**Psychoanalysis and the Interpretation of Culture**

Professor Kornbluh English 585 Spring 2024 CRN 47425 BSB 115

Office Hours Tuesdays 1pm-2pm; Colloquium Fridays 2pm-3pm; and by appointment

The present omnicrisis manifests at the personal scale in abject psychic misery: depression, anxiety, fascistic rage, narcissist wound, and deaths of despair. Its extent is prompting what many have chronicled as a “renaissance” of psychoanalysis in clinical therapy. Is there any attendant change in the psychoanalytic valence of contemporary cultural production? What are the contemporary aesthetic repertoires of lack, anxiety, and enjoyment? Do 21st century aesthetics demand psychoanalytic interpretation? How is psychoanalytic cultural criticism advancing? What critical approaches can explain our current intolerance for mediation? What critical approaches can amplify the marginal mediums for joy, pleasure, and the desire called utopia? Why might scholars of modern aesthetics need to engage psychoanalytic concepts, methods, and insights? To explore these questions, this course juxtaposes classic works of psychoanalytic theory and highlights of psychoanalytic cultural criticism with contemporary aesthetic objects and emergent popular critical approaches. We will try to formulate psychoanalytic contributions to the critique of omnicrisis, and to practice cultural criticism that metabolizes psychoanalytic theory dynamically.

**Requirements**

* active seminar participation: careful reading, thoughtful contribution to discussion
* discussion facilitation, one session
* discussion wrap-up, one session (informal summation of that day’s discussion)
* seminar paper

**Guidelines**

**Readings and Discussion Preparation:** This is an intensive seminar, with a heavy reading load of complex texts. We will approach the seminar space as a laboratory for experimenting with collective reading and discovering as much as we can about psychoanalytic approaches to cultural criticism. Seminar sessions will often commence by asking every student to indicate ideas or forms or phenomena in the readings that call for unpacking, and to supply page numbers where possible. Discussion participation is key to a strong seminar and an important basis for your evaluation.

**Discussion Facilitation:** Lead a chunk of discussion time in a given session. Take pedagogical liberties as far as activities, discussion plan, etc, but be sure to include at least 3 of the days text and at least these 3 steps: First step: substantive paraphrase aimed at educing the value of the critical arguments or the ideas in the creative works. Second step: highlight at least 1 passage of interest / vexation for further unpacking. Third step: pose 3 questions for discussion pertaining to theoretical questions in the course, aesthetic examples in the course, or other avenues of inquiry that strike you.

**Discussion Wrap-up:** At the end of a seminar session, spend 5 minutes extemporaneously reviewing what emerged as key themes during that session’s discussion. No advance preparation is necessary; simply attend to the flow of that session’s conversation and select a few central points for recapitulation and carry-over to the next discussion.

**Seminar Paper**: 12-15 pageessays should respond to and elaborate the theoretical issues raised by the seminar, and will most likely do so by way of readings of cultural objects not on our syllabus (see, for starters, the Optional Objects list). Papers should reflect / incorporate research conducted using the MLA database.

**Required Texts for Purchase:**

Joan Copjec, Read My Desire

Peter Gay, The Freud Reader

Jacques Lacan, The Seminar Book 11

Lydia Kiesling, Mobility

**Additional Required Texts available in our dropbox:**

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/nl7xlc0qiib77jws77q23/h?rlkey=0gpizwhg1mlu68yinrcmd0oro&dl=0>

**Reading Schedule**

**PART ONE: NOW**

**Week 1 (9 JAN)**

**What is Psychoanalysis and Why Is It Now**

Parapraxis, “A Tragedy of Errors, A Comedy of Terrors”

Joseph Bernstein, “Not Your Daddy’s Freud”

Jamieson Webster, “Teenagers Are Telling Us That Something Is Wrong With America”

Hannah Zeavin, “What’s Behind The Freud Resurgence?”

Freud Museum, “What is Psychoanalysis: Is It Weird?” (8 mins video)

Alenka Zupančič, “Why Psychoanalysis”

Byung Chul Han, *Psychopolitics*

optional: Kornbluh, “Imaginary”

**Week 2 (16 JAN)**

**Psychoanalytic Cultural Criticism Now**

Nathan Gorelick, “Psychoanalysis At The End of the World”

Rithika Ramamurthy, “The Climate Anxiety Novel”

Lily Scherlis, “Boundary Issues”

Mitch Therieau, “Vibe, Mood, Energy”

Russell Sbriglia, “Enjoy Your Trump”

Eugenia Brinkema, *Forms of the Affects*: “Ten Points to Begin”;“Film Theory’s Absent Center”

Todd McGowan, *Enjoying What We Don’t Have*: “The Economics of the Drive”

Mari Ruti, *A World of Fragile Things* intro

Eric Santner, *Untying Things* “On Some Causes For Excitement”

**PART TWO: FOUNDATIONS**

**Week 3 (23 JAN)**

**Freud**

Sigmund Freud

“The Wolf Man” Reader 400-428

“The Sexual Aberrations” Reader 240-258

*Interpretation of Dreams* (excerpt) Reader 129-171

**Week 4 (30 JAN)**

**still Freud**

Freud

*The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (excerpt: Chapter 1; Chapter 5 53-67)

“The Unconscious” Reader 572-583

“The Uncanny”

*Civilization and Its Discontents* (excerpt) Reader 722-771

**Week 5 (6 FEB)**

**Lacan**

Bruce Fink, *The Lacanian Subject* (1-34)

Jacques Lacan

Seminar 11 “The Unconscious and Repetition” (17-53)

Joan Copjec, *Read My Desire* intro

Fredric Jameson, Lacan and the Dialectic

**Week 6 (13 FEB)**

**Sex**

Copjec, “Sex and The Euthanasia of Reason;” “The Sexual Compact”

Lee Edelman and Lauren Berlant, “Sex Without Optimism”

Avgi Saketopoulou, “To Suffer Pleasure”

Patricia Gherovici, *Psychoanalysis, Gender, and Sexuality: From Feminism to Trans* intro

Christopher Breu, *In Defense of Sex* intro

**PART THREE: INTERPRETING CULTURE**

**Week 7 (20 FEB)**

**das unbehagen**

Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, “The Culture Industry”

Herbert Marcuse, “The Dialectic of Civilization”

Jameson, “Pleasure: A Political Issue”

Slavoj Žižek, “How Did Marx Invent The Symptom?”

Mladen Dolar, **“**Of Drives and Culture”

Berlant, “Affect in the Present”

**Week 8 (27 FEB)**

**aesthetics**

Freud, “The Theme of the Three Caskets” Reader 514-521

Edgar Allan Poe, “The Purloined Letter”

Lacan, Seminar on The Purloined Letter

Shoshana Felman, “To Open The Question”

Eve Sedgwick, *Between Men* intro

Tracy McNulty, “Enabling Constraints”

**Week 9 (5 MAR)**

**still aesthetics**

Mary Ann Doane, “Sublimation and the Psychoanalysis of the Aesthetic”

Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”

Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* intro

Copjec, “Imagine There’s No Woman”; “Narcissism, Approached Obliquely”

Berlant, “Slow Death”

Lauren Michelle Jackson, “The Invention of the Male Gaze”

**PART FOUR: FANTASY AND THE POLITICAL**

**Week 10 (12 MAR)**

**surplus**

Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* (excerpt tucker 65-80ish)

“The Labor Process, Or, The Production of Use Values”

“Productive and Unproductive Labor”

Yahya Madra and Ceren Ozselcuk, “Economy/Oikonomia”

Jameson, “Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan”

Kiarina Kordela, “Political Metaphysics: God in Global Capitalism”

Samo Tomsic, “Labor/Work”

Sarah Brouillette, “Creative Labor”

**SPRING BREAK (18 MAR)**

**Week 11 (26 MAR)**

**cultural difference**

Franz Fanon, “Colonial War and Mental Disorders”

Edward Said, “Freud and the Non European”

Hortense Spillers, “All The Things You Could Be By Now”

Kenneth Reinhard, “Toward a Political Theology of The Neighbor”

Sheldon George, “The Lacanian Subject of Race”

David Marriott, “Slave and Signifier”

**Week 12 (2 APR)**

**utopia**

Freud, “Creative Writers and Daydreaming” Reader 436-442

Oscar Wilde, “The Soul of Man Under Socialism” excerpt

Robin D.G. Kelley, “Freedom Dreams”

Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future* (excerpt)

ME OBrien, *Family Abolition* “Toward the Commune”

Seth Brodsky, “Drive: Stay High”

**PART FIVE: MEDIA**

**Week 13 (9 APR)**

**mediatic**

Jodi Dean, “Blog Settings”

Richard Seymour, *The Twittering Machine* excerpt

Clint Burnham, “Does the Internet Have An Unconscious?”

Brouillette, “Wattpad, Platform Capitalism, and the Feminization of Publishing Work”

Jacob Johanssen, “For The Moment I Am Not F\*cking, I Am Tweeting”

Marshall Armintor, “Amazon Web Services, The Lacanian Unconscious, and Digital

Life”

Joshua Gunn, “The Psychoses of Speed”

**Week 14 (16 APR)**

**Novel**

Lydia Kiesling, *Mobility*

Brooks, “Freud’s Masterplots”

Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* intro excerpt

**Week 15 (23 APR)**

**Film**

Jordan Peele, *Get Out*

McGowan, *Psychoanalytic Film Theory* (intro and chapter one); “The Singularity of the

Cinematic Object”

Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* “Something To Be Scared Of”

**Optional Objects**

Succession

The Americans

Mare of Easttown

BlackHat

Lost in Translation

This Is Where I Leave You

Adventureland

Inside Man

Eternal Sunshine

Decision To Leave

Everybody Knows

Submergence

Rust and Bone

About Elly

Certified Copy

Moonlight

Phantom Thread

Somebody Somewhere

Shrinking

Parasite

Tar

Transit

Babylon Berlin

Wandavision

The Leftovers

Colleen Hoover

Brandon Sanderson

Jordan Peterson

Black Swan

The Last of Us

In the Dream House

Annihilation

Beau is Afraid

Stranger Things

Kimi

Mad Men

Bojack Horseman

Slave Play

Denis Chocolat