This seminar will provide a comprehensive introduction to the poetry of the Occitan troubadours, their language, and their reception among later writers. The troubadours flourished in the south of France during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, producing a dazzlingly varied and innovative corpus of lyrics, which exercised a profound influence on the emergence of lyric poetry in other European vernaculars. In addition to studying troubadour lyrics and the cultural contexts that produced them, we will also think critically about the role of textual reception and canon formation in the function of literary traditions, both medieval and modern. This course will include a basic introduction to the Occitan language as well as an opportunity to work closely with medieval manuscripts.
In this course, we examine the powerful innovations of form, style, subject matter, and ideology that have marked Haitian literature from the early nineteenth to the late twentieth centuries in relation to the cultural legacy of the nation’s revolutionary founding. Against the view that modern Haitian literature has evaded historical concerns in favor of more pressing contemporary social and political problems, we explore how the revolution itself generated a rhetorical, literary, and ideological foundation for the emergence and continuous renovation of an intellectual and aesthetic tradition in Haiti, as well as the degree to which several subsequent aesthetic revolutions in Haitian literature have been a response to perceived repetitions of the historical past. Beginning with a reading of foundational Haitian political writings together with theoretical texts by authors such as C.L.R. James, Michel-Rolph Trouillot, Sibylle Fischer, Étienne Balibar, Jacques Rancière, and René Girard, we go on to analyze the twentieth-century literary and artistic movements that were catalyzed by the first U.S. occupation of Haiti and the rise of the Duvalier dictatorship. These include Indigenism (Jacques Roumain), Marxism (Jacques-Stephen Alexis, René Depestre), Negritude (Depestre), Magical Realism (Alexis), and Spiralism (Jean-Claude Fignolé). Throughout, we will pay close attention to gender and sexuality in mediating representations of Haitian history, as well as the role of women authors (Virgile Valcin, Annie Desroy, and Marie Chauvet) in innovating radical critiques of both neocolonialism and the operations of violence, desire, and domination within Haitian society, writing from the interstices of black and mulatto, public and private, individual and collective, and psychoanalytic and historical materialist perspectives. Taught in French.
In the past few decades, a number of artists have experimented with the moving image essay as a mode of writing that blurs the distinction between creation and interpretation, fiction and documentary, history and memory. This seminar will be devoted to films and videos that have contributed to the emergence of new forms of visual thought, from Chris Marker’s Sans Soleil and Jean-Luc Godard’s Scénario du film Passion to Agnes Varda’s The Gleaners and I. As we follow the trail set by these works, we will read texts by Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and Roland Barthes, among others. We will also consider essayistic experiments in the fields of photography, performance, and installation art. Because we stand at a pivotal juncture in the reconfiguration of our mediatic landscape, particular attention will be given to those works that problematize the relation between the analog and the digital.
This introductory course on problems in contemporary critical theory will begin by focusing on critique of ideology in the Marxist tradition (with particular attention to Sartre, Althusser and Jameson, along with some of their major predecessors, allies and adversaries, including such thinkers as Eisenstein, Barthes, Bataille and Derrida). We will then discuss how the relationships between discursive, institutional and aesthetic practices and their pragmatic effects are rethought in the writings of such theorists as Foucault, Rancière and Deleuze. While the primary focus of the course will be on theoretical texts, these texts will also be considered in dialogue with literary and cinematic works.
In this course, students revise and expand a paper written in a previous course with an aim towards producing a work approaching publishable quality, of approximately 20-25 pages in length. While deepening students’ knowledge of their chosen subject area, the course also provides students with a forum in which to work through some of the methodological challenges of academic research and writing. In the revised paper, students will develop an original argument relative to a significant problem or research question; demonstrate knowledge of relevant primary and secondary sources; engage critically with a well-defined theoretical methodology or scholarly corpus; and draw out clearly the significance of their findings. The class will meet regularly as a group for the purpose of discussion and feedback on individual work, and students will give short presentations on various aspects of their projects including the research methodology, the state of knowledge on their topics, and the contribution to the field. In addition, students will meet individually with the professor to discuss their progress. Work written in the quarter will be shared and discussed in the final meeting of the quarter. Taught in English. Although required for French Ph.D. students in the 2nd or 3rd year, this course is appropriate for graduate students across the humanities. The professor will contact enrolled students at least one week prior to the first meeting so as to solicit the paper they wish to develop in the seminar. Any student who enrolls after that date should contact the professor as soon as possible before the beginning of the quarter.
This course traces images of violence through 16th-century French literature, paying close attention to the transmigration of imagery, stylistic devices and discursive postures across literary forms. We will examine structural and formal conventions as well as historical and political contexts in exploring the conversations between our texts and the turbulent times in which they were created. Authors will include Joachim du Bellay, Marguerite de Navarre, Agrippa d’Aubigné, Michel de Montaigne, François Rabelais and others. Classes will be conducted in English.
The aim of this introductory course is to read with beginning graduate students in French some of the major theoretical texts in colonial and postcolonial studies. While the field is expansive, both temporally and geographically, this course’s focus will be primarily on twentieth century theories with special emphasis on Francophone Africa. The aim is therefore neither to be exhaustive nor representative of all the positions and directions that this vast field has come to cover in recent years. At the heart of the course issues of language and discursive practices that constitute coloniality and postcoloniality, seeking to trace some of the vicissitudes of ideas about the colonial and the postcolonial, the necessities and consequences of these ideas as well as their modes of presentation. Given that several of the theorists on our reading list are also novelists and poets, we will read a number of literary works alongside the theoretical works in order to better trace the articulations of the two genres of thought and writing.
FRENCH 393/403: FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING: THEORY AND PRACTICE

Professor Patricia Scarampi  Tuesdays 3–5:20p

The course provides a foundation in approaches, methods, and materials for the teaching of French from the perspectives of Second Language Acquisition research. The theoretical background will be applied to the teaching of the four skills such as speaking, listening, reading and writing and the teaching of culture to help students develop their own philosophy of foreign language teaching. Students will acquire the pedagogical tools and metalinguistic awareness that they need to become successful language instructors.
This seminar will provide a comprehensive introduction to the poetry of the Occitan troubadours, their language, and their influence on literary traditions. The troubadours flourished in the south of France during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, producing a dazzlingly innovative corpus of lyric poetry, which exercised a profound influence on the emergence of literature in other European vernaculars. In addition to studying troubadour lyrics in their original language, we will also think critically about issues related to orality, textuality and the role of literary “traditions” in the construction of cultural and national identities. This course will include study of the Occitan language and close work with medieval manuscripts.
This seminar offers an introduction to the avant-gardes of the early twentieth century. Our survey includes canonical European avant-gardes and their international circulation, but also a range of non-European movements: Futurism in Italy and Russia; Berlin Dada; Stridentism in Mexico; Surrealism in France, Japan, and Egypt; Brazilian Anthropofagism; and Négritude. Our focus will be on manifestos, literary works, and critical theories of the avant-garde, but we will also consider the visual arts, with a planned group trip to the Art Institute of Chicago.
In this course, we explore some of the most radical political philosophies, discourses, and freedom projects of the French eighteenth century with an aim to discern the extent to which these are informed by a reflection on the problem of slavery as an extreme instance of unfreedom. Although many recent studies of Enlightenment have challenged the radicalism of its emancipatory ethos in light of its inability to sustain an unambiguous attack on contemporary New World slavery, scholars have yet to fully apprehend the conceptual role of servitude in French Enlightenment discourses of emancipation and sovereignty—both individual or collective. We depart from the striking observation that the metaphor of political slavery was a foundational feature of modern contract theory and universal rights-based philosophies of freedom, and that most of the century’s most politically revolutionary stories were figured through foreign contexts in which slavery was practiced—the Turkish Seraglio, the Spanish American plantation, and various sites of European colonial cruelty. Moving beyond common explanations of these displacements, we query the potentialities and limits of French Enlightenment narratives of emancipation or resistance with an aim to uncover the philosophical parallels and conflicts between radical Enlightenment and antislavery, as well as the specific meanings and exclusions of the freedom projects they underwrite. Beginning with Montesquieu’s monumental epistolary critique of “Oriental despotism” as the conflation of physical and political servitude, we move on to the radical republican project of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in which the emancipation of the subject is indistinguishable from the general will that binds it. This we contrast with the rationalist, materialist philosophy of Baron d’Holbach, whose attempt to reduce the human to pure matter determined by physical causes offers what Jonathan Israel maintains is the most politically emancipatory discourse of the era, deriving from the monism of Baruch Spinoza. Moving on to examples of actual “antislavery” literature of the time, by Voltaire, De Gouges, and De Staël, together with the highly polemical Histoire des deux Indes, we examine their ambiguities, ambivalences, and relation to Enlightenment discourses of political emancipation. We conclude with a sustained interrogation of the dialectics of liberty and slavery in the French and Haitian Revolutions, tracking closely the extent to which both projects rely on various forms of unfreedom for their fulfillment. Guided by the theoretical work of Orlando Patterson, Wendy Brown, Mary Nyquist, Hannah Arendt, and others. Taught in French.
This course provides an introduction to the philosophy of Giorgio Agamben, particularly the texts that he includes within the Homo Sacer cycle. We discuss the genealogy and influence of the pivotal concepts that he espouses such as homo sacer, bare life, and the state of exception. These notions have generated both vital interest and vehement controversies that seem likely to endure for quite some time. For example, does the notion of homo sacer help or hinder us from assessing the critical implications of the current global refugee crisis? Through such question, we examine the advantages and limits of Agamben’s thought for contemporary discussions of biopolitics, political philosophy, the Shoah, and postcolonial studies. Finally, by considering Agamben’s encounters with figures such as Melville, Kafka, and Levi, we ask whether his literary readings offer a more productive horizon than does the rest of his thought. Over the course of the term, we will cover texts by Agamben, Foucault, Schmitt, Benjamin, Butler, Levi, Kafka, and Melville.
The aim of this course is to introduce new graduate students to twentieth-century theories of visual culture and media, with special emphasis on the French and German contexts. Rather than attempting to cover all the positions and directions that this field has produced, we will work around specific questions and trace the ways in which they have been pursued by theorists and practitioners alike. How can we conceptualize the relation between art and technology? Can we speak of perception and memory independently of specific technical apparatuses? What is at stake in the shift from analog to digital media at the level of both inscription and reception? We will also ask questions of media archeology, and consider a range of pre-twentieth century devices for hearing and seeing. As we focus on different kinds of audiovisual media, we will read texts by T.W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Friedrich Kittler, Bernard Stiegler, and Samuel Weber. We will also analyze films and art installations by Harun Farocki, Martin Arnold, and Pierre Huyghe.
Topics in Culture and Society: Guy Debord and the International Situationist. This course offers a sustained engagement with the radical social analysis of Guy Debord and the International Situationists. Debord, who identified himself a strategist at war with the society he saw emerging in the late fifties and early sixties, worked in various domains and genres in an effort to provoke a realization and supersession of that society. We read his major works as well as major contributions to the development or comprehension of his analysis by other situationists, including Vaneigem, Vienet, and Becker-Ho, and we study most if not all of Debord’s films. We also examine scholarly analyses of Debord’s theoretical work by critics such as Jappe, Agamben, and Plant. Our aim is to understanding of Debord’s social analysis in its socio-historical context in order to begin assessing its relevance to our own society, which Agamben has argued remains the ‘society of the spectacle.’
In the opening decades of the twentieth century, Henri Bergson was the most famous philosopher in the world. Although his early writings focused on debates about number (he was trained as a mathematician), space, and above all time, he later turned to such topics as evolution and the nature of life. His key terms were interpreted in wildly conflicting ways by different readers and rapidly became a central reference for not only philosophers, artists, and literary writers, but for many political thinkers as well.

This course explores the connections between Bergson as a philosopher of time, space, and life to some of the diverse Bergsonisms that evoked his philosophy to justify and energize their aesthetic and political agendas during the modernist period. After an introduction to Bergson’s philosophical writings, we will concentrate on their uses in three different historical contexts: Parisian modernism of the interwar period (with a special emphasis on right-wing uses of Bergson); Japanese philosophy and cultural criticism from the same period; and writers associated with the négritude movement, from the late 1930s into the period of decolonization. Writers from the period may include Walter Benjamin, Wyndham Lewis, Nishida Kitaro, Kobayashi Hideo, Marcel Proust, Georges Sorel, and Léopold Senghor. Recent criticism may include Jimena Canales, Bachir Diagne, Mary Ann Doane, Donna Jones, and Stefan Tanaka.