



The European Graduate School EST. 1994

Seminar with Professor Mladen Dolar (4.5 ECTS credits)
Division of Philosophy, Art and Critical Thought
June Session/June 10–16 2019

Seven deadly sins: On avarice

The course will take as the starting point the tradition of 'seven deadly sins' and raise some questions about the nature of sin, transgression, prohibited enjoyment etc. and the possible modern relevance of an antiquated notion. It will propose a psychoanalytic take on the question of sin as the inner vagary of human desire. But the main red thread of the course will be the sin of avarice and pursuing this thread it will take up a number of literary and theoretical texts. Avarice was always considered to be the major sin, since time immemorial, way before Christianity, but also to be something dangerously close to the very nature of human desire, the innermost capacity of its perversion. Shall one keep and hoard for oneself, or shall one give and share with others? Such is a very elementary choice which forms the basis of all societies. The course will pursue the evolvment of this elementary dilemma from pre-modern times to the development of modern and 'post-modern' capitalism. It will scrutinize the cultural history of the figure of avarice through the paramount cases reaching from Plautus's *Aulularia* in Roman times to Molière's *Harpagon* at the emergence of modernity, Balzac's *Gobseck* at the time of prevailing capitalism and Dickens's *Scrooge*, 'the last miser'. It will try to analyze the evolution of avarice against the backdrop of the rise and deployment of capitalism from the medieval times on, and in particular explore Marx's take on capitalism as the system of universalized avarice. It will further examine the close and fatal connection between avarice and the figure of the Jew, such as it emerged particularly with modernity in close connection with the rise of capitalism as its flip-side, giving rise to 'structural' anti-Semitism. A considerable amount of time will be devoted to a close reading of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* as the pivotal text of modernity, staging the opposition between avarice/usury vs. charity. The red thread will be pursued up to Joyce's *Ulysses* and to Freud's relation to Judaism, which is linked with the very emergence of psychoanalysis. Finally it will explore the contemporary embodiments of avarice linked to the figure of the consumer and the logic of consumerist society as the society of generalized avarice, presenting itself as its opposite, finishing with a consideration of debt and the austerity measures after the 2008 crisis. – Despite the fact

that the problem of avarice sounds antiquated, old-fashioned and obsolete, it actually points to a knot, tying together economy and desire, which may well stand at the core of our contemporary predicament.

Provisional reading list:

Plautus, *Aulularia*

Molière, *The Miser*

Balzac, "Gobseck"

Dickens, *The Christmas Carrol*

Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*

Marx, "Paris Manuscripts", some sections of *The Capital*

Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*

Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*

- "Character and Anal Eroticism"

Weber, *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*

Lazzarato, *The Making of the Indebted Man*