Lacanian Psychoanalysis: Theory and Practice

Summer 2017 (14-16 & 19-20 June)

Dr Derek Hook

Course overview

This course introduces and explores Lacanian psychoanalysis by focusing on series of distinct topic areas in Lacan’s work, all of which are related to Lacan’s over-arching objective of ‘a return to Freud’. The objective of the course is to render Lacan’s ideas accessible, and to link Lacanian theory to forms of practical application (such as the clinical and the realm of psychosocial analysis). The opening session focuses on the topic of the imaginary, which includes an understanding of the mirror-stage and ego identifications. The second centres on Lacan’s complementary notion of the symbolic order, and the aligned notions of full and empty speech. The third session extends this basic foundation by asking the question: ‘What is the Lacanian unconscious?’, via a reading of Freud’s understandings of dream interpretation, and the famous Lacanian maxim that ‘the unconscious is structured like a language’. Additional focus areas include Lacan’s clinical structures – obsessional neurosis and hysteria, psychosis and perversion – each of which are approached via discussions of desire, the Other and the relation to objet a, the object-cause of desire. Further topics include the notions of the ‘Name-of-the-Father’, the concept of jouissance (libidinal enjoyment) and the issue of ‘sexuation’ (that is, the taking of masculine/feminine identifications). The course closes with a discussion of Lacan’s thoughts on ‘direction of treatment’, that is, with a review of the various ways in which Lacan’s theoretical axioms are brought to life both in the clinical realm and within the domain of psychosocial analysis.

Email: hookd@duq.edu

Prescribed texts:
### Provisional Timetable:

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<th>Time</th>
<th>9.00-11.30</th>
<th>12.00-1.30</th>
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L: lecture  
RS: Reading + discussion session  

**Lecture/reading sessions:** Each day is broken down into a morning and an afternoon session. Each session will begin with a lecture, which will be followed by a reading + discussion session. The reading sessions extend the content of the lecture, and students will be given the choice of readings to focus on during this time this is to accommodate those with differing interests (and levels of experience) in Lacanian psychoanalysis. **Note:** students should start reading through the materials before the class begins. The reading sessions will not be lengthy enough for students to cover all material within class. These sessions are for close readings and discussions of select sections of these texts.  

*Students will be expected to bring to class copies of the readings they will focus on in each day’s reading sessions!* Most - if not all – readings will be available online via Moodle. In the case of difficulties, please contact Derek (hookd@duq.edu).
READINGS

SESSION 1 (Day 1, morning):

SESSION 2 (Day 1, afternoon):

SESSION 3 (Day 2, morning):

SESSION 4 (Day 2, afternoon):

SESSION 5 (Day 3, morning):

SESSION 6 (Day 3, afternoon):


SESSION 7 (Day 4, morning):  


SESSION 8: (Day 4, afternoon)  


SESSION 9: (Day 5, morning)  


SESSION 10: (Day 5, afternoon)  

SESSION 1: THE MIRROR STAGE

Lacan’s first major contribution to psychoanalytic theory was his notion of the mirror stage. This introductory session will cover the key aspects of this theory, and discuss also a series of related notions – the imaginary order, the ideal-ego, narcissism, identification – that would prove fundamental to all of his subsequent theorizing.


Questions for Session 1:
1. How are we to understand the body, and embodiment, via the notion of the mirror stage?
2. How does the idea of the mirror stage inform distinctions between psychosis and neurosis?
3. What is included within the remit of the imaginary?
4. Is there a mode of temporality specific to the mirror stage?
5. What is entailed by the notion of meconnaissance, and how does conceptualization this inform clinical practice?
SESSION 2: FULL & EMPTY SPEECH


Questions for Session 2:

1. How can we differentiate between the imaginary and the symbolic registers?
2. What are the crucial facets of the idea of the 'symbolic order' that Lacan derives from Levi-Strauss?
3. What is ‘full speech’, and how is it attained?
4. What is ‘the Other’, and how does this concept inform clinical work and forms of ideology critique?
5. What are the uses of the L-schema?

SESSION 3-4: WHAT IS THE LACANIAN UNCONSCIOUS?

The Lacanian notion of the unconscious often proves paradoxical for newcomers to Lacan and those familiar with the literature of post-Freudian analyses. These sessions will explore a series of such paradoxes (the unconscious as ‘structured like a language’, as symbolic rather than imaginary, as the ‘discourse of the Other’), and do so via a careful and detailed consideration of the matrix of ideas contained in Freud’s theorization of the dreamwork (including notions of condensation, displacement, symbolism, and dramatization/representability).


Questions for Sessions 3 & 4:
1. What crucial concepts from Freud’s analysis of dreams are foundational to the Lacanian credo that the unconscious is structured like a language?
2. The notion of the dream as a rebus has often been neglected by post-Freudians. Why is this idea so essential to Lacanian understandings of the unconscious.
3. How, via Freud’s ideas in respect of dreaming, should one understand the temporality of the unconscious?
4. How are the Freudian notions of condensation and displacement taken up and developed by Lacan?
5. Why does the notion of the signifier feature so prominently in Lacan’s understanding of the unconscious?
6. How might the idea of ‘the unconscious structured like a language’ inform clinical practice?
7. How should one understand Lacan’s idea that the unconscious can be understood as ‘the discourse of the Other’?
8. What are the most crucial elements from Lacan’s seminar on ‘The purloined letter’ for an understanding of the unconscious?

SESSION 5: JOUISSANCE

The later Lacanian is said to have prioritized the notion of jouissance, that is, instances of disturbing libidinal enjoyment. This session will explore various dimensions of this notion both with references to the clinical and the cultural and political terrain where the perceived ownership - and theft – of a type of superabundant vitality (that is, enjoyment) are often crucial in anchoring both symptomatic and ideological struggles.


Questions for Session 5:
1. How, following Lacan, are jouissance and desire to be differentiated?
2. Why is the notion of enjoyment so crucial to the analysis of ideology?
3. Why is it the case that an analysis of jouissance entails a necessarily ethical dimension?
4. Is jouissance, strictly speaking, ‘unconscious’? If so, in what capacity?
5. What is the relationship between jouissance and objet a?

SESSION 6: FORECLOSURE AND PSYCHOSIS

The subjective structure of psychosis is understood differently in Lacanian theory to how it is in virtually all other schools of psychotherapy and psychoanalysis. This session explores both the crucial underlying mechanism that determines psychosis (the foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father) and elaborates on a series of related concepts (the relation to the Other, the localization of jouissance, the anchoring of meaning) that are vital in understanding psychic structure more generally.


Questions for Session 6:
1. What is the Name-of-the-Father, and why is it such a crucial factor in a diagnosis
of psychosis?
2. What is the location of the unconscious in psychosis?
3. Jouissance and the Other are both unstable and potentially threatening to the psychotic subject. Explain.
4. List five categorical differences between the structures of neurosis and psychosis.
5. How are we to differentiate ‘ordinary’ from ‘extraordinary’ forms of psychosis?

SESSION 7: OBSESSION AND HYSTERIA

Lacan offers a series of helpful postulates regards obsession and hysteria, including the well-known dilemmas of suffering from (respectfully) an impossible desire and a desire for an unfulfilled desire and the questions ‘Am I alive or am I dead?’ and ‘Am I a man or a woman?’ We will flesh out these ideas by dwelling on the Freudian roots of Lacan’s conceptualizations, and also by exploring briefly Lacan’s notion of the ‘individual neurotic myth’.


Questions for Session 7:
1. Lacan provides an encapsulating question for the logic of both obsessional neurosis and hysteria. State these two questions with reference to practical examples in the literature.
2. What does Lacan have in mind with his description of the individual myth of the neurotic?
3. List five characteristic of the structure of obsessionality.
4. What is the hysteric’s relation to desire?
5. Why the predominance of the motif of ‘the Other woman’ in hysteria?

SESSION 8: PERVERSION

Perversion is often considered to be the most elusive of Lacan’s psychic structures when it
comes to the clinic, and yet the various ideas brought to the fore by this structure (disavowal, subject as embodying the Other’s jouissance, the enactment of an ostensibly transgressed Law) are indispensable in the broader architecture of his psychoanalytic thinking.


Questions for Session 8:
1. The perverse subject has a very particular relation to the law that they so frequently appear to transgress. Explain.
2. Name and describe – with examples - the characteristic form of negation that features in cases of perversion.
3. What is the perverse subject’s relation to desire?
4. Perversion invariable implies a very particular relation to the Other. What is this relation?
5. What differential diagnostic considerations would be useful in differentiating neurosis from perversion, and perversion from psychosis?

SESSION 9: THE PHALLUS AS SIGNIFIER

One of Lacan’s most controversial – and arguably misunderstood – Freudian concepts is that of the phallus as signifier. This session will focus on exploring the various dimensions of the phallus (imaginary, symbolic) and developing an appreciation of how the concept is utilized in relation to understandings of castration, sexuation, lack, negativity, jouissance and desire.


Questions for Session 9:
1. The phallus appears to mean different things at different times to Lacan. Why is this the case?
2. Why for Lacan the predominance of motifs of negativity or subtraction when he discusses the phallus?
3. Why is there a different relation to the phallus as signifier for those designated as ‘men’ opposed to those designated as ‘women’?
4. What is the relation of the phallus to language?
5. Why should questions of sexuation be so intricately tied to questions of psychosis?
6. Name three crucial functions of the phallus as signifier.

SESSION 10: LACANIAN CLINICAL TECHNIQUE

Having arrived at the end of the course, this session will function both to wrap up foregoing questions and to apply various conceptual motifs to the domain of clinical practice. Particularly importance here will be: issues of temporality (and suspension); the critique of meaning; the role of the signifier; the analyst’s position in the transference; interpretation; the objectives of scansion and punctuation.


**Questions for Session 10:**

1. Why the pronounced Lacanian distrust of meaning in the clinic?
2. How do Lacanians understand the role of the transference, and how might we differentiate between imaginary and symbolic transference?
3. How do Lacanian notions of temporality directly impact clinical practice?
4. What is meant by the materiality of the signifier, and how does this inform psychoanalytic practice?
5. How do notions of *jouissance* and castration feature in approaches to Lacanian clinical technique?