**Screening Desire, Projecting Anxiety:**

**The Psychoanalysis of Film**

**Course code:** PSY 366 / 566

**Term and year:** Summer 2025

**Day and time:** 17:30-21:15

**Instructor:** Dr Joseph Dodds

**Instructor contact:** [joseph.dodds@aauni.edu](mailto:joseph.dodds@aauni.edu)

**Consultation hours:** by appointment

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Credits US/ECTS** | 3/6 | **Level** | Intermediate |
| **Length** | 15 weeks | **Pre-requisite** | Introduction to Psychology |
| **Contact hours** | 42 hours | **Course type** | HSC, PS, JC Elective  HUM Elective |

# Course Description

Everyone has an experience of film, a film you love or hate, a film which makes you feel good, bad, or ugly. A film to make you laugh, cry or fall in or out of love. A film that makes you think. This course studies the psychology of cinema from a psychoanalytic perspective and in addition explores what we can learn about the mind, culture and society through the movies.

# Student Learning Outcomes

# Upon completion of this course, students should be able to demonstrate:

* Ability to apply definitions and main concepts of different psychoanalytic schools to explain and interpret different aspects of film
* Understanding and application of Cinema Therapy
* Analysis, synthesis and evaluation of readings through active class participation
* Their ability to compare and contrast different psychoanalytical theories, outline the limits and
* controversies individual theories imply when describing the same phenomena
* In-depth familiarity with 2 psychoanalytic theories of their choice in presentation and
* paper form and their ability to apply them in interpretation of a film phenomena of choice
* Ability to defend their individual evaluation of film and critically review fellow students' positions
* Active pursuit of in-depth discussions in seminars, ability to lead a class debate
* Attainment of interpretive perspectives applicable not just to the realm of film but also
* phenomena such as art, culture, politics, gender, psychology, psychopathology and the media.

# Reading Material

## Required Materials

* Course materials will be available via NEO, and [www.psychoanalysis.cz](http://www.psychoanalysis.cz) , and in the *Psychoanalysis and Film Reader*. All links required will be posted to NEO.

# Teaching methodology

Lecture, class discussion, group work, presentations, etc.

# Course Schedule

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Date** | **Class Agenda** |
| Pre-Course Reading | **Reading:** Glen Gabbard: The Psychoanalyst at the Movies. Harry Trossman: Towards a Psychoanalytic Iconography.  **Assignments/deadlines:** Choose a favourite film and attempt to use 2 of the approaches described in the Gabbard and Trossman readings. Write approximately 2/3 of a page and bring it to first class for class discussion. |
| June 3 | **Topic:** Introduction to psychoanalysis and film: Luis Brunel’s *Un Chien Andalou*  **Description:** Introducing the course and the field.  **Reading:** Andrew Webber: Cut and Laced – Traumatism and Fetishism in Luis Brunel’s Un Chien Andalou. Luke Hockley: Cinematic Projections – The Analytical Psychology of C.G. Jung and film theory. Andreas Hamburger (2024): Film Psychoanalysis: Relational Approaches to Film Interpretation – Freud in Wonderland, and Un Chien Andalou interpretation.  **Assignments/deadlines:** Consider the link between dreams, film and life. |
| June 4 | **Topic:** Film and the lifespan and ‘nothing less than a whole life’. Bergman’s *Wild Strawberries*.  **Description:** Dreams, film, aging.  **Reading:** Elizabeth Cowie: The cinematic dream-work of Ingmar Bergman’s  Wild Strawberries. Erik Erikson: A Life History: Revisitation and  Reinvolvement.  **Assignments/deadlines:** Prepare for discussion. Can film really capture a whole life? What are your thoughts about aging and mortality? |
| June 5 | **Topic:** Growing Up in Celluloid: Guillermo del Toro's *Pan's Labyrinth*  **Description:** Children’s movies, children in movies.  **Reading:** Harry Herbert Stein: A Family Romance Fantasy in ‘Pan’s  Labyrinth’. Ira Konigsberg (2003) Children Watching Movies. Plus one  optional reading from the website (Star Wars, Harry Potter, Frodo’s Journey, etc.)  **Assignments/deadlines:** Prepare for class discussion based on the readings and the selected optional readings. Think about your own favourite childhood film and what it meant for you. |
| June 9 | **Topic:** The Uncanny World of Jan Svankmajer  **Description:** Introducing the Czech Surrealist animator and filmmaker.  **Reading:** Sigmund Freud: The uncanny. Helen Robinson: Two short films by Jan Svankmajer.  Nicola Glover: Psychoanalytic Aesthetics chapters 2 and 3.  **Assignments/deadlines:** Consider your own experience of ‘uncanniness’. What is it? How does it feel? What other films that you know of might fit this theme? Or from your own life? |
| June 10 | **Topic:** Desire and Fantasy in Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo*.  **Description:** A look at Hitchcock, gender, and fantasy.  **Reading:** *Two* of the following readings:  A.Glen Gabbard - Vertigo: Female Objectification, Male Desire, and Object Loss.  B.Robert Samuels – Vertigo: Sexual Disorientation and the Engendering of the Real.  C.Emanuel Berman – Vertigo: Collapse of a Rescue Fantasy  **Assignments/deadlines:** What is it like to fall in love? What do we mean by gender? What is the relation between desire, control, fantasy and terror? What other questions does the film raise and how do you relate it to your own experience? |
| June 11  **Exam 1 in class** (30%). | **Topic:** The Double in Film: *Fight Club, The Student of Prague* and *The Dark Knight*. **Exam 1** (30%) (done in the morning in class).  **Description:** The theme of the double.  **Reading:** Wolff Bernstein: Fight Club (plus response by Michael Sinason)  Herbert Stein: Twins of ‘The Dark Knight’.  **Assignments/deadlines:** Superhero films are one of the most popular  genre’s out there. Why do we enjoy such films? Can they be considered as  ‘serious’ films for analysis? What’s your favourite film and character, and  why? |
| June 12 | **Topic:** Psychotic Fragmentation and Twinship in David Cronenberg's *Spider*  and *Dead Ringers.* Research proposal due.  **Description:** Exploring the psychotic mind.  **Reading:** Jonathan Sklar and Andrea Sabbadini: David Cronenberg’s Spider: Between Confusion and Fragmentation.  Plus ONE of the following readings on *Dead Ringers* to be assigned in class  A.Vogel Judy: Deadly Narcissism in Cronenberg's Dead Ringers  B.Corinee Oster: Dead Ringers: A case of psychosis in twins  C.Joaquin Canizares: The strange case of Dr Mantle and Dr Mantle: David Cronenberg’s Dead Ringers  **Assignments/deadlines:** What do we mean by madness? Is film a suitable medium to explore it? How well do you think the films, through both directing and acting, manage to capture important psychological themes? Can such films not only depict madness in the characters but evoke ‘mad’ feelings and states of mind in the spectator? |
| June 16 | **Topic:** Projecting Anxiety: The Paradox of Horror.  **Description:** A look at horror and anxiety in film.  **Reading:** TWO horror readings, one of readings A or B (assigned in class), and one of readings C-F (assigned in class):  A.Creed: Horror and the monstrous-feminine - An imaginary abjection  B.Dodds: The Monstrous Brain – A neuropsychoanalytic aesthetics of horror (first section).  C.Sabbadini: Watching Voyeurs: Michael Powell’s *Peeping Tom* plus Hamburger 2024 (Film Psychoanalysis) extract.  D.Hess: The Shining: all work and no play.  E.Torato: The final girl: a few thoughts on feminism and horror.  F.Brett Clarke: “Mourning and Melancholia” Meets The Babadook: Emptiness and its Relation to Absence  **Assignments/deadlines:** What do you find scary (now, and when you  were a child)? Prepare for class discussion on all things horror. Prepare for  final paper and presentations. |
| June 17 | **Topic:** Sci-Fi: *Blade Runner* and The *Matrix Trilogy*.  **Description:** A look at sci-fi.  **Reading:** Read *two* of the following (assigned in class):  A. Duncan Cartwright: beta-mentality in the matrix trilogy.  B.William Fred: Blade Runner – An Interpretation.  C.Slavoj Zizek: Troubles with the Real - Lacan as a viewer of Alien.  D.Robert Young: Alien 3.  **Assignments/deadlines:** What’s your experience of the ‘other worlds’ of science fiction? Can sci-fi provide new perspectives on what it means to be human for our individual and social/political lives? |
| June 18 | **Topic:** The Lynchian Universe: *Mullholland Drive* and *Blue Velvet*. Presentations  **Description:** Entering the world of David Lynch.  **Reading:** Any *two* of the following:  A.Joseph Barbera and Henry Moller: Mulholland Drive: a self-psychology perspective.  B.Corina Vaida and Victor Wildman: Mulholland Drive.  C.Danielle Knafo and Henneth Feiner (2002) Film Review Essay: Blue Velvet David Lynch’s Primal Scene.  **Assignments/deadlines:** Discuss film and readings. |
| June 19 | **Topic: Exam 2** (30%) (done in the morning in class). **Student Presentations** on final paper. Review of course. |
| June 23 | **Final Paper due** |

# Course Requirements and Assessment (with estimated workloads)

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Assignment** | **Workload (hours)** | **Weight in Final Grade** | **Evaluated Course Specific Learning Outcomes** | **Evaluated Institutional Learning Outcomes\*** |
| Attendance and participation | 45 hours | 10% | Students are expected to join in and actively participate in class discussions and respond to other students presentations. This will include the overall participation as well as attendance. Students will make a presentation the class based on their project/final paper. If a students misses more than a third of the classes they will fail the course. | Participation and Presentation |
| Homework, readings and assignments. | 30 hours |  | Students are expected to keep up with the readings and prepare for the discussions. Assignments of this type are not directly assessed but help to develop and consolidate learning so that students are sufficiently prepared for the exams and assessed paper. | 1, 2, 3 |
| 1st Exam | 20 hours | 30.00% | The first exam will take place in class without notes or computers, and will cover the first half of the course and take the form of a choice of essay questions. Students should show a high level of 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. The exact question will be provided in advance, at the latest by the Friday before the exam (30% of the total mark.) | 1, 2, 3 |
| 2nd Exam | 20 hours | 30.00% | The second exam will take place in class without notes or computers, and will cover the second half of the course and take the form of assigned essay questions. Students should show a high level of 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. The exact question will be provided in advance, (30% of the total mark.) | 1, 2, 3 |
| Final Paper | 35 hours | 30.00% | A final paper, 2000-2500 words (double-line spacing), is due June 23, on a relevant topic (on psychoanalysis of film) of the student’s choice. It must incorporate at least two different major psychoanalytic approaches and show good abilities of analysis, synthesis and application of theory to a relevant topic on psychoanalysis and film. It should be well researched and referenced and include a bibliography (not included in the word count). The student is expected to take an independent position and be able to defend their point of view. They will also present their paper to the class in the last weeks of class (assigned individually). Students can do this paper on their own or with at most one other person. If they work with another they will present the paper together in class. (30% of the total mark.) |  |
| **TOTAL** | **150** | **100%** |  |  |

\*1 = Critical Thinking; 2 = Effective Communication; 3 = Effective and Responsible Action

# Detailed description of the assignments

## Assignment 1:

**Assessment breakdown**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Assessed area** | **Percentage** |
| Reading, analyzing and recording main ideas, problems and questions | 10% |
| Posing relevant questions on readings in class |  |
| Mindful presence and thoughtful involvement in class |  |
| Participation, presentation. |  |
| Doing readings and assignments. |  |

## Assignment 2:

**Assessment breakdown**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Assessed area** | **Percentage** |
| The two exam essays will cover two sections of the course and be done individually in the form of essay questions. | 60% (30% per exam) |
| Show a high level of comprehension of the area involved and good analytical abilities. |  |
| Demonstrate a good grasp of the theoretical issues |  |
| Make a good case to support their argument. |  |

## Assignment 3:

**Assessment breakdown**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Assessed area** | **Percentage** |
| Final paper on the students own independent research into psychoanalysis and film. To be done on their own or with one partner (not more). | 30% |
| Demonstrating knowledge of concepts and essential issues, in writing |  |
| Providing relevant discussion and examples |  |
| Writing well-documented and well-argued essay |  |
| Incorporate at least two different psychological approaches |  |
| Show good abilities of analysis, synthesis and application of theory to a relevant topic. |  |
| Scholarly researched, referencing, and bibliography. |  |
| Demonstrate ability to take an independent position and be able to defend their point of view |  |

# General Requirements and School Policies

## General requirements

All coursework is governed by AAU’s academic rules. Students are expected to be familiar with the academic rules in the Academic Codex and Student Handbook and to maintain the highest standards of honesty and academic integrity in their work. Please see the AAU intranet for a [summary of key policies](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1xoNETY9yqNMwNP-06wDzM2VmgMIOire-?usp=sharing) regarding coursework.

## Course specific requirements: AI

While the use AI is permissible as part of a student’s research of a topic (a more advanced form of google searching), the use of AI is forbidden for the actual writing of their final paper and presentation which must be done by the students themselves. Its use will result in a failure of the course.