

NYU Post Doctoral Program in Psychotherapy and Psychoanalysis

*The Politics of Psychoanalysis and the Psychoanalysis of Politics*

Fall, 2015

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### **The Course**

This course explores various aspects of the relationship between psychoanalysis and politics. We consider aspects of psychological experience and identity often left out of the psychoanalytically-informed frame that relate to our insertion in the larger social order beyond the family. We collaboratively examine how our affective ties and ideological notions regarding gender, ethnic and class positions/relations frame our psychologies and are reflected in the intersubjective encounter between therapist and patient. In so doing, we take account of the interface between large social forces, hegemonic ideologies and unconscious fantasy, affects and defenses. These themes address questions related to the psychoanalysis of politics.

We also take up the tradition within psychoanalysis that has sought to integrate psychological theory and clinical practice with political activism that offers a critique of and challenges oppressive hierarchical social structures that contextualize human suffering and produce psyches that adapt rather than confront hegemonic forces. In this exploration, we consider such psychoanalytic staples as “neutrality”, “objectivity” and “anonymity” with regard to their political functions and their relationship to the dynamics and meanings of the bystander phenomenon. We then look at specific historical and contemporary examples of psychoanalytic political activism. These themes address the politics of psychoanalysis.

In this examination of the interface between psychic and social reality, the course explores how psychoanalysis is born out of a particular social matrix that contains within it both (1) a tendency to accommodate to the prevailing political culture and its ideological and institutional foundations and (2) the potential for a contrary liberatory theory and clinical practice that facilitate critical consciousness about the social matrix of psychological experience.

Each segment of the course will deal with theory, history, and clinical material.

Class time will include (1) instructor lecture (2) class discussion of assignments (3) media illustrations of themes and (4) the application of theory to clinical practice. Instructor and class participants will provide clinical examples that illustrate topics under discussion.

### **Assignments:**

- \*Students are required to read assignments before coming to class
- \*Students are required to watch *The Corporation* (Netflix) in order to discuss the documentary in Friday's class
- \*In class, we will view and analyze segments from the four part documentary, *Century of the Self*, and other relevant media excerpts that illuminate the themes of the course

### **Friday, 4:00 - 6:30 p.m.**

In this segment of the course, we take up the following themes:

- (1) the Ideological assumptions fundamental to psychoanalytic thinking that make it difficult to consider social life and experience in relation to individual mental health
- (2) the functions of mainstream psychoanalysis that have often been syntonetic with and uncritical of the fundamental components of hegemonic ideology and relational structures embedded in the culture
- (3) how psychoanalytic practitioners are taking account of issues of gender, class and race in the analytic setting

Assigned readings:

Roland, A. (1984). Psychoanalysis in Civilizational Perspective: The Self in India, Japan, and America. *Psychoanal. Rev.*, 71:569-590.

Layton, L. (2006). Racial Identities, Racial Enactments, and Normative Unconscious Processes. *Psychoanal Q.*, 75:237-269.

Hollander, N. (2010), The Social Matrix of Psychic Experience, Excerpt from *Uprooted Minds: Surviving the Politics of Terror in the Americas* (New York: Routledge), 11-17 (provided by instructor with syllabus).

Cushman, P. (2000). White Guilt, Political Activity, and the Analyst: Commentary on

Paper by Neil Altman. *Psychoanal. Dial.*, 10:607-618.

**Saturday, 9:00 am – 5:00 pm**

In this segment of the course, we explore the following themes:

(1) the potential for psychoanalysis to occupy a position of radical critique of prevailing power relations, as has been elaborated in contemporary psychoanalytic accounts of gender, ethnic and class attitudes, values and behavior;

(2) the theoretical underpinnings of new approaches to clinical work that encourage both analyst and patient to understand their relationship to the social world as well as how the social world manifests in their intersubjective engagement in the therapeutic encounter. We too often neglect the social world as a significant aspect of personal life.

(3) a social psychoanalytic approach that includes an interdisciplinary appreciation of how psychoanalysis can learn from other fields as well as contribute to them in order to foster a more complex appreciation of the interface between large social forces and individual conscious and unconscious dynamics

(4) the different psychoanalytic theoretical orientations and their implied visions of the relationship between individual and social repression, desire and liberation

(5) the response of psychoanalysts to conditions of extreme political repression: the case of Nazi Germany and the Argentine Dirty War

(5) psychoanalytic appropriations of radical social theories in the service of conceptualizing subjectivity, the process of subjectification and the possibilities of resistance to hegemony

Assigned readings:

The Einstein-Freud Correspondance [on war] (1931-32) (provided by instructor with the syllabus)

Frosh, S. (1986). Beyond the analytic attitude: Radical aims and psychoanalytic psychotherapy. *Free Associations*, 1:38-58.

Hollander, N.C. (2001) Psychoanalysts on the Witness Stand: Trauma and Memory in Latin America (provided by instructor with the syllabus).

Ruti, M. (2014) In search of defiant subjects: Resistance, rebellion, and political agency in Lacan and Marcuse. *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society*, 19 (3): 297-314.

Benjamin, J. (2014) The Discarded and the Dignified – Parts 1 and 2: From the Failed Witness to “You are the Eyes of the World”. (On the Web: *Publicseminar.org*. December 24, 2014; once on Publicseminar.org website, click on search and insert Jessica Benjamin: read parts 1 and 2 and skim parts 3-6).