Social Psychoanalysis  
and the Unconscious of Power

SC 533  
Stephen Pfohl  
Boston College: Office Hours: Tuesday 2-3:30 PM and by appointment  
Fall 2012

Course Description

This seminar explores social psychic repetitions at the heart of everyday life and how unconscious cultural forces typically (or archetypically) affect the ritual organization of power in history. Inviting a dialogue between sociology and psychoanalysis, the course encourages a ‘power-reflexive” examination of suggestive social phantasms and fears, compulsive fascinations and desires, selective memories and forgetting. Intended as an advanced introduction to the theories and methods of social psychoanalysis, the seminar pays particular attention to the unconscious haunts of gendered, racialized, erotic, and class-based forms of power in a global historical context.

This course is also concerned with the reproduction and possible social change of energetically binding unconscious transferences between our selves and others. Such transferences move us from the "here and now” of our embodied lives in history, leading us to identify with who and what we're not. Transferences of this sort call upon us to embrace certain “idealized” social personas and ways of life to the exclusion of others. This involves sacrifice and the substitution of imaginary and symbolic relations for the complexity of what is real.

How do unconscious aspects of social power manifest themselves in and between us? And how might power's symptomatic repetitions be reflexively interpreted and changed? What, moreover, are the implications of social psychoanalysis for the practice of critical sociological inquiry and for activism aimed at healing the sickening effects of social injustice? Such questions (of power and knowledge) give provisional form to the desires shaping this course. Whose desires are these? What do you—as students and participants in this seminar—want?

Course Requirements

1. This is an advanced seminar. All participants are expected to prepare for each session by engaging in a minimum of six hours of reading and to actively engage in class discussion. Participants are also asked to take turns in assuming responsibility for leading weekly discussions on assigned readings. Working in teams of two or three, leaders are expected to meet together to prepare for seminar discussions. (10%)

2. All participants are expected to construct a semester-long "analytic journal." Written at the "power-reflexive" intersection of one's own biography and socio-historical positioning, journals should include (but are not limited to) the construction of short critical responses to questions, readings, in-class discussion, and other concerns arising in the course of the seminar. Journals are to be framed in relation to 8 specific
"weekly" seminar themes and to be submitted for review on October 25th and again by December 17th, 5:00 PM. (60%)

3. Participants are expected to produce one 15 page social psychoanalytic paper (due by December 17th, 5:00 PM). All papers are to make explicit use of course themes and assigned materials. Working drafts of papers OR one completed analytic journal entry are to be presented to the seminar. (30%)

Seminar Readings

Week 1, September 6th
Introduction

Week 2, September 13th
Psychoanalysis at the Crossroads of Social Criticism

Required Readings

Substitute/Supplementary Readings

Week 3, September 20th
Hysterical Beginnings: The Analytic Ear and the Talking Cure

Required Readings

Substitute/Supplementary Readings


Week 4, September 27th
The Totemic Function, Sacrifice, Sex/Death, and the Unconscious

Required Readings


Substitute/Supplementary Readings


Week 5, October 4th
Beginning Again: Repressions, Dreams, and Symbols

Required Readings


**Substitute/Supplementary Readings**


**Week 6, October 11th**

**Appearance and Disappearance: Surplus and Lack**

**Required Readings**


**Substitute/Supplementary Readings**

- Trinh T. Minh-ha, "Commitment from the Mirror Writing Box," in Woman, Native, Other: Writing, Postcoloniality and Feminism, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989, pp. 7-44.

**Week 7, October 18th**

**Repressing, Repeating and Engendering Psychic Matters**

**Required Readings**


Substitute/Supplementary Readings


Week 8, October 25th
(Re)politicalizing the Unconscious

Required Readings


Substitute/Supplementary Readings


Week 9, November 1st
Color Coded Cultural Psyches

Required Readings


Substitute/Supplementary Readings


Week 10, November 8th
At the Fleshy Borders of the Socially Mirrored Ego

Required Readings


Substitute/Supplementary Readings


Week 11, November 15th
Haunted Fantasies of Foundation (and Subversion)

Required Readings


**Substitute/Supplementary Readings**


**Week 12, November 29th**

**Shadows of the Modern/Colonial Psyche**

**Required Readings**


**Substitute/Supplementary Readings**


**Week 13, December 6th**

**Power-Reflexive Social Psychoanalysis: terminable and interminable**

**Required Readings**

**Substitute/Supplementary Readings**