio-philosophical alienation at a pinnacle. A philosophical critique of the *actuality* of European conditions.
- # 3A & 3B *Human all Too Human*: The Philosopher as Wanderer in exile, as the residue of his own inscription (Vol. II; Part 2). The Wanderer, along with Baudelaire's *flâneur*, as a prototype of the intellectual and critic.
- # 4A Nietzsche as prototypical modern culture-critic.
- # 4B Introduction to Marx. The Marxian project in relation to German idealist philosophy and the parameters of criticism established by the *Frühromantik*. *The Marx-Engels Reader*: "On the Jewish Question," "Theses on Feuerbach," *The German Ideology*.
- # 5A Marx, Introduction continued. Also: Observations & Calculations. *Capital*, I, 1-3; II, 5-7; IV, 15 (pp. 258-306, 553-87).
- # 5B & 6A Marx: Laboring Subjects. *Capital I*, III, 7-9, VI, 19-22

(pp. 283-389; 675-710).

- # 6B Marx: Monstrous Machines. *Capital I*, IV, 12-15
(pp. 429-639).
- #7 A& B Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, esp. Act I; Derrida, *Specters of Marx: Marx Revisited*.
- #8 A&B A: Freud, *The Freud Reader: Anna O. & Katharina* (60-86), "On Dreams" (142-72), "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality" (239-93).
B. "On Beginning the Treatment" (363-78), "Observations on Transference-Love" (378-87)

Paper # 1 due, March 4, 2015.

- #9 A & B A: Freud. "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" (594-625).
B: "Civilization and its Discontents" (722-72).

[Spring Break: 3/15-22/15]

- # 10A & B Freud, more on alienation, viewed psychoanalytically.
Discussion: Therapeutic healing.
Planting release-valves in closed systems?
Common cause with art and culture-critique?
- # 11 A & B A: Bertolt Brecht, Introduction. Also *Baal*.
B: Brecht: Drama & System I: *Baal, A Man's a Man*, supplemented by *Brecht on Theatre*, pp. 77-90, 104-53, 179-205. Also, Walter Benjamin, "What is Epic Theatre?," in *Illuminations* (147-54) or in *Collected Writings*, IV, 302-09.
- # 12A & B A: More, Drama & System, I. Also Brecht, *Threepenny Opera*
B: More, *Threepenny*
- #13A & B A: Drama & History: Brecht, *Mother Courage and her Children*. Politics & literature revisited.
B: The Brechtian Legacy; Sexual Politics; New-Wave Cinema (clips).
- # 14A & B: Looking back at the XXc.: Modernism and its Shadows. Benjamin on "Mechanical Reproducibility" (Class Website); paintings by Picasso, Leger, Braque, Kandinsky; film-clips, Buñuel, Dreyer, Eisenstein, ect

15A Final paper summations.
 Also: Closing discussion: Politics and Culture?

Final Papers Tuesday of Reading Days, May 5, 2014: special needs negotiable
Adaptations, due: with Instructor.

Office: 3rd floor, German house, 172 College Ave.

Office Hours: Weds., 3:00-5:00 PM & by appointment.