"Theory" has become historical.

During the 1980s Theory’s cryptic messages and provisos coursed through departments of comparative literature and humanities promising, if always obliquely, a qualitative transformation of our conventional and retrograde intellectual and practical habitudes. Theory traded on the fading aura of 1960s radicalism, implying that, whereas the soixante-huitards ('68ers) had foundered, it would write the next chapter in the Book of Revolution. Its heightened awareness of past failures, nourished by a skepticism vis-à-vis metanarratives, seemingly enhanced its prospects of success.

But, when all is said and done, how might one, going forward, define "success"? When the entirety of a tradition is presumptively jettisoned or consigned to desuetude, it is difficult to know exactly where to begin – or to re-begin. Derrida implied that once the demons of logocentrism had been vanquished, life and thought would be permanently and positively transformed. However, both he and his acolytes refrained from pointing out that the thinker who had coined the term "logocentrism" was the well nigh unreadable, proto-fascist German Lebensphilosoph Ludwig Klages (cf. Geist als Widersacher der Seele; 3 vols. 1929-32).

In The History of Sexuality, Foucault, mistrusting the allure of collective action, or, in Hannah Arendt's words, "people acting in concert," recommended that we pursue "a different economy of bodies and pleasures," going so far as to invoke - in what can only be described as a prototypical instance of "Orientalism" - the Kama Sutra (sic) by way of illustration. However, in retrospect, this prescription seemed merely to dovetail with the "culture of narcissism" (cf. Christopher Lasch) that succeeded the demise of the contestatory spirit of the 1960s – as such, grist for the mill of an apolitical "lifestyle" or "identity" politics. In other words: an "apolitical politics."

Circa 1971, Foucault had internalized the deleterious linkage between "knowledge" and "domination" – or, "power-knowledge" – to the point where he was prepared to abandon both "writing" and "discourse" tout court, having concluded that both were merely expressions of hegemony. If we accept the Nietzschean claim that
“truth” is little more than an efflux or manifestation of “power” (as Foucault suggests: “truth isn’t a reward for free spirits . . . it is produced by multiple forms of constraint. It induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth”), and if all norms are “normalizing,” what, then, is the basis of contestation and critique? Has the concept of emancipation remained meaningful, or must it, too, be cynically consigned to the rubbish heap of lost illusions?

The story of French Theory coincides with the reception of Nietzsche and Heidegger's thought in France during the 1950s and 1960s. Here, Deleuze's 1962 book on Nietzsche as well as Foucault's essay, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, and History" (1971) signify important way stations. Deconstruction, for its part, takes its inspiration from Heidegger's appeal in Being and Time for a "destruction of the history of Western ontology." At the outset, we will focus on pivotal German and French texts in order to secure a solid philosophical grounding in Theory's conceptual intricacies. Thereby, in a post-enlightenment spirit, the obscure shall be rendered clear - or, at least, clearer.

Marx once said: "We recognize only one science, the science of history." What, then, might it mean to historicize poststructuralism?

Book List:

- Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense"
- Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morals
- Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism"
- Heidegger, Being and Time (selections)
- Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences"
- Derrida, "Signature, Event, Context"
- Foucault, Discipline and Punish
- Foucault, History of Sexuality
- Deleuze, What is Philosophy?
- Cusset, French Theory
- Historicizing Postmodernism
- Habermas, Philosophical Discourse of Modernity

Books by Your Instructor That You May Find of Interest:

- The Politics of Being: The Political Thought of Martin Heidegger (Columbia UP)
- The Terms of Cultural Criticism: the Frankfurt School, Existentialism, Poststructuralism (Columbia UP)
- Heidegger's Children: Hannah Arendt, Karl Löwith, Hans Jonas, and Herbert Marcuse (Princeton UP)
- The Seduction of Unreason: the Intellectual Fascination with Fascism from Nietzsche to Poststructuralism (Princeton UP)
- The Wind from the East: French Intellectuals, the Cultural Revolution, and the Legacy of the 1960s (Princeton UP)
Weekly Assignments

Feb. 1: Introduction

Feb. 8: Philosophical Precursors I: Nietzsche

Feb. 15: President’s Day (class will not meet)

Feb. 22: Philosophical Precursors II: Heidegger
  Heidegger, “The Destruction of the History of Ontology”* (Being and Time); “Letter on Humanism”*; “Overcoming Metaphysics”

Feb. 29: French Theory avant la lettre:
  Bataille, “Theory of Expenditure,” (*Collège de Sociologie*); *The Accursed Share* (selections); Blanchot,

March 7: Structuralism and the Death of Man
  Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques* (selections); Foucault, *The Order of Things* (selections); Barthes, “Death of the Author”; Furet, “French Intellectuals: From Marxism to Structuralism”

March 14: Foucault’s “Aesthetics of Existence”
  *The Foucault Reader*, 121-168; “Structuralism and Poststructuralism,”

March 21: Foucault: The Critique of Power
  *The Foucault Reader*, 51-100, 159-256, 291-330;

March 28: Derrida I: Grammatology & Différance
  Derrida: “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences”; “Signature Event Context”; *Positions*;
  Rorty, “Philosophy as a Kind of Writing: An Essay on Derrida”;
  R. Bernstein, “Serious Play: the Ethical Political Horizon of Jacques Derrida”

April 4: Derrida II: Deconstruction and the Political
  Derrida, “Force of Law: On the Mystical Foundation of Authority”
  [“Declarations of Independence”]
  “Spectres of Marx”

April 11: Postructuralism and Ethics
  Derrida, *On Hospitality*; Levinas, “Ethics as First Philosophy”; *Totality and Infinity* (selections); Foucault, “An Aesthetics of Existence”; Badiou, *Ethics* (selections);

April 18: Postructuralism and Post-Marxism
Badiou, *Metapolitics, The Century*; Zizek, *In Search of Lost Causes*

April 25: Spring Recess


May 9: Final Papers due

Additional Readings

Descombes: *Modern French philosophy*
Dosse, *History of Structuralism*, volume 1
Furet, “French Intellectuals: from Marxism to structuralism”
Sartre, “On Structuralism: an Interview” (Telos)
Frank, *What is neostructuralism?*
*The Foucault Reader,*
Lyotard, *Just Gaming*
Bourdieu, “on the international circulation of ideas”; *Homo Academicus*
Ferry & Renaut, *French Philosophy of the 1960s*
Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*
Rorty, “Derrida: Philosophy as a Kind of Writing”
Cusset, Introduction to *French Theory*
Bernstein, “Serious Play”

Units:

I. **Philosophical Precursors I: Nietzsche**

II. **Philosophical Precursors II: Heidegger**

III. French Theory *avant la lettre*
Bataille, “Theory of Expenditure,” *The Accursed Share* (selection), Blanchot,

IV. Structuralism and the Death of Man
Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques* (selections); Foucault, *The Order of Things* (selections); Barthes, “Death of the Author”;

V. Foucault’s “Aesthetics of Existence”
The *Foucault Reader*, 121-168; “Structuralism and Poststructuralism,”

VI. Foucault & Power
The *Foucault Reader*, 51-100, 159-256, 291-330;

VII. Derrida I: Grammatology & Différance
Derrida: “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences”*; “Signature Event Context”*; *Positions*
Rorty, “Philosophy as a Kind of Writing: An Essay on Derrida”* 
R. Bernstein, “Serious Play: the Ethical Political Horizon of Jacques Derrida”* 

VIII. Derrida II: Deconstruction and the Political
Derrida, “Force of Law: On the Mystical Foundation of Authority”
[“Declarations of Independence”?] 
“Spectres of Marx”

IX. Poststructuralism and Ethics
Levinas, “Ethics as First Philosophy”*; *Totality and Infinity* (selections); Foucault, “An Aesthetics of Existence”; Badiou, *Ethics* (selections);

X. Poststructuralism and Post-Marxism
Badiou, *Metapolitics, The Century*; Zizek,