CIEE Paris, France

Course title: Pensée Contemporaine Française (in French)
Course code: FREN 3101 PAFR (FREN)
Programs offering course: French and Critical Studies, Paris Open Campus Block, Paris OC Modified University of Wisconsin Madison
Language of instruction: French
U.S. semester credits: 3
Contact hours: 45
Term: Spring Block I 2020

Course Description

In this course, we will attempt to describe the comings and goings of diverse movements in contemporary French thought, from the end of the 1940s to today, with particular accent on the movements following the events of May 1968, which attempt to construct an alternative history of the modern world. In analyzing excerpts from theoretical, literary, and philosophical works, we attempt to bring to life French thought from the end of the 20th century to the beginning of ours. Reflecting on "thought" in terms of invention, art, science, and political strategy, we will be faced with questions regarding the self and the Other, liberty and control, mystification and demystification, technology of life and techniques of definition. We will focus, above all, on the power of language and representation with regard to knowledge seen as "fact." How can a text construct this brand of knowledge? Can we, rather, portray a text as a machine that simply makes sense of life? To do so, we must question stable boundaries, fixed identities, accepted ideas, power, desire, politics, and ethics. We must also explore potential places where critical thought and artistic experimentation can blossom, here, in Paris. Art, after all, is a living, breathing entity. Often considered a living museum, Paris is a dynamic city where creative forces meet and exchange, from cinema and fine arts to literature and other forms of intellectual engagement. Like a laboratory of contemporary French thought, this course invites students to experiments with texts, discourses, images, and gestures, feeding an energetic reflection that is sometimes contestable, sometimes paradoxical, and always passionate. Drawing on the arenas of the Parisian intellectual universe -- philosophical and academic institutes as places of exposition, projection, and artistic representation -- students will acquire the
theoretical tools to construct, deconstruct, and demonstrate the inner-workings of these movements in thought, which never cease to be built up and re-demolished.

Learning Objectives

By completing this course, students will:

Students will be able to critically review major French intellectual movements from the post-war era to today, such as existentialism, structuralism, deconstruction, French feminism, post-colonialism, situationism and the debates around aesthetics, politics, and the critique of technology.

- Students will define, deepen and contest key terms associated with these movements, contextualizing them in French intellectual history and expressing them in French.
- Students will be able to apply the rhetorical methods of the movements studied in French composition and debate, including such rhetorical approaches as historical dialectics and critical theory methods, deconstruction of binary oppositions, polysemy versus dissemination, determination versus construction, obedience versus emancipation, and the power relations related to the definition of the Other.
- Students will apply the new methods of intellectual inquiry explored by these thinkers, placing them in the context of the history of the French mentality.
- Through response papers, students will also force these terms to encounter each other and describe how these notions impact, influence, or resist each other.
- Students will acquire the advanced means to understand and comment complex notions in French.

Course Prerequisites

4 semesters of college French, or equivalent.

Methods of Instruction

- All texts to read in and out of class are available through the Canvas platform.
• Students will be responsible for 3 text explanations during the Block, identifying the life and context of the thinker studied, defending the importance of the passage chosen, and focusing on one term in that passage that merits discussion.
• 3 co-curricular classes at the Musée du Quai Branly, the Musée de l'Histoire de l'Immigration and the Palais du Tokyo will reveal how this thought is expressed in contemporary French culture.
• Documentary films will be shown with guided comprehension questions to work on aural comprehension and acquisition of critical performative styles in French.
• General workshop environment where students will be required to participate, read and analyze texts in real time.

Assessment and Final Grade

1. Presentation 1: From Existentialism to Deconstruction 10%
2. Presentation 2: Emancipation & Identity 15%
3. Presentation 3: Aesthetics/Politics/Technology 15%
4. Response Paper 1 (contrasting two terms) 20%
5. Response Paper 2 (contrasting two terms) 20%
6. Class Participation 20%
   TOTAL 100%

Course Requirements

Presentation 1: From Existentialism to Deconstruction
Presentation 2: Emancipation & Identity
Presentation 3: Aesthetics/Politics/Technology

Students will have 3, 10-minute, in-class presentations of notions found in studied texts. The student will define the historical, political, social, philosophical, and/or cultural context of a short passage from the text, target one term in that text, define and drill into it, and then open discussion through questions asked to the whole class.

Response Paper 1 (contrasting two terms)

1,500 words
Response Paper 2 (contrasting two terms)

2,250 words

Week 3 and Week 5, students will submit a 1500-word response paper and a 2250-word response paper that develop the text explications presented during the Block. Drafts will be worked on in class and reflected on in class discussion.

Class Participation

Participation is valued as meaningful contribution in the digital and tangible classroom, utilizing the resources and materials presented to students as part of the course. Meaningful contribution requires students to be prepared in advance of each class session and to have regular attendance. Students must clearly demonstrate they have engaged with the materials as directed, for example, through classroom discussions, online discussion boards, peer-to-peer feedback (after presentations), interaction with guest speakers, and attentiveness on co-curricular and outside-of-classroom activities.

Please note that pop quizzes will be given occasionally to assess student understanding of the materials covered and overall commitment in the course. Students will also be regularly asked to turn in their personal lists of definitions with citations on examples on Canvas. This exercise, one per each current of thought studied, will ensure students understand the material and engage with it. Pop quizzes and definition lists are the online component of the weekly participation grade, accounting for 50% of that grade.

Session 12, students will submit a free-form reflection exercise about the critical theory trend that intrigued them most AND that resonated most strongly with their intercultural experience.

Important: all course assignments must be turned in on time. While students will not be penalised for submissions up to and including 1 hour late,

- Students submitting work from 1 hour and 1 minute late up to and including 24 hours late will be penalised 15% from the assignment;
- Student work submitted from 24 hours and 1 minute late onwards will receive a zero (0%) grade.
Attendance

Regular class attendance is required throughout the program, and all absences will result in a lower participation grade for any affected CIEE course. Due to the intensive schedules for Open Campus and Short Term programs, absences that constitute more than 10% of the total course will result in a written warning.

Students who transfer from one CIEE class to another during the add/drop period will not be considered absent from the first session(s) of their new class, provided they were marked present for the first session(s) of their original class. Otherwise, the absence(s) from the original class carry over to the new class and count against the grade in that class.

For CIEE classes, excessively tardy (over 15 minutes late) students must be marked absent.

Attendance policies also apply to any required co-curricular class excursion or event, as well as to any required field placement. Students may not miss placement/work hours at an internship or service learning site unless approved in advance by the Academic Director and placement supervisor. All students must complete all of the requisite 100 minimum work hours on site at the internship or service learning placement to be eligible for academic credit.

Students who miss class for personal travel, including unforeseen delays that arise as a result of personal travel, will be marked as absent. No make-up or re-sit opportunity will be provided.

Attendance policies also apply to any required class excursion, with the exception that some class excursions cannot accommodate any tardiness, and students risk being marked as absent if they fail to be present at the appointed time.

Absences for classes will lead to the following penalties:
N.B. Course schedule is subject to change due to study tours, excursions, or local holidays. Final schedules will be included in the final syllabus provided to students on site.

Weekly Schedule

Week 1

Class  1.1  The Collapse of Progress / Liberty at War

Presentation of class.

La République du silence by Jean-Paul Sartre.

Introduction to La Dialectique de la Raison, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno. Thèses sur la philosophie de l’histoire,” N° IX, Walter Benjamin.

Class  1.2  Structuring the Relationship between Same & Other

Discussion of Horkheimer, Adorno, and Sartre.

Passage from the reading, Le Deuxième Sexe, by Simone de Beauvoir.
Introduction to the ethnography of Claude Lévi-Strauss, Tristes tropiques, and the critique of Jacques Derrida, “La structure, le signe et le jeu dans le discours des sciences humaines” in L’écriture et la différence.

Week 2
Class 2.1 Co-curricular to the Musée du Quai Branly

Reflections on the Musée du Quai Branly, Lévi-Strauss, and Derrida.

Presentation 1: From Existentialism to Deconstruction

Class 2.2 Liberating the Sign from Itself: Deconstruction of Language & Identity


Co-curricular to the “Cité nationale de l’histoire de l’immigration”.
Definition of terms.

Week 3
Class 3.1 Subject, Desire, the Other, the Unconscious

Definition of terms. Discussion of Derrida, Nancy, and the CNHI.

Presentation of the psychoanalysis of Jacques Lacan.

“L’aliénation” in Quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse.


Response Paper #1 due.

Class 3.2 Subjectivity, Surveillance, Control
Discussion of Lacanian psychoanalysis and ideological interpellation of the subject. Passage from the text by Louis Althusser, “Idéologies et appareils idéologiques d’Etat”.

Excerpts from Surveiller et punir by Michel Foucault.

Introduction to Foucault’s biopolitics. “Post-scriptum sur la société du contrôle,” Gilles Deleuze

Reflections on the surveillance of life, liberty, and discourses of power.

Presentation 2: Emancipation and Identity.

Week 4

Class  4.1  Changing Life / Transforming the World

Theoretical and practical liberation of May 1968


Class  4.2  Subject of Sex / Subject of Colonization

Discussion of Deleuze, Artaud.

Analysis of Parties by Hélène Cixous.

Ce sexe qui n’en est pas un by Luce Irigaray.

Discussion of Feminism.

Critique of Frantz Fanon, Peau noire/masques blancs.

Class 4.3 Co-curricular Outing to the Collège International de Philosophie

Week 5

Class 5.1 Art & its Critical Capacities: Consensus, Dissensus, Emancipation

Discussion of postcolonial thought.

Presentation of the text, “Les mésaventures de la pensée critique,” by Jacques Rancière in *Le spectateur émancipé*.

Response Paper #2 due.

Class 5.2 Co-curricular to the Palais de Tokyo

Presentation 3: Aesthetics/Politics/Technology.

Week 6

Class 6.1 Speed, Memory, Technique, Technology

Discussion of Rancière and the Palais de Tokyo exhibits. Definition of Terms. Excerpts from Paul Virilio: *Penser la vitesse* and *L’université du désastre*. Introduction to the thought of Bernard Stiegler and Ars Industrialis: “Contrôle et culture des individus” and excerpts from *Prendre soin* and *Les Etats du choc*.

Reflection exercise due.

Class 6.2 La fin? Jamais!

Round table discussions of final work. Attempted summaries of the course’s progression.
Course Materials
Readings


