APPREACHES TO THE PAST: PUTTING THEORIES IN PRACTICES
(USEFUL CATEGORIES OF HISTORICAL ANALYSIS)

Course description

This course is a research seminar designed to help students work on papers for classes, theses and individual projects. In scholarly texts dealing with the past, methodological and philosophical standards are often low and there is an obvious gap between theory and practice in this field. On the one hand, theoretical “speculations” and abstractions are viewed with suspicion by practising historians, archaeologists, and anthropologists, and on the other theorists complain about the low level of methodological sophistication among practising historians. The course will introduce texts that have inspired theoretically oriented scholars, and show how students might use techniques and categories borrowed from different disciplines in their own research.

The course is meant to convince students that an understanding of theory is fundamental to humanistic studies. The course would focus on cross-disciplinary themes and explore them in depth through workshops and seminars. It will encourage interdisciplinary approaches and encourage seminarists to take up interdisciplinary projects. It is meant to teach the importance of critical thinking, teach different strategies of interpretation, and devote special attention to the development of students’ original approaches.

Course requirements

This course is set for students who are interested in exploring new ways of thinking about the past. Students should read texts at home and come to class prepared to discuss assigned readings. There will be a final written assignment. Its topic will be chosen by the student himself/herself and it is supposed to draw upon the projects undertaken in other courses the student is taking. In order to pass the examination students have to participate in classes, be active in the discussions (creativity, modes of argumentation and originality in interpretations are given special considerations) and prepare a written assignment.

Course schedule

1. Introduction: Challenging Traditional Ways of Thinking About the Past

2. Reading images - “punctum” (workshop)


3. Memory and Trauma: Mourning and Melancholia


4. Space, place, chora


5. “Spectre”/ghost/phantasm/fetish/“factish”
Special guest: Hayden White
Karl Marx, "The Fetishism of Commodities" in his, *Capital*, vol. I.

6. Encounter, nearness, face
Lévinas, Emmanuel, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*. The Hague: Nijhoff, 1981 (fragments)

7. Monster/the Other


8. Abjection, Disgust and Abomination
special guest: René Girard


9. Body (alive and dead)
Thomas W. Laqueur, “The Dead Body and Human Rights” (manuscript)

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