

SYLLABUS (Draft 1/5/18)

CSLC 503: Introduction to Comparative Studies in Culture

Violent Ethics

Spring 2018
Section: 22076D
Time: M 2-4:50
Location: THH 109

Professor: Erin Graff Zivin
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Off. Hrs.: M 12-2



Course description: This graduate seminar will study ethical thought in distinct cultural, disciplinary, and historical contexts. Taking as its point of departure the pursuit of the “good” in classical philosophy (Plato, Aristotle), the course will jump to early modern thinkers (Spinoza, Kant), and then spend the remainder of the semester exploring modern and contemporary ethical thought in the areas of philosophy, critical theory, cultural studies, and aesthetics. Ultimately, we will trace dominant and subversive strains in these inter- and interdisciplinary traditions, so that while we might think of the following as classical, conventional, or at least *predictable* ethical concepts—responsibility, compassion, recognition, tolerance, hospitality, non-violence—we will also consider misrecognition, opacity, misunderstanding, violence, and terror as unorthodox or defective ethical concepts, and as the act of thinking *itself* as violent. Finally, we will ask how such ideas can be imagined, or imagined differently, through aesthetic and cultural production such as narrative, poetry, film, music, visual arts, and performance (James Baldwin, Giannina Braschi, Albertina Carri, Paul Celan, Leonard Cohen, Robin Coste Lewis, Walter Goldfarb, Internacional Errorista, Juan José Saer). Theoretical readings will include works by Nicole Anderson, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, Anne Dufourmantelle, Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, Édouard Glissant, Bonnie Honig, Luce Irigaray, Cristina León, Emmanuel Levinas, Patchen Markell, Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, and Kelly Oliver. In addition, we have visits by Judith Butler, Rebecca Comay, Jacques Lezra, and Bracha Ettinger.

Schedule:

Week 1. 1/8: Introduction

- Introduction
- Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Books I and II
(<http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/nicomachaen.1.i.html> and
<http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/nicomachaen.2.ii.html>)
- Joanna Zulinska, *The Ethics of Cultural Studies* (selection) **

Week 2. 1/15: MLK HOLIDAY- NO CLASS

- Butler reading group: date TBD

Week 3. 1/22: Interpreting Non-Violence

- Judith Butler, “The Claim of Non-Violence” in *Frames of War* **
- J. Butler, “Precarious Life” in *Precarious Life* **
- J. Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* **
- Emma Ingala, interview with Judith Butler **
- Visit by Prof. Butler

Lecture: Judith Butler, “Interpreting Non-Violence” 4pm, DML 240

Week 4. 1/29: Ethical and Moral Philosophies

- Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics* (selection) **
- Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy* (selection) **
- J. B. Schneewind, “Autonomy, Obligation, and Virtue: An Overview of Kant’s Moral Philosophy” **

Week 5. 2/5: Responsibility

- Emmanuel Levinas, “Philosophy and the Idea of the Infinite” **
- E. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being* (selection) **
- Jacques Derrida, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas* **
- Walter Goldfarb, “Ilumanisme de L’autre Homme/Difficile Liberté” (serigraph; in class)

Week 6. 2/12: University Responsibility

- Immanuel Kant, *Conflict of the Faculties* (selection) **
- J. Derrida, “Mochlos” **
- J. Derrida, “The University Without Condition” **
- Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, “The Undercommons” **

Week 7. 2/19: PRESIDENT’S DAY HOLIDAY - NO CLASS

Mandatory lecture: Wednesday, February 21, 5pm (THH 309K)
Prof. Rebecca Comay, "Leverage: Kant, Derrida, and the University"

Week 8. 2/26: Inheritance

- Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, Ch. 1 **
- Nicole Anderson, *Ethics Under Erasure*, Ch. 3 **
- Albertina Carri, *Cuaterros* (film; in class)

Week 9. 3/5: SPRING BREAK - NO CLASS

Week 10. 3/19: (Mis)recognition

- Patchen Markell, *Bound by Recognition* (selection) **
- Kelly Oliver, "Beyond Recognition: Witnessing Ethics" **
- Édouard Glissant, "For Opacity" and "Open Boat" in *Poetics of Relation* **
- Ronald Mendoza-de Jesús, "Assuming a Body? Alterity, Opacity, and Abjection in Glissant's 'The Open Boat' and Braschi's 'Close-Up'" **
- Giannina Braschi, "Close-Up" **
- Robin Coste Lewis, "Pleasure & Understanding" **
- Cristina León, "'The Right to Opacity': Aesthetics, Ethics, and Politics in Queer Latinidad" **
- Final paper abstract due at beginning of class

Week 11. 3/26: Testimony and Witnessing

- S. Felman and D. Laub, *Testimony: Crisis of Witnessing...* (selection) **
- J. Derrida, "Poetics and Politics of Witnessing" **
- Paul Celan, "Ashglory" (<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/58206/ashglory>)
- Juan José Saer, *The Witness* *

Week 12. 4/2: Hospitality

- J. Derrida and Anne Dufourmantelle, *Of Hospitality* **
- A. Dufourmantelle, "Hospitality—Under Compassion and Violence" **
- Luce Irigaray, "Toward a Mutual Hospitality" **
- Bonnie Honig, "Proximity and Paradox: Law and Politics in the New Europe" **
- Mireille Rosello, "Conviviality and Pilgrimage: Hospitality as Interruptive Practice" **
- Coline Serreau, "Saint Jacques... La Mecque" (film; in class)

Week 13. 4/9: NO CLASS (professor away)

- Rough draft of final paper due (via e-mail)
- Peer editing of final paper

Week 14. 4/16: Terror and Trouble

- Jacques Lezra, “Introduction” to *Wild Materialism* **
- James Baldwin, *Tell Me How Long the Train’s Been Gone* *
- Visit by Prof. Lezra

Lecture: Prof. Jacques Lezra, 4pm (THH 309K), “The Ends of Populist Reason: Celluloid Cervantes”

Week 15. 4/23: Violent Ethics

- Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* *
- E. Levinas, “A Propos of ‘Kierkegaard vivant’” in *Proper Names* **
- J. Derrida, “Whom to Give to (Knowing Not to Give)” in *The Gift of Death* **
- Bracha Ettinger, “From Proto-Ethical Compassion to Responsibility” **
- Leonard Cohen, “Story of Isaac” (music; in class)

Week 16. 4/30: Make-up class (place and time TBD)

- Final paper presentations
- Final papers due at beginning of class

Lecture: Bracha Ettinger, 4pm (DML 241)

Course Materials:

*The following books (marked with one asterisk) are available for purchase on Amazon.com (or anywhere else online).

- James Baldwin, *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone*
- Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*
- Juan José Saer, *The Witness*

** Texts marked with two asterisks will be distributed by Prof. Graff Zivin.

Course Requirements:

PARTICIPATION. Each student should read the texts specified above before each class session. Films will be shown in class on the date specified. You are expected to voluntarily contribute to class discussions, which will be reflected in your participation grade. This means that you should prepare notes with comments and questions to bring up in class.

FACEBOOK. You will be required to make weekly contributions to our class Facebook group, CSLC 503: Introduction to Comparative Studies in Culture (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/231656077235453/>). These contributions are twofold. First, you will be expected to post a response to the required reading for the week, due by midnight the Sunday night before class. Second, you will be expected to comment on your classmates' posts, due by midnight on the Sunday following class. No late posts will be accepted for credit.

PRESENTATIONS. You will be responsible for two in-class presentations. The first presentation will be based on one of the required readings, and will involve a summary and critique of the piece (20 minutes), after which you will facilitate a discussion with the rest of the class (30 minutes). The second will be a conference-style presentation of your final paper on April 30 (20 minutes).

FINAL PAPER. The final paper is due on April 30. You may choose between writing an article-length paper (20-25 pages) or a conference paper (8-10 pages). Papers handed in late will receive a lower grade. In addition, you will be required to turn in a one-page abstract for your final paper on March 19, which will describe in prose form your main thesis and supporting arguments. Late or missing abstracts will result in a lower grade for the final paper.

FINAL GRADE. The final grade will be calculated in the following manner: participation (20%), Facebook posts (15%), presentations (20%), final paper (45%).

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Conduct

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Section 11, *Behavior Violating University Standards* <https://scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions/>. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct/>.

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You are encouraged to report any incidents to the *Office of Equity and Diversity* <http://equity.usc.edu/> or to the *Department of Public Safety* <http://capsnet.usc.edu/department/department-public-safety/online-forms/contact-us>. This is important for the safety whole USC community. Another member of the university community – such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. *The Center for Women and Men* <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm/> provides 24/7 confidential support, and the sexual assault resource center webpage sarc@usc.edu describes reporting options and other resources.

Support Systems

A number of USC’s schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the *American Language Institute* <http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali>, which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students. *The Office of Disability Services and Programs* http://sait.usc.edu/academicssupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations. If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, *USC Emergency Information* <http://emergency.usc.edu/> will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.