



Sixth Seminar Series in Critical Theory and Radical Politics

**Philosophy as a way of life:
The work of Simon Critchley**

READING COURSE

**Venue: Pavilion Parade, Staff Common Room
January to May 2015**

and

**WORKSHOP with Professor Simon Critchley
Grand Parade, University of Brighton
20th May 2015 – 22nd May 2015**

This research seminar hosted by CAPPE and the Faculty of Arts, is aimed at staff and research students interested in contemporary politics, philosophy, ethics and critical theory. Each year we focus on a different theorist or issue, engaging in a close critical reading of their work. In previous years we have read Alain Badiou, Theodor Adorno, Ernesto Laclau, Judith Butler and Wendy Brown. This year our reading of Simon Critchley's work culminates with workshop with Simon Critchley, in the last week of May 2015.

On this course we will systematically read Professor Critchley's work, focusing on (among other topics) his account of ethics and deconstruction, his account of fidelity and commitment, his work on disappointment, nihilism and critique, and his influential accounts of humour, tragedy and politics. All members of the Universities of Sussex and Brighton are welcome to participate. Participation in the workshop with Professor Critchley is limited to a maximum of 20. If you would like to attend please email Mark Devenney on md17@brighton.ac.uk as soon as possible to reserve a place. Participation in the workshop costs £60, to cover coffees, food and one evening meal. All sessions, other than the very last, will be held between 4.30pm and 7.00pm on Monday evenings. Participants on the reading course are expected to read in advance of, and to attend, all sessions. Each session will begin with an introductory overview of the arguments followed by close scrutiny of passages in the texts under discussion.

READING COURSE OUTLINE

Session 1: The Ethics of Deconstruction **Monday 12th of January, Pavilion Parade** **16.30-19.00**

The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas (1992, republished 1999) was Critchley's first published book. His then novel reading of an ethics of deconstruction both changed the way in which Derrida was read, and established his long standing interest in the possibility of deconstruction as ethically demanding, as well as the relationship of deconstruction to Levinas's ethics. We will also analyse Critchley's own self-criticism, as an introduction to themes explored in weeks to come.

Session 2: Nihilism and Meaning: From Philosophy to Literature 1 **Monday 26th of January, Pavilion Parade,** **16.30-19.00**

In Critchley's second book Very Little...Almost Nothing we begin to link the different strands of his developing thought. He insists that philosophy must understand the significance of death or finitude, and that this requires an exploration of the place of nihilism in philosophy. Critchley reads Nietzsche and Heidegger before considering Blanchot, Levinas, Cavell and Beckett. This critical reading of their accounts of finitude culminates in a rethinking of the relationship between philosophy and literature. Critchley asks if literature opens us toward the possibility of addressing religious disappointment without seeking solace in new forms of meaning. These themes recur throughout Critchley's *oeuvre*. In this first session we critically address Critchley's reading of Nietzsche, Heidegger and Blanchot.

Critchley, Simon (1997) Very Little...Almost Nothing, pp. 1-85.

Session 3: Nihilism and Meaning: From Philosophy to Literature 2 **Monday 9th of February, Pavilion Parade,** **16.30 – 19.00**

In this session we complete the reading of Very Little, Almost Nothing with a critical reading of Critchley on Cavell and Beckett.

Critchley, Simon (1997) Very Little...Almost Nothing, pp. 86 – 181

Session 4: Infinitely Demanding 1: Demanding Approval and Ethical Subjectivity **Monday 23rd of February, Pavilion Parade,** **16.30-19.00**

In the next two sessions we engage in a close reading of one of Critchley's key text, Infinitely Demanding. This week we explore his ethics, in particular the concepts of approval, (infinite) demand and ethical subjectivity.

Critchley, Simon (2007) Ininitely Demanding, London, Verso, pp.1-69.

Session 5: Ininitely Demanding:
Monday 9th of March, Pavilion Parade
16.30-19.00,

This week we analyse Critchley's account of sublimation and his political theory. He recognises that ethical overload may result in a subject which masochistically punishes itself, with potentially tragic consequences. In contrast Critchley defends the minimal sublimation of humour, as one way to address the division of the ethical subject. He concludes by defending ethics as a form of anarchic meta-politics, developing an understanding of protest congruent with recent forms of political activism.

Critchley, Simon (2007) Ininitely Demanding, London, Verso, pp. 70-150

Session 6: Faith of the Faithless 1
Monday 23rd of March, Pavilion Parade
16.30 - 19.00

In the next two weeks we read Critchley's Faith of the Faithless. Published in 2012 Critchley revisits themes that have concerned his work for over 20 years – faith, ethics, anarchist politics and commitment – but in this case through the relationship between politics, religion and violence. In sustained readings of among others Rousseau, Schmitt, St Paul and Zizek he argues that faith is especially important for those who do not believe in any transcendent order. Faith is refigured in terms of the infinite demand to act in the face of weakness, or what he terms the powerless power of conscience.

This week we critically assess Critchley's accounts of citizenship in light of Rousseau's immanent conception of legitimacy, and his reworking of the concept of original sin through readings of Schmitt and Gray.

Critchley, Simon (2012) Faith of the Faithless, London, Verso: pp. 1-154

Session 7: Faith of the Faithless 2
Monday 20th of April, Pavilion Parade
16.30 - 19.00

This week we complete the reading of Faith of the Faithless. First we analyse Critchley's critical engagement with the recent resurgence of interest in St Paul, in particular his rereading of Heidegger on St Paul. This allows him to argue against contemporary crypto-Marcion readings of St Paul (in particular those of Badiou and Agamben) while suggesting a new reading of Heidegger's account of authenticity in terms of impotence. Last, we revisit with Critchley his sometimes heated engagement with Zizek in particular on the question of violence. Here Critchley reads Benjamin, Butler and Levinas emphasising the possibility of a non-violent violence, and the importance of a politics at a distance from the state.

Critchley, Simon (2012) Faith of the Faithless, London, Verso: pp.155-153.

Session 8: Doubt, Knowledge and Action
Monday 27th of April, Pavilion Parade,
16.30-19.00

In the next two weeks we turn to Critchley and Webster's engagement with and reinterpretation of Hamlet. The authors engage with Hamlet not through literary criticism, but rather through interpretations of the way in which Nietzsche, Benjamin, Hegel, Freud, Lacan and others read Hamlet. Many of the themes already addressed recur here: doubt and faith, conscience and weakness, knowledge and action. Over the next two weeks we will take what the authors term as their rash text, a book about love, as much as anything else. We will use the reading of this text as a chance to reflect on our reading over the past months, and as an opportunity to think through the difficult relations between philosophy, ethics, love and art.

Critchley, Simon and (2013) The Hamlet Doctrine: Knowing too Much: Doing Nothing, London, Verso, pp. 3-114.

Session 9: Doubt, Knowledge and Action
Monday 11th of May, Pavilion Parade
16.30 - 19.00

Critchley, Simon and (2013) The Hamlet Doctrine: Knowing too Much: Doing Nothing, London, Verso, pp. 115-237.

Session 10: Memory Theatre: The past in the present
Monday 18th of May, 10.00 - 17.00

We conclude this reading course with a day-long review of the key arguments developed by Critchley, presentations by participants on questions they wish to explore with Critchley, and a discussion of his most recent work, a foray into fiction, Memory Theatre. We will relate the novel, both in terms of form and content, to the key philosophical, political and aesthetic questions explored in the past months.

Critchley, Simon (2014) Memory Theatre, Fitzcarraldo.

Wednesday 22nd May: Public Lecture Professor Simon Critchley
Old Courtroom

Thursday 23rd and Friday 24th of May
Workshop with Professor Simon Critchley, New School
GRAND PARADE, UNIVERSITY OF BRIGHTON