

Center for Religion and Psychotherapy Chicago
Introduction to Social and Cultural Foundations (Year B)

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General Course Description

As instructors for this course, we aim to provide a space for students to question the role of social and cultural formations in our clinical work. From a psychoanalytic perspective, and from a number of angles, this course will provide a space for sustained reflection on the question:

What does it mean to work clinically with the effects of society and culture in the client/patient/analysand as a subject of the unconscious?

While this course will provide coordinates for various ways in which others have addressed similar and aligned questions, we should consider the answer(s) to this question as remaining to be discovered in our collective work and, if all goes well, elaborated in relationship to the unique desires and experiences of each successful course participant.

Furthermore, this course provides a space for participants (instructors and students, both) to elaborate and explore the implications of psychoanalysis as a potentially *decolonizing practice*. Psychoanalysis can stand in support of a human capacity to interrupt, to change, to revise, and to transform the norms and structures of society and culture, by helping the patient to inscribe that which is unconsciously significant into the sociocultural field. (As Patricia Gherovici has put it, “the unconscious is the last activist.”) A disciplinary clinical process that bases itself on maximizing social conformity, optimizing the subject by seducing him/her/them away from the symptoms that trouble them, or which does not support the subject in bringing his/her/their desires to bear in the social field does not deserve to be promoted, in our view. This is what “psychoanalysis as a decolonizing practice” aims at.

The focus for Year B of this course is to continue reflection on the major theme of “clinical religion,” with an emphasis on categories like race, gender, sexuality, and class. While social scientists

(and, indeed, some psychoanalysts -- Freud, at times, not least among them) have tended to view religion as a domain that enforces social conformity and provides cultural stability, we revise and resuscitate the term “clinical religion” to emphasize religion as a domain of significance for the inventive subject of the unconscious. As such, we associate “clinical religion” with what in the human and in the aesthetic has the capacity to disrupt, interrupt, and transform the social domain. We will consider examples of this both in our consideration of clinical cases and in our consideration of fictional accounts that might help us connect theoretical readings to human experience more broadly.

This course offers an unconventional approach to learning clinical work by bringing art reception and cultural criticism to the classroom to develop students’ cultural awareness. Since, with each new patient, clinicians must learn how to listen to and immerse themselves in a new discourse, the readings and films that we have selected and the clinical cases we might share propose similar challenges. Read the text with the curiosity and “beginner’s mind” with which you would listen to a patient and view the films in the same way, while being aware, at the same time, that the conditions for the creation of media like text and film differ markedly from the clinical setting. The same goes for the sharing of a clinical case, since those hearing the case are not in the room with the patient. Nevertheless, these media and forums have the capacity to transmit *something*.

Last, from its inception in the work of Sigmund Freud, psychoanalysis has benefitted from the insights of other disciplines like anthropology, history, sociology, and religious studies, among others. Later, linguistics, mathematics, and optics, as some examples, played a role in the teaching of the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. Instructors of this course believe that contemporary fields like postcolonial studies, trans studies, queer theory, black studies, etc., also have much to offer psychoanalysis and psychotherapy. We strive to integrate these fields into our inquiries, because we believe that clinical work would stand to lose much by ignoring them.

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Spring Quarter

Diagnosing the Spirit

Description

In Fall Quarter, 2021 we explored the topic of the split subject of society, culture, and religion, and we introduced Willy Apollon’s notion of the human spirit (as the capacity to introduce something beyond culture in the hallucination or the dream) as a result of a traumatic effraction.

Now, in Winter Quarter, 2022 we introduce the theme “diagnosing the spirit,” posing the question: what would constitute an ethical—or decolonial, if you like—position for the clinician with respect to the spirit? We propose dividing the work of the quarter into four parts. First, we will introduce the concept of spirit possession as a central category for psychoanalysis. Second, we will look at substance use and sexuality as domains, where clinicians frequently seem to run the risk of becoming

exorcists. Last, we will begin to look at the category of the aesthetic as ways human beings create to work with the spirits that sometimes trouble them. We argue for a psychoanalytic and ethical positioning of the clinician as one who is curious about, able to trigger, and willing to witness the work of the spirit in the subject.

Schedule

<i>Session # / Date / Topic</i>	<i>Review</i>	<i>Assignments</i>
Introducing Spirit Possession Session 1	Lecture: From Spirit Possession to the Clinic Johnson: “Rosalie Psychiatric Nearhuman” in <i>Automatic Religion</i> Optional: Kapil - “A Project for Future Children” (No pdf, book and Kindle available on Amazon)	
Session 2	Apollon - “Vodou: The Crisis of Possession” <i>The Exorcist</i> Optional: Johnson - “An Afro-Atlantic Genealogy of Spirit Possession” Optional: Lewis - “Possession and Psychiatry” in <i>Ecstatic Religion: A study of Shamanism and Spirit Possession</i>	
Session 3	McNulty - “Untreatable: The Freudian Act and Its Legacy” Freud - Dream of Irma’s Injection <i>The Witch</i>	
Session 4	Jones - “Pole Dancing for Jesus: Negotiating Movement and Gender in Men’s Musical Praise” in <i>Esotericism and African American Religious Experience</i> <i>Suspiria</i>	

Sexuality Session 5	Gherovici - “Psychoanalysis Needs a Sex Change” Jones - ““I am Delivert!”” in <i>Flaming? The Peculiar Theopolitics of Fire and Desire in Black Male Gospel Performance</i> <i>Pray Away</i>	
Session 6	Saketopoulou - “The Draw to Overwhelm: Consent, Trauma, and the Re-translation of Enigma” Saketopoulou - “#consentsowhite: On the Erotics of Slave Play in ‘Slave Play’” Turman - “Slain in the Spirit: Toward a Radical Black Womanist Choreo-Pneumatology of the Die-In”	
Substances + Addiction Session 7	Flor - “Knows no’s nose” and Fink - “Brief Comments on Rolf Flor’s Case Presentation” in <i>Lacan and Addiction</i> <i>Losing Isaiah</i> (1995)	
Session 8	Tolentino - “Losing Religion and Finding Ecstasy in Houston” (audio recording also available on linked website) Optional: Saldanha - “Drugs and Difference” and “Trance, Dance, and the Trance Dance” in <i>Psychedelic White: Goa Trance and the Viscosity of Race</i>	
Aesthetic Session 9	Carlson/de la Torre - “The Mythologist’s Aesthetic Task” in <i>Sex for Structuralists: The Non-Oedipal Logics of Femininity and Psychosis</i> <i>The Babadook</i> Optional: Lévi-Strauss - “The Effectiveness of Symbols”	
Session 10	Pandolfo - “Ta’bīr: Figuration and the “Torment of Life”” in <i>Knot of the Soul: Madness, Psychoanalysis, Islam</i> “In the Realms of the Unrea”	

Course Components

Seminar Discussion / Working Group

We envision this course as taking on the style of a seminar or of a working group. This means that, while there will be some short periods of input from the instructors, the goal is primarily to create a space where we can work together on pressing questions about how the clinical meets the social and the cultural in our ongoing training as clinicians.

Case Presentations / Confidentiality

While we will be reading various texts in the course as points for critical engagement, what is most important in the training of clinicians is one's experience in one's own treatment in psychoanalysis or psychotherapy and in one's clinical work.

To facilitate a space where each of us might be able to speak more freely about what in our experience and what related to our desire connects to our work around key questions, participants in this course should treat each other's experiences, and clinical vignettes that might be shared, with respect and confidentiality. This mutual agreement to treat matters with confidentiality is necessary to create the classroom as a site for possible free speech.

Reading Questions: How to Formulate a Good Question

Each course participant (students and instructors, both) should—after reading, listening to, or viewing the assigned materials—should write down three questions which they are prepared to bring to class discussions. The questions should be constructed with an open curiosity, related to something about the clinical desire of the one who proposes it. This is to say that we expect the questions we each bring to communicate a puzzle of the questioner to the class, rather than seeking factual information or soliciting (dis)agreement with some position that the questioner has already decided for him-/her-/them-self.

Culminating Notebook or Intervention

This course contains two options for a kind of culminating project. Combinations of these two suggested forms are also possible. While culminating projects can take an incredibly broad variety of forms, they must speak to issues of the relation between clinic and society/culture, and they should aim to transmit something that was “worked-through” or explored in the course of our work together.

Option 1 - *Culminating Notebook*. One option is that students will continuously work on a log or journal throughout the course to account for your desire as a clinician. The “notebook” can include a series of questions, sketches, textual and visual materials of all kinds really -- dreams, vignettes,

photographs, etc. This assignment provides a space for you to document and track, in writing and visual forms, your progress and development in this course. You may choose to develop your notebook as an analogue (handwritten, paper & pen) or digital (docs, slides, Evernote, Notability, etc.) project.

Option 2 - *Culminating Intervention*. A second option to create something in relation to the course is in the form of a “culminating intervention.” This, too, could take a variety of forms. It could include the presentation of a case that raised issues for you, as the clinician, that you might aim to transmit to the group. It could include some kind of plan for a community project you plan to enact, or a paper you wish to publish.

How to submit your culminating assignment

At the end of each quarter, course participants are asked to submit something in relation to the work they have undertaken or which they plan to undertake. These milestones ensure that the presentation of the culminating project is on the course participant’s horizon and that they are actively working on it.

Presentation

At the end of the course, course participants will be invited to share their *notebook* or *final intervention* in a presentation to the other course participants. The presentation aims to communicate something in relation to the work undertaken in the course and as a space to take responsibility for one’s desire to do clinical work in a way that has the potential to facilitate cultural intervention. At the same time, our presentations will allow the instructors to gauge what was achieved and transmitted in this course beyond the limitations of the format entailed in the standard “course evaluation.”

Decolonizing Syllabi + Curricula

Recent conversations in higher education have led to extensive, and sometimes fraught, debates and conversations about the role of the “canon” (a sanctioned, often white, male, and heterosexual body of texts) in course curricula. Some have called for the canon to be thrown out altogether, while others have called for the inclusion of minority authors (at worst, as tokens).

In crafting this course, the instructors have considered this issue, and strived to find ways in which these concerns might be worked on. One of the ways we suggest points to the continuous development and sharing of individual and collective questions, which might allow us to collectively tweak the syllabus and make changes as we move forward. There is space for this.