**HIS 3001/SOA 3513/ENG 3231**

**READING HISTORY: FROM POSITIVISM TO CRITICAL THEORY**

**Neeladri Bhattacharya**

**Object of the course:**

The course will explore how history as a modern discipline comes into being in the nineteenth century, and how it changes over time. It will focus on some of the dominant traditions of historical writing, and the internal dialogues within the traditions. It will move from positivism to critical theory, from Marxism to the Annales, from the French historical tradition to English social history, from histories of the economy to histories of sensibilities and emotion, from Foucault’s discursive turn to Michel de Certeau’s focus on everyday practice. Through this journey, we will reflect on some of the binaries that often shape historical thinking –– the questions of history and myth, certainty and ambiguity, objectivity and prejudice, truth and falsehood –– and see how these notions are questioned and rethought over time.

If historians in the nineteenth century established some of the founding premises of the historian’s craft, the ‘critical turn’ from the 1970s has powerfully questioned many of these assumptions, underlining the complex nature of historical practice. It has persuaded historians to ask: what does it mean to enter the archive and mine the traces of the past, to read the record, to see and represent, to narrate, and to write a story based on evidence? This course will explore what this critical turn has meant to the writing of history, how it has forced historians to question earlier frames, opening up new worlds of research, and how the old questions of historical evidence and verification still remain critical to the historian’s craft.

**Structure:**

For some themes there will be one lecture, for others two, and some themes will be explored through student led discussions.

On some days, there will be a film screening followed by a discussion on the film. We will explore how the film resonates with the themes of our concern.

**Attendance:**

There is no compulsory attendance for the lectures, but students are expected to be there for all classes. Attendance in student presentations is compulsory and absence will affect grades.

**Assessment:**

There are no exams for this course. The structure of assessment will be as follows: (i) 6 short response papers/presentations on readings = 30 per cent of total credits (5% x 6 = 30), and (2) a collective presentation (in small groups) = 5 per cent, (3) an end semester essay of 2500-3500 words = 50 percent of total credits, (4) participation in discussions = 10 per cent, (5) attendance in discussions/ presentations = 5 percent.

The course has 4 parts. You can choose any 6 readings from those suggested (no more than 2 from one part) and write notes of about 400 -500 words each, capturing the arguments in the essay and stating your responses to it. These will be discussed in the class on scheduled dates.

The end semester essay will be on a theme selected by the student in consultation with me, and the draft will be discussed in separate discussion groups, each with 5-6 students.

**Themes and lectures:**

**Introduction: On Reading History**

**I: MODERNITY AND HISTORICAL KNOWEDGE**

1. **Ranke, Acton and the Shaping of the Historical Discipline**

Readings:

* 1. G. G. Iggers and K. von Moltke (eds), *The Theory and Practice of History: Leopold von Rank*e, Indianapolis, 1973, Introduction.
  2. John Warren, ‘The Rankean Tradition in British Historiography, 1850-1950’, in Stephen Berger et al., eds., *Writing History: Theory and Practice*, Hodder Arnold, 2003.
  3. Leonard Krieger, *Ranke: The Meaning of History*, (Read: Ch. 1: The Dubious Legacy, Ch. 2: The Unscientific Counterpoint, Ch. 3: The Limits of Theory), pp. 1-34.
  4. Acton, *A Lecture on the Study of History*, Macmillan 1911.

1. **Ethnocentrism, Teleology and the Idea of Progress:**

Readings:

* 1. H. Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History*. Norton Library, 1965. Chs. 1-3.
  2. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, Introduction and Part V, Epilegomena.
  3. Peter Winch, ‘Understanding Primitive Society’, in Bryan Wilson ed. *Rationality*,Oxford, Basil Blackwell 1970.
  4. Charles Taylor, ‘Understanding and Ethnocentricity’, in *Social Theory as Practice* (OUP, New Delhi, 1983)

1. **History and the Narrative Turn**

Readings:

* 1. Louis O. Mink, ‘Narrative form as Cognitive Instrument’ in Louis O. Mink, *Historical Understanding*, Cornell University Press, 1987.
  2. Hayden White, ‘The Historical Text as a Literary Artifact’, in Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse*, John Hopkins University Press, 1978.
  3. Hayden White, ‘The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality’, in White, *The Content of the Form,* The John Hopkins University Press, 1987.
  4. Paul Ricoeur, ‘On Narrative Time’, *Critical Inqu*iry, Vol. 7, No. 1, Special Issue on Narrative (Autumn, 1980), pp. 169-190.
  5. David Carr, ‘Getting the Story Straight: Narrative and Historical Knowledge’, in Geoffrey Roberts Ed., *The History and Narrative Reader*, Routledge, 2001, pp. 197-208.

**II: annales and the French historical tradition**

1. **The Vision of Total History:**

readings:

* 1. Marc Bloch, *The Historian’s Craft*, New York 1953.
  2. Lucien Febvre, ‘A New Kind of History’, in Burke, Peter ed., *A New Kind of History: From the Writings of Lucien Febvre*, Routledge, 1973, pp. 27-43.
  3. Lucien Febvre, ‘Sensibility and History: How to Constitute the Emotional Life of the Past’, in Burke, ed., *A New Kind of History: From the Writings of Lucien Febvre*, pp. 12-26.

1. **What is Historical Time? Braudel and After:**

Readings:

* 1. Fernand Braudel, ‘History and the Social Sciences: The *Longue Dureé*’, *Annales E.S.C.*, No 4, 1958, reproduced in Braudel, *On History*, The University of Chicago Press, 1980, pp. 25-54.
  2. Peter Burke, ‘The History of the Event and the Revival of the Narrative’, in Peter Burke ed., *New Perspectives on Historical* Writing, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001, pp. 283-300.
  3. E. Le Roy Ladurie, The ‘Event and the Long Term in Social History: The Case of Chouan Uprising’, in Ladurie, *The Territory of the Historian*, The Harvester Press, 1979.
  4. Aron Gurevich, ‘What is Time’, in Aron Gurevich, *Categories of Medieval Cultur*e, Routledge, 1985, pp. 152-93.

1. **From History of Mentalité to History of Discourse:**

Readings:

* 1. Jacques Le Goff, ‘Merchant’s Time and Church’s Time in the Middle Ages’, *Time Work and Culture in the Middle Ages*, The University of Chicago Press, 1982, pp. 29-42.
  2. Le Goff, ‘Dreams in the Culture and Collective Psychology of the Middle Ages’, *Time Work and Culture in the Middle Ages*, The University of Chicago Press, 1982, 201-204.
  3. Robert Muchembled, *Smells: A Cultural History of Odours in Early Modern Times*, Polity, 2020, Chs 1-4.
  4. LaCapra, Dominick., ‘Is Everyone a Mentalite Case?’ in LaCapra, Dominick, *History and Criticism,* Cornell University Press, 1985.
  5. Peter Burke, ‘Strengths and Weaknesses of a History of Mentalities’, in Burke, *Varieties of Cultural Histories*, Cornell University Press, 1997, pp. 162-82.

1. **From History of Sensibilities to History of Emotions:**

Readings:

* 1. Barbara H. Rosenwein, ‘Worrying about Emotions in History’, *American Historical Review,* 107, no. 3, 2002, pp. 821-845.
  2. Peter N. Stearns, *Happiness Revolution in World History*, Routledge, 2021, Ch 7.
  3. [Christina Kotchemidova](https://www-jstor-org.elibrary.ashoka.edu.in/action/doBasicSearch?Query=au%3A%22Christina%20Kotchemidova%22), ‘From Good Cheer to "Drive-by Smiling": A Social History of Cheerfulness’, [*Journal of Social History*](https://www-jstor-org.elibrary.ashoka.edu.in/journal/jsocialhistory), Vol. 39, No. 1, Autumn, 2005, pp. 5-37.
  4. Peter N. Stearns*, Shame: A Brief History*, Urbana, 2017, Ch. 2 or 4.

**III: Marxism and historical writing**

1. **The Beginnings: Karl Marx, Marxism and History**

Readings:

* 1. Karl Marx, *18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte.* 1852.
  2. Marx, ‘Theses on Feuerbach’, 1845.
  3. Eric Hobsbawm, ‘Karl Marx’s Contribution to Historiography’, in *Ideology and Social Sciences*, Suffolk 1962.
  4. Joseph Stalin, *Historical and Dialectical Materialism*, 1938.

1. **Althusser and the Structuralist Vision**

Readings:

* 1. Althusser, *For Marx*, Harmondsworth, 1969.Ch. 1.
  2. Thompson, E.P., ‘Poverty of Theory: or an Orrery of Errors’*, in The Poverty of Theory,* Merlin, London, 1978, Ch.
  3. Maurice Godelier, ‘The Ideal in the Real’, in Raphael Samuel and Stedman Jones eds., *Culture, Ideology and Politics,* Routledge, 1982.

1. **History from Below and New Social History: E. P. Thompson and Beyond**

Readings:

* 1. E. Thompson, ‘The Moral Economy of the English Crowd’, *Past & Present*, No. 50 (Feb. 1971), pp. 76-136.
  2. E. Thompson, ‘Rough Music’, in Thompson, *Customs in Common*, Penguin, 1991, pp. 467-534.
  3. Elizabeth Fox Genovese, “The Many Faces of Moral Economy: A Contribution to the Debate’, *Past & Present* , Feb., 1973, No. 58 (Feb., 1973), pp. 161-168.
  4. Chris Wickham, ‘Gossip and Resistance among the Medieval Peasantry’, *Past & Present,* 160 (1998).
  5. R.W. Scribner, ‘Sorcery, Superstition and the Society: The Witch of Urach’, in Scribner, *Popular Culture and Popular Movements in Reformation Germany, 1529*, The Hambledon Press, 1987, pp. 257-76.
  6. Shahid Amin, ‘Gandhi as Mahatma’, in Ranajit Guha ed., *Subaltern Studies* *III*, OUP, 1984.

1. **Gendering History**

Readings:

1. Joan Wallach Scott, ‘Women in the Making of the English Working Class’, in Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, Columbia University Press, 1999, pp. 68-92
2. Carolyn Steedman, ‘The Price of Experience, Women and the Making of the English Working Class’, *Radical History Review*, 59, 1994, pp 108-119.
3. Judith Butler, ‘Speaking Up, Talking Back: Joan Scott’s Critical Feminism’, in Butler and Elizabeth Weed eds., *The Question of Gender: Joan Scott’s Critical Feminism*, Indiana University Press, 2011, pp. 11-30.
4. Saidiya Hartman, ‘A Venus in Two Acts’, *Small Axe*, 12: 26: 2, June 2008, pp 1-14

**IV: HISTORY AND CRITICAL THEORY**

1. **Foucault and Histories of Power:**

Readings:

1. Michel Foucault, ‘The Body of the Condemned’, & ‘Docile Bodies’, in *Discipline and Punish, Vi*ntage Books, Part I, Ch 1& Part III, Ch. 2.
2. Michel Foucault, ‘Body Power”, & ‘Truth and Power’, in *Power/Knowledge*, The Harvester Press 1980, pp. 55-62, 109-33.
3. Foucault, ‘The Subject of Power’, Herbert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, University of Chicago Press, 1982, pp. 208-28.
4. **Semiotics and the History of Meanings and Symbols**

Readings:

* 1. Robert Darnton, ‘The Great Cat Massacre’, in Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History*, New York, Basic Books, 1984.
  2. Roger Chartier, ‘Texts, Symbols and Frenchness’, in Chartier, *Cultural History: Between Practices and Representations*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1988.
  3. Dominick La Capra, ‘Chartier, Darnton and the Great Symbol Massacre’, in La Capra, *Soundings in Critical Theory*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, London, 1989.
  4. Raphael Samuel, ‘Reading the Signs’, *History Workshop*, No. 32, 1991, pp. 88-109.

1. **Michel de Certeau and the Practice of Everyday Life**

Readings:

1. Michel de Certeau, ‘Walking the City’, in de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, University of California Press, 1988.
2. Michel de Certeau, ‘Making do: Uses and Tactics’, 115-30, in de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, pp., 29-42.
3. Chartier, *Cultural History: Between Practices and Representations*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1988, Ch. 1
4. **Looking at the Small and the Anecdotal: Microhistory and New Historicism**

Readings:

**Microhistory:**

* 1. Carlo Ginzburg, ‘Micro history: Two or Three Things that I Know about it’, *Critical Inquiry*, No. 1, 1993; reproduced in *Threads and Traces*, pp., 193-214.
  2. Carlo Ginzburg, *The* *Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-century Miller,* John Hopkins University, 1980*,* pp. 1-35.
  3. Giovanni Levi, ‘On Microhistory’, in: Peter Burke ed., *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), p. 93-113.
  4. Ranajit Guha, ‘Chandra’s death’, *Subaltern Studies, V*, OUP, 1987, 135-65.
  5. Tanika Sarkar, ‘Talking about Scandals: Religion, Law and Love in Nineteenth Century Calcutta’, *Studies in History*, 13: 1 1997, pp. 63-95.

**New Historicism:**

* + - * 1. Stephen Greenblatt, ‘The Poetics of Culture’, Michael Payne ed., *The Greenblatt Reader*, Blackwell Publishing, 2005, pp. 30-49.
        2. Catharine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, *Practicing New Historicism*, University of Chicago Press, 1997. Introduction, pp. 1-19

1. Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, ‘Counter History and the Anecdote’, in *Practicing New Historicism*, University of Chicago Press, 1997pp. 49-74.
2. Gallagher, ‘The Potato in Materialist Imagination’, *Practicing New Historicism*, University of Chicago Press, 1997, pp.110-35.
3. **Post Modernism, Post Colonialism and the Writing of History**

Readings

1. Dipesh Chakrabarty, ‘Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for "Indian" Pasts?’, *Representations*, No. 37 (Winter, 1992), pp. 1-26.
2. Gabrielle Spiegel, ‘History, Historicism and the Social Logic of the Text in the Middle Ages’, *Speculum*, lxv, 1990, pp. 59-86.
3. Patrick Joyce and Catriona Kelly, ‘History and Post-Modernism’, *Past & Presen*t, No. 133 (Nov., 1991), pp. 204-213.
4. Hayden White, ‘Historical Emplotment and the Problem of Truth’, in Saul Friedlander, *Probing the Limits of Representation*, Harvard University Press, 1992, pp. 37-54.
5. Dominick LaCapra, ‘Representing the Holocaust: Reflections on the Historians’ Debate’, Saul Friedlander, *Probing the Limits of Representation*, Harvard University Press, 1992, pp. 108-127.
6. Braun, Robert, ‘The Holocaust and the Problems of Representation’, *History and Theory*, 34, 1, 1995.