Psychoanalysis and Society

**Course code:** PSY365

**Spring 2025**

**Monday 15:30-18:15**

**Instructor:** Dr. Jevgenija Konoreva

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**Consultation hours:** by appointment

# Course Description

What distinguishes psychoanalysis is its indeterminate status: for some, it is a quackery, a caprice of the elites; for others – an impenetrable theory; for still others – the only adequate way of thinking about the world. How can it be possible that even a hundred years after Freud’s intervention, psychoanalysis manages to evade easy solutions and provoke such a wide range of responses in society? This course aims to follow the main strategies of integrating psychoanalysis into a wider intellectual debate, starting with its historical relations with hysteria as its initial background and ending up with its current theoretical engagement in the activist discourse. Jacques Lacan’s theory is taken as the most significant heir of Freudian psychoanalysis. Therefore, the course is focused on unpacking the Freudian conceptual apparatus as it was developed within Lacan’s structuralist approach. Students are encouraged to analyze their own intellectual, political, or creative contributions and to develop alternative angles productive for self-analysis. The course textbook, films, and academic and clinical material will be used for study and research.

# Reading Material

## Required Materials

* Some reading material would be available in the Course reader. Additional videos and other visual references would be collected in a separate youtube playlist with open access. Students are not assumed to have much prior knowledge or contact with psychoanalysis before the course starts. However, some familiarity is an advantage, even if this means just researching a little before the start of the semester. As the course starts, readings and films will be provided by the instructor each week; readings should be done prior to the class in question.
* List of required articles
* Sigmund Freud: Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria (1905)
* Sigmund Freud: The Interpretation of Dreams, chapter VI “The Dream-Work” (1900)
* Slavoj Žižek: How to Read Lacan (2006)
* Slavoj Žižek: The Sublime Object of Ideology (1989)
* Jacques Lacan: The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious, or Reason Since Freud (1957)
* Jacques Lacan: The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis (1953)
* Alexander Smulansky: What Is Contemporary Psychoanalysis? (2019)

## Recommended Materials

* Mladen Dolar: Of Drives and Culture (2017)
* Judith Butler. Ernesto Laclau and Slavoj Žižek: Contingency, Hegemony, Universality; Dialogues of the Left (2000)
* Judith Butler: The Psychic Life of Power (1997)
* Alexander Smulansky: The Real – What’s Wrong with It? (2016)

# Class organization

Each lesson is divided into two sections: in the first section students are introduced to theoretical material based on the assigned topic and supported by the assigned readings; the students are encouraged to formulate their questions when they read at home. The second section is devoted to a discussion supported by additional learning materials. Each student will make a presentation on the topic of their choice (30-40 min), approved beforehand by the instructor. The class will actively participate in the discussion, demonstrating engagement in the studied topic and practicing their oral skills in combination with analytic thinking. Students should provide evidence of their ability to integrate knowledge acquired from the readings and defend or challenge their own thinking strategies.

# Course Schedule

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| **Date** | **Class Agenda** |
| Session 1Feb. 32025 | **Topic:** Introduction to psychoanalysis**Description:** Psychoanalysis was introduced by Sigmund Freud more than a century ago and since then it has undergone a series of transformations and stagnations. We’ll contour the main lines of this historical development, starting with its birth at Freud’s times and moving forward to today’s conjuncture.**Reading:** Freud S. *Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria*,pp 1-30 (1905), Althusser L. *Freud and Lacan* (1969), Lacan J. *The Seminar, Book 2*. *The Ego in Freud’s Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis 1954-55* (chapters 1-3)**Assignments/deadlines:** students are encouraged to talk about their knowledge/experience of psychoanalysis and their own expectations of the course |
| Session 2Feb. 102025 | **Topic:** Freud and Dora**Description:** Hysteria as the historical site where analysis was born. The relations between psychoanalysis and the figure of the hysteric are fundamental for the understanding of psychoanalysis as a discipline. Freud’s case of Dora is a canonical psychoanalytic theoretical and clinical evidence; we’ll examine its main conceptual framework and its engagement into feminist debates.**Reading:** Freud S*. Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria*, pp. 30-123 (1905), Kahane C. eds. *In Dora’s Case* (1985), Benvenuto S. *Dora Flees: Is There Anything Left to Say About Hysterics?* (2005),**Assignments/deadlines:** 1 presentation on the topic, discussion about hysteria as a historical, nosological or sociopolitical phenomenon, its today’s variations.  |
| Session 3Feb. 172025 | **Topic:** The desire **Description:** The major Freudian discovery is the dimension of unconscious desire: something that is repressed but still insists on its presence in the form of various symptomatic formations. The seminar will introduce the students to the psychoanalytic understanding of this concept. **Reading:** Freud S.: *The Interpretation of Dreams*, chapter VI “The Dream-Work” (1900), Zupančič A.: *Why psychoanalysis*? (2008)**Assignments/deadlines:** 1 presentation on the topic, discussion about neurosis as a clinical and cultural phenomenon |
| Session 4Feb. 242025 | **Topic:** The signifier**Description:** This session will be devoted to studying basis linguistic units as they were introduced by structural linguistics and further developed in formalist approach. We’ll start talking about structuralism in general and its connection with psychoanalysis.**Reading:** de Saussure F. *The Course of General Linguistics*, pp. 65-79 (1916), Jakobson R. *Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbance* (1956)**Assignments/deadlines:** 1 presentation on the topic, discussion about the meaning of speech and studying language |
| Session 5Mar. 32025 | **Topic:** The desire and the signifier: what it means to be a speaking animal**Description:** It was already Freud who discovered a connection between speech and psyche, yet until Lacan’s turn to linguistics some of Freud’s innovations were not properly understood. This seminar will be devoted to the reasons and theoretical instruments of Lacan’s return to Freud and to the psychoanalytic concept of the drive.**Reading:** Lacan, J*. The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious, or Reason Since Freud* (1957), Dolar M.: *Of Drives and Culture* (2017)**Assignments/deadlines:** 1 presentation on the topic, discussion about nature and culture |
| Session 6Mar. 102025 | **Topic:** Human sexuality**Description:** Starting with Freud and his scandalous discoveries psychoanalysis insists on a fundamental significance of sexuality not only as a biological dimension but as an integral part of psyche’s formation, whereas the border between the two is not easily articulated. We’ll talk about the history of studying sexuality and the main psychoanalytic concepts employed here. **Reading:** Lacan J. *The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis* (1953), Freud S. *Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-Year-Old Boy* (1909)**Assignments/deadlines:** 1 presentation on the topic, discussion about sexuality, gender |
| Session 7Mar. 172025 | **Topic:** Psychoanalysis and contemporary studies of sexuality**Description:** Following the trajectory of the previous session we’ll discuss the tradition of engaging psychoanalysis as a theoretical tool in various disciplines whose object of research is sexuality: gender studies, queer studies**Reading:** Butler J. *Gender Trouble* (1990), Deleuze G. and Guattari F. *Anti-Oedipus*, pp. 51-75 (2010)**Assignments/deadlines:** 1 presentation on the topic, discussion about gender, sexuality, and ideology; midterm paper. |
| March 24 | **Mid-term break** |
| Session 8Mar. 312025 | **Topic:** Woman a ‘dark continent’**Description:** The relations between feminism and psychoanalysis has never been easy: sometimes psychoanalysis is blamed for misogyny and chauvinism, sometimes it is used as the main theoretical resource to support the feminist agenda. The seminar will outline how the feminine is conceptualized within the psychoanalytic framework and what effect it produces when we talk about women elsewhere. **Reading:** Kristeva J. *Powers of Horror*, pp. 1-31 (1980), Mitchell J., interview. “Psychoanalysis and Feminism: Then and now” (2015), Smulansky A. *The Child and the Woman’s Enjoyment* (2012)**Assignments/deadlines:** 1 presentation on the topic, discussion about the feminine and feminism |
| Session 9Apr. 72025 | **Topic:** Lacan’s theory of sexuation**Description:** Lacan’s reformulation of sexual difference in terms of its relation with the concept of the signifier was a major breakthrough in our strategies of thinking sex. The students will be introduced into Lacan’s differentiation, demonstrating its innovative character along with its limitations.**Reading:** Lacan J. *The Seminar. Book XX “Encore”, On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge*, 1972-73, Chapters V-VI.**Assignments/deadlines:** 1 presentation on the topic, discussion about the limits of sexuality |
| Session 10Apr. 142025 | **Topic:** Recent development of the theory of sexuation vs activism**Description:** During the last sessions it was demonstrated that sexuality is being studied from different angles by various disciplines, yet what is not so often brought up is the very interest to the idea of sexuality: why is it such a burning issue for the contemporary subject? and where does most of the attempts to conceptualize it fail? We’ll examine further development of Lacan’s theory of sexuation.**Reading:** Smulansky A. *Queer Studies and Phallic Function* (2016), Dean T. *Hatred of Sex*. Introduction (2022)**Assignments/deadlines:** 1 presentation on the topic, discussion about activism vs. conservatism |
| Session 11Apr. 282025 | **Topic:** Lacan’s *jouissance* as a historical operator**Description:** The concept of enjoyment or *jouissance* is widely appropriated across the academic discourse in the attempt to answer the question: how contemporary subjectivity is shaped and under what conditions it could be led to a more harmonious existence. The seminar will place *jouissance* within Lacanian conceptual apparatus. **Reading:** Lacan J. *The Seminar. Book XX “Encore”, On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge, 1972-73*, Chapter II.**Assignments/deadlines:** 1 presentation on the topic, discussion about enjoyment, activism vs. conservatism |
| Session 12May 52025 | **Topic:** Michel Foucault’s ‘pleasure practices’ and *jouissance***Description:** The concept of *pleasure practices* introduced by Foucault in his later work is presented as a disregarded alternative for practicing the sexual in a more profound way than it is suggested by the current discourse. The seminar traces down its possible theoretical intersection with Lacan’s conceptualization of *jouissance*.**Reading:** Foucault M. *The Gay Science* (2011); *Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity* (1994)**Assignments/deadlines:** 1 presentation on the topic, discussion about enjoyment, activism, gender |
| Session 13May 122025 | **Topic:** The pleasure of referring to psychoanalysis**Description:** From Wilhelm Reich, who cherished the idea of bringing psychoanalysis into masses, to Ian Parker, who believes in a revolutionary potential of this theory, psychoanalysis is regarded as an ally in the mission of liberating the individual. The seminar will introduce the students to the history of freudomarxism in order to challenge this strategy.**Reading:** McGowan T. *The Ethics of the Death Drive*, Lacan J. *The Seminar Book XVII. The Other Side of Psychoanalysis.* Chapter XII**Assignments/deadlines:** 1 presentation on the topic, discussion about Marxism, Neoliberalism. |
| Session 14May 192025 | **Topic:** Conclusions and responses**Description:** The final session will sum up the previous work, highlighting new perspectives for Freudo-lacanian psychoanalysis that are being developed right now in various parts of the Globe along with the most recent themes that have been brought up: the question of psychoanalytic community and the future fate of the discipline. **Reading:** Smulansky A. *Clinique in the Hole* (2024) **Assignments/deadlines:** final exam in the form of an in-class essay; final paper.  |

# Course Requirements and Assessment (with estimated workloads)

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| **Assignment** | **Workload (hours)** | **Weight in Final Grade** | **Evaluated Course Specific Learning Outcomes** |
|  |  | % |  |
| Presentation and participation | 60 | 30% | The students are expected to choose the topic of their interest (confirm it with the instructor) and prepare an interesting and critically engaged presentation (30 min). Participation in class discussion allows students to engage the material they learn into their dynamic intellectual assets. |
| Midterm Paper | 20 | 20% | The students make an autonomous research, learning to work with resources, learning and improving their writing and argumentative skills.  |
| Final Exam | 30 | 20% | The students should be able to provide an unprepared in advance response to the chosen topic.  |
| Final Paper | 40 | 30% | This is a thorough analytic task, where the students present their gained academic skills of research and writing. They are encouraged to consult the instructor regarding the content, the resources, or other formalities.  |
| **TOTAL** | **150** | **100%** |  |

# Detailed description of the assignments

## Assignment 1:

**Assessment breakdown**

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| **Assessed area** | **Percentage** |
| Over the semester, 1 formal presentation is required by each student on a topic of their choice: 30 min long. The topic should be discussed and approved by the instructor at the beginning of the course. Students should also be prepared to facilitate class discussion of their presentations, and pre-prepare questions to the class on the topic for this purpose. The aim is to encourage class debate on these topics allowing students to apply knowledge learned during class to a specific discussion. All students, not just the presenter, are expected to participate.  | 30% of the total mark |

## Assignment 2:

**Assessment breakdown**

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| --- | --- |
| **Assessed area** | **Percentage** |
| There will be one final exam in the form of an in-class essay. On the essays students should show a high level of spontaneous creativity, comprehension of the area involved and good analytical abilities. They are expected to show a good grasp of the theoretical issues and make a good case to support their argument.  | 20% of the total mark |
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| A midterm paper, 8 pages (double-line spacing), is due week 7, on a topic of the student’s choice approved by the instructor. It must show good abilities of analysis, synthesis and application of theory to a relevant social-political topic. It should be well researched and referenced and include a bibliography. The student is expected to take an independent position and be able to defend their point of view.  | 20% of the total mark |
|  |  |
| A final paper, 12 pages (double-line spacing), is due week 14, on a topic of the student’s choice approved by the instructor. It must show good abilities of analysis, synthesis and application of theory to a relevant social-political topic. It should be well researched and referenced and include a bibliography. The student is expected to take an independent position and be able to defend their point of view.  | 30% of the total mark |