



Sociology of Culture : A Theoretical, Aesthetic and Political History of Modernity in Paris

EDUCO

Prof. Florent Jakob

Course Description

This course aims to provide an analytical introduction to modernity in general, starting with one of its great capitals: Paris. We will focus on intellectual, cultural, and historical aspects of society from the mid-18th century to the present day. Each session will proceed chronologically, based on relationships between political, theoretical and aesthetic aspects of the period, and will highlight certain related aspects of Paris.

Each class will therefore focus on certain moments of thought (a few short texts) that characterize an era, as well as on a number of political and aesthetic experiments (a few works). This will familiarize you with a certain Parisian geography. In some cases, you will also have the opportunity to take a tour (be prepared to walk a bit!).

This is not just a question of developing an understanding of history: As the classes progress, a world of our own - the contemporary world - takes shape. Each session hence looks at the historical period from the point of view of its heritage, from the point of view of the present.

This course will help you better know Paris, and to deepen your French experience. It will also, and above all, help you to gradually build an overall understanding of modernity, and thus provide you with the means to apprehend and problematize contemporary experience.

There are NO prerequisites for this course: if, on occasion, certain theoretical points seem difficult at first, they will be explained to you.

ONE text must be read for the session (indicated in bold). Texts will be provided.

Learning Objectives

- Demonstrate an understanding of the historical shifts that mark the evolution of our notion of culture and society since the Enlightenment.
- Understand the philosophical and sociological methodology necessary to analyze the texts studied.
- Integrate the structured observation of cultural sites and artistic experiments in Paris into our understanding of the texts studied.
- Identify and throw into the question the stakes of the debate around reason, modernism, and human creation.

Note : This syllabus is a base model. The instructor is free to alter and modify its content in concertation with EDUCO. All is subject to change.



Assessment, Attendance and Course Rules

If you are absent, you will need to provide an official document to justify your absence (a medical certificate, for example). For two unjustified absences, your final mark will drop by one point (a 14/20 will become a 13/20; a 15/20 will become a 14/20). Three unjustified absences will result in a 0/20 for the course. (See Academic Guidelines)

EDUCO policy prohibits the use of AI and tools such as ChatGPT in the production of assignments. Your essays and oral presentations must be of your own creation, and anything that does not come directly from you must be cited and acknowledged according to the rules in force.

Assessment:

- 1 paper on your favorite reading (due in session 11), 40%
- 1 final exam (session 12), 30%
- 1 participation grade (all sessions), 30%

Course Schedule

Week 1 :

Introduction to the course. Presentation of course work and class goals.

End of the Ancien Régime. Court society - The birth of the absolute state (the pacification of social life, and the modern state concentration of violence...), the idea of "culture" (self-government, self-restraint, and the Encyclopedia...)

Theoretically: Jean-Jacques Rousseau; aesthetically: Watteau, Jardins...

Preparatory reading (and extracts given):

Norbert Elias, *La société de cour* (pp.-) - will be presented in class.

Michel Foucault, *History of Madness in the Classical Age*

Rousseau, *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*

Week 2 :

(1780-1810) The Enlightenment - The birth of the public sphere, and the French and hence global question of the Revolution. The transformation of the relationship with time.

Theoretically : The question of the Revolution (Rousseau, Robespierre, Saint-Just), aesthetically: Chardin, architecture

Visit: Du Luxembourg à l'Odéon – Paris of the Revolution and the Enlightenment Public Sphere (Danton, Prokope, et al.)

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Preparatory reading :

-Habermas, L'espace public (pp.-)

-Diderot, Rameau's Nephew

Week 3 :

(1810-1830) The first critique, the first modern alternative? A romantic nature? Questioning "progress". A new experience of the city? What is a museum? The feeling of belonging to a new world.

Theoretically: Romantic philosophy, birth of social criticism, aesthetics: Balzac, Géricault, Delacroix...

Preparatory reading :

Raymond Williams, Metropolitan Perceptions

-Michael Löwy, Robert Sayre, Anticapitalist Romanticism and Nature

Week 4 :

(1830-1848) Walter Benjamin, Paris, capital of the 19th century

Visit: Paris Arcades (2nd arrondissement)

Theme: the question of the modern metropolis, birth of the myth of the big city, commodity fetishism...

Preparatory reading :

Walter Benjamin, Extracts devoted to the arcades from Livre des Passages.

Roger Caillois, The myth of Paris

Week 5 :

(1848-1880) Karl Marx in exile, France "the classical land of politics". The rupture of 1848 and the Paris Commune of 1871, Birth of "labor", Modern aesthetics.

Theoretically: Marx, Baudelaire the critic; aesthetically: Baudelaire the poet, Edouard Manet...

Preparatory reading:

Marx, Class Struggles in France

The 18th-Brumaire of Louis Napoléon Bonaparte

Engels, The June Days

Dolf Oehler, Spleen against oblivion

Week 6 :

(1880-1918)

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The "party", "Imperialism", Freud in Paris, War in the 20th century, and the shock of technology. Theoretically, Nietzsche and France, aesthetically, the avant-gardes.

Preparatory reading:

Georg Simmel, Cities and the Life of the Mind

Week 7 :

(Between the wars) The trauma of war. Psychoanalysis and the last capital of the European avant-garde (Surrealism). Understanding fascism (Collège de Sociologie).

Theoretically, aesthetically, Surrealism.

Preparatory reading:

Simone Weil, The Iliad or the poem of strength.

Week 8 :

1945-1975. Paris, capital of Feminism "Independence", "Autonomy", intersecting other struggles?

Preparatory reading:

Simone de Beauvoir, The Second Sex, introduction.

Luce Irigaray, Speculum of the Other Woman

Monique Wittig, La Pensée straight

Week 9 :

Paris-capital of "recognition" (the construction of an Afro-American and colonized French-speaking differentiation in Paris in the 1950s-1960s. Algerian War, policing).

Visit of the Latin Quarter, focus on Black Paris.

Preparatory reading :

Frantz Fanon, Peau noire, masques blancs (ch. "Le nègre et la reconnaissance", pp.172-182)

Aimé Césaire, Discourse on colonialism

Week 10 :

The 1960s-1970s, Paris, the critique of everyday life. Theorizing and criticizing social and urban experience in terms of consumption, spectacle, use and appropriation. Chantal Akerman, Jean-Luc Godard...

Visit of the « Slab » in the 13th arrondissement.

Preparatory readings:

Maurice Blanchot, "La parole quotidienne" (in L'entretien infini)

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Henri Lefèbvre, *Critique de la vie quotidienne*

Week 11 :

Paris, postcolonial capital, from 1990 to today. Exit the Empire, discuss the "universal".
And then, put an end to the museum?

Preparatory readings:

Seloua Luste Boulbina and Achille Mbembe, Interview "Penser par éclairs et par la foudre".

<https://www.cairn.info/revue-rue-descartes-2014-4-page-97.htm>

Françoise Vergès, "Should museums be emptied?"

<https://www.arte.tv/fr/videos/108567-010-A/faut-il-vider-les-musees/>

Week 12 :

Can we synthesize these different aspects of modernity? Are we leaving it behind?

Week 13 :

Final exam

(The exam consists of a few short questions, an image analysis, and an essay)

Bibliography

Baudrillard, Jean, *La société de consommation*, Gallimard, « Folio »

Barthes, Roland, *Mythologies*, Le Seuil, « Points »

De Beauvoir, Simone, *Le deuxième sexe, Vol. 1*, Poche

Benjamin, Walter, *Paris capitale du XIXe siècle*, Allia

---, *Petite histoire de la photographie*, Allia

Blanchot, Maurice, *L'entretien infini*, Gallimard

Boulbina, Seloua Luste and Achille Mbembe, Interview "Penser par éclairs et par la foudre", Cairn

Bourdieu, Pierre, *La distinction*, Editions de Minuit.

---, *Le sens pratique*, Editions de Minuit (les quatre premiers chapitres)

---, *L'invention du quotidien*, Gallimard, « Folio »

Caillois, Roger, « Paris, mythe moderne » in *Nouvelle Revue Française*, 284, mai 1937.

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Césaire, Aimé, *Discours sur le colonialisme*, Présence Africaine
De Certeau, Michel, *La culture au pluriel*, 10/18
Diderot, Denis, *Le neveu de Rameau*, Gallimard
Elias, Norbert, *La société de cour*, Calmann-Lévy
Engels, Friedrich, « La révolution de Juin » in *Les journées de juin 1848*
Fanon, Frantz, *Peau noire, masques blancs*, Poche
Foucault, Michel, *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*, Gallimard
Habermas, Jurgen, *L'espace public*, Payot Rivages
Hazan, Eric, *L'invention de Paris*, Le Seuil
Harvey, David, *Paris, capitale de la modernité*, Les prairies ordinaires
Irigaray, Luce, *Speculum, de l'autre femme*, Minuit
Lefebvre, Henri, *Critique de la vie quotidienne, Vol. 1*, Gallimard
Löwy, Michael and Robert Sayre, *Romantisme anticapitaliste et nature*, Payot Rivage
Marx, Karl, *Les luttes de classes en France*, Editions Sociales.
Oehler, Dolf, *Juin 1848 : le spleen contre l'oubli*, La Fabrique
Rancière, Jacques, *Le spectateur émancipé*, La Fabrique
Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *Rêveries d'un promeneur solitaire*, Poche
Simmel, Georg, *Les grandes villes et la vie de l'esprit*, Payot
Strabinski, Jean, *L'invention de la liberté*, Skira
Wittig, Monique, *La pensée straight*, Editions Amsterdam
Weil, Simone, *L'Illiade ou le poème de la force*, Editions de l'éclat
Williams, Raymond, *Metropolitan Perceptions and the Emergence of Modernism*, Verso
Zeldin, Theodor, *Les passions françaises*, Le Seuil, « Points »

Internet links to other readings in syllabus above.

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