Course Description

This seminar will introduce students to the thought of four influential thinkers in the field of radical philosophy from 1945 to the present. Beginning with Castoriadis and ending with Rancière, the seminar will explore key debates in the reinterpretation of democracy’s revolutionary nature and the necessary steps to restore its implicit radicalism. The seminar will offer opportunities to reflect on the connections between democratic politics and revolutionary theory, particularly in connection with the history of radical social movements and radical theory during and after the 1960s. The seminar will adopt an interdisciplinary angle, emphasizing the innovative contributions from the political anthropological and psychoanalytical fields. Through active seminar discussion and paper writing projects, students should be able to reconstruct the intellectual genealogy of radical democratic theory in the context of the four authors under study, as well as to envision alternative options for the revival of a radical democratic tradition today. The seminar will present the dilemmas and challenges of connecting the theory of radical democracy to its practice in everyday life.
Required Texts


Pierre Clastres, *Archaeology of Violence* (Semiotext(e), 2010)

Miguel Abensour, *Democracy against the State* (Polity, 2011)


**Session I: Socialisme ou Barbarie and the Origins of the Anti-Bureaucratic Critique**

Readings

Castoriadis, “The Greek Polis and the Creation of Democracy”, “Dead End?”, *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*

Castoriadis, “Recommencing the Revolution”, “Marxism and Revolutionary Theory”, “Presentation of Socialisme ou Barbarie”, *The Castoriadis Reader*

Castoriadis, “Marxism: A Provisional Assessment”, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*

**Session II: Cornelius Castoriadis’ Theory of Political Autonomy**

Readings

Castoriadis, “Power, Politics, Autonomy”, “The Social-Historical”, *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*

Castoriadis, “The Logic of Magmas and the Question of Autonomy”, “Psychoanalysis and Philosophy”, *The Castoriadis Reader*
Castoriadis, “Autonomy and Alienation”, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*

**Session III: The Making of The Imaginary Institution of Society**

Readings

Castoriadis, “Theory and Revolutionary Project”, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*

Castoriadis, “The Institution and the Imaginary”, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*

**Session IV: The Reception of The Imaginary Institution of Society**

Readings

Castoriadis, “Radical Imagination and the Social Instituting Imaginary”, “Done and to be Done”, *The Castoriadis Reader*

Castoriadis, “Intellectuals and History”, “The End of Philosophy?”, *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*

**Session V: Castoriadis’ Social Creativity and the Redefinition of Democracy**

Readings

Castoriadis, “The Social Historical Institution”, “Social Imaginary Significations”, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*

**Session VI: Pierre Clastres’ Political Anthropology**

Readings

Clastres, “Savage Ethnography”, “Primitive Economy”, “Marxists and their Anthropology”, *Archaeology of Violence*

**Session VII: True Democracy according to Society against the State**

Readings

Clastres, “The Power to Speak”, “Society against the State”, *Society against the State*
**Session VIII: Autogestion and Primitive Society: Clastres on True Democracy**

Readings

Clastres, “Exchange and Power”, “The Last Frontier”, “The Return to Enlightenment”, *Society against the State*

Clastres, “Power in Primitive Societies”, *Archaeology of Violence*

**Session IX: Miguel Abensour's and the Revival of Utopian Politics**

Readings

Abensour, “The Utopia of the Rational State”, “Political Intelligence”, “From the 1843 Crisis to the Criticism of Politics”, *Democracy against the State*

**Session X: The Commune versus the Institutional: Abensour's Critique of the State**

Readings

Abensour, “The Four Characteristics of True Democracy”, “True Democracy and Modernity”, “Savage Democracy and the Principle of Anarchy”, *Democracy against the State*

**Session XI: Rancière’s Vision of Radical Democracy**

Readings

Rancière, “Plato’s Lie”, “Marx’s Labor”, “The Philosopher and the Sociologist”, *The Philosopher and his Poor*

**Session XII: The Future of the Proletariat according to Rancière**

Readings

Rancière, “The Proletarian and his Double”, “Heretical Knowledge and the Emancipation of the Poor”, “The Links of the Chain”, *Staging the People*
**Session XIII:** Rancière on Revolution and the Possibilities of Resistance

Readings

Rancière, “From Victorious Democracy to Criminal Democracy”, “Politics, or the Lost Shepherd”, “Democracy, Republic, Representation” *Hatred of Democracy*

**Session XIV:** Castoriadis, Clastres, Abensour and Rancière: A Radical Polyphony

Comparative Conclusions: Insights, Hopes and Unresolved Dilemmas in *The Imaginary Institution of Society, Society against the State, Democracy against the State and Staging the People*