Texts and Ideas: Scenes of Instruction

Fall 2017, CORE UA.0400
Lecture: TR 12:30-1:45, Silver Center 207

What does it mean to offer, seek, follow, or refuse instruction? What figures show up in scenes of instruction, and what personas emerge from them? Is instruction primarily the imparting of knowledge or skills? When is it an order or a mandate? If mechanisms and venues of instruction proliferate today, whether in the form of fitness drills, how-to videos, flash mobs and MOOCS, in what ways can the literatures of the past provide assistance in navigating the promises and hazards of instruction? Throughout the course we explore texts that enact instruction or else bring some version of it into representation. How do texts imbue their lessons, advice and directives with urgency? What desires collect around instruction? What is the relationship of instruction to subjection? More basically, what counts as valid instruction in different historical epochs and what imperatives drive individuals to secure or elude it? We pose these questions in relation to writings by Euripides, Plato, Melville, Nietzsche, Freud, Stefan Zweig, and Louis Althusser, among several other writers.

Although we are primed to think of scenes of instruction in terms of classrooms, the course invites an elastic use of the term. We will think about the subjectivities that form within intimate settings of instruction, while also devoting attention to the broad cultural mandates that instruct and direct everyday belief and behavior. The types of instruction that pervade a given place and time set the terms for what passes as a society’s common sense. We will purposely explore instruction in divergent and contrastive sites, and in terms of different registers – not least its philosophical ones. Approaching our topic in this way will afford immersion in several distinctive moments of literary and intellectual history.

The course aims to nurture an expansive understanding of literature and develop facility in close reading by working with different and at times difficult texts. Course materials stretch as far back as the first millennium CE and come up to the turn to the twenty-first century. If, as literary critic Kenneth Burke argued, literature is “equipment for living,” we will ask what instructions or other “equipment” our readings put forth or intimate. In so doing the course provides opportunities to activate ancient texts in fresh ways and locate texts closer to our own time within longer trajectories of philosophical and literary inquiry.
Preceptors:
Andrea Chu, Shirin Nadira, Constanza Schaffner

Required Texts:
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The Yoga Sutra Attributed to Patanjali*, trans. Barbara S. Miller (Bantam)
Plato, *Five Dialogues* (Hackett)
Euripides, *Iphigenia Among the Taurians*, trans. Anne Carson (Chicago)
Herman Melville, *Bartleby the Scrivener* (Dover)
Stefan Zweig, *Confusion* (New York Review of Books)
Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home* (Mariner Books)
Henry James, *The Beast in the Jungle and Other Stories* (Dover)

Most other readings are compiled in a Course Packet (CP), available at the NYU Bookstore. A few readings (those not marked CP on the syllabus) will be posted on NYU Classes.

Course Requirements:

1. Attendance at lectures; completion of assigned readings *before* lectures, that is, *for* the lecture in which they will be presented, not after.
2. Attendance at discussion sections, and regular participation in discussion. Occasional, unscheduled quizzes at the start of lecture, based on readings and lectures. (Excused absences by prior approval only).
3. A mid-term and a final exam.
4. Two papers (the first 3-4 pages in length and the second 5-6 pages in length). Formal revision of the first paper. See class schedule for due dates.
5. Check your email! Course instructors will rely on the NYU CLASSES email function to send you important information about the course. (These emails go to your nyu.edu email account. Let us know immediately if you use an alternative email address).

Lecture Policies:
1. Bring readings to lectures and meetings of recitation section.
2. Turn phone ringers, laptops and tablets off prior to the start of lecture.

Grading Distribution:

Exams: 15% (midterm exam) and 20% (final exam)
Papers: 15% (first paper and revision) and 20% (final paper)
Attendance and Participation: 15%
Schedule of Readings and Assignments:

Sept. 5  Introduction
Joseph O’Neill, *The Dog*, Excerpt
Lydia Davis, “How I Read as Quickly as Possible Through My Back Issues of the TLS”

Randolph Bourne, “Youth,” “The Cult of the Best,” “The Dodging of Pressures,” “What is Exploitation?” (CP)

Sept. 12  *The Yoga Sutra Attributed to Patanjali* (Parts I, II and III)
Sept. 14  *The Yoga Sutra Attributed to Patanjali* (Part IV)

Sept. 19  **First paper due in lecture** [Papers will be returned the following week and revisions will be due on October 3, again in lecture]
Plato, “Euthyphro,” “Apology of Socrates”

Sept. 21  Plato, “Crito”

Sept. 26  Euripides, *Iphigenia Among the Taurians*
Sept. 28  Euripides, *Iphigenia Among the Taurians*

Oct. 3  **Paper revision due**
Herman Melville, “Bartleby the Scrivener”
Oct. 5  Herman Melville, “Bartleby the Scrivener”

Oct. 10  Henry James, “The Jolly Corner”
Oct. 12  Friedrich Nietzsche, “Schopenhauer as Educator” (CP)

Oct. 19  **In-Class Midterm Exam**

Oct. 24  Kenneth Burke, “The Rhetoric of Hitler’s Battle” (CP)
Oct. 26  Stefan Zweig, *Confusion*

Oct. 31  Stefan Zweig, *Confusion*
Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Excerpt (CP)
Adam Phillips, “Freud and the Uses of Forgetting”

Nov. 2  Lillian Smith, *Killers of the Dream*

Nov. 7  Lillian Smith, *Killers of the Dream*

Nov. 9  James Baldwin, “The Price of the Ticket” (CP)
Kenneth Clark, “A Conversation with James Baldwin” (1963)

Nov. 14  Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home*
Nov. 16  Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home*

Nov. 21  **Second paper due in lecture**
 Lilian Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses”
 A. O. Scott, “How to Be Wrong”
 Hito Steyerl, “The Spam of the Earth: Withdrawal from Representation” (CP)

Nov. 23  Thanksgiving Break

Nov. 28  Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses”

Nov. 30  TBD

Dec. 5  TBD

Dec. 7  TBD

Dec. 14  Review for Final Exam

Dec. 21  **Take Home Final Exam Due by 12pm** (late exams will not be accepted)