

Introduction to Psychoanalysis

Encountering Psychoanalysis Through Metaphor and Myth

September 10, 17, 24 and October 8, 2025

7:00pm - 9:15pm EST

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Course Description:

The word “encounter” is rich with meaning in the field of psychoanalysis, emphasizing an intersubjective, relational experience of mutual influence (Stolorow, Beebe, Orange), and/or an emotionally alive recognition of otherness (Levinas, Benjamin). Here, the power of the encounter isn’t necessarily in our words - the interpretation or the cognitive realm - but is instead found and created in our presence: in being with, together. This will be the sensibility of our class.

With a focus on metaphor and myth, students will explore key ideas and critical shifts that have emerged over the course of the development of psychoanalysis. We will wonder about the origins of psychoanalysis, conceptualizations of being human and of therapeutic change, contributions of the analyst/theorist in the room and on the field, and consider self psychology as a potential vital disruption to a long line of (sometimes stifling) tradition. As we move together through these encounters, students are encouraged to begin to reflect on who each of you are and might become - as individuals, as a cohort, in relationship with IPSS, and within our expansive field of psychoanalysis.

Class Expectations:

Please complete the assigned readings before each class and be prepared to participate in discussion during class. The experience of the whole class is created by each of us - I look forward to all of your contributions!

There will be no class meetings on September 29, 2025.

Learning Objectives:

- Students will understand the beginnings of Freud's psychoanalysis and the significant shifts in Freudian thought, reflecting upon the role of context and subjectivity in his theoretical thinking and development.
- Students will be able to identify key criticisms of psychoanalysis, particularly relating to gender, sexuality, race and other social/cultural identity and "otherness".
- Students will be able to demonstrate knowledge on the following questions: What are the origins of psychoanalysis? Who are the major players in the development of psychoanalysis? What are some contemporary developments? How has the conceptualization of the patient, the analyst and the therapeutic relationship changed over time?
- Students will grow their psychoanalytic listening capacities as we use metaphor and myth to feel into ideas and clinical situations.
- Students will be able to identify some central organizing differences between Freudian thought and self psychology and be able to use these understandings in their clinical work - for example, "oedipal complex" vs. "oedipal phase" and "guilty man" vs "tragic man".

Course Outline and Bibliography:

All readings can be found on Google Drive - link included in email.

Week 1 (September 10, 2025) - Encountering Psychoanalytic Tradition

This week serves as both a welcome and an introduction to the traditions of psychoanalysis. As we explore its origins, we will trace key shifts in Freud's thinking and begin to locate these developments within the contexts of his time and his subjectivity. We will also open space to think about psychoanalysis alongside the concept of "otherness."

Readings:

- Letter from Fredric Perlman, from Busch, F. (Ed.). (2021). Dear candidate: Analysts from around the world offer personal reflections on psychoanalytic training, education, and the profession. Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group.
- Ch. 1: The Development of Freud's Theory, from Sandler, J. Models of the Mind. p. 11-38
- Letter from Freud to Fliess, Sept. 21, 1887 - Freud explains his decision and reasoning behind abandoning his "seduction theory"/"affect-trauma theory".
- A Long Dress - Gertrude Stein (poem)

Week 2 (September 17, 2025) - Encountering Movement in Psychoanalysis Through Metaphor

Itinerary - guide with all needed content can be found in our dropbox, entitled "Week 2"

This week we will loosely follow the movement and shifts in the development and expansion of psychoanalysis. We will consider questions like: Who are some of the major thinkers in the development of psychoanalysis? What are some contemporary developments in thought? How has the conceptualization of human experience, and the patient, the analyst and the therapeutic relationship, changed over time?

- Bion's Beam of darkness
- Freud's Archaeologist, Surgeon
- Winnicott's Squiggle game
- Orange's Flyjar
- Ferro's Inkblot
- Hillman's Snake
- Kohut's Astronauts

Week 3 (September 24, 2025) - Encountering the Myth of Narcissus

This week we will explore the myth of Narcissus and consider its meaning as Freud developed his psychoanalytic thinking. We will reflect on the differences in understanding and meaning for self psychology, and locate this re-centering as part of a vital disruption and transformation in our conceptualization of human experience and within our field.

Readings:

- Ovid. "Echo and Narcissus". Metamorphosis. p. 109-116
- Excerpt: Freud, S. (1914) On Narcissism: An Introduction. The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud 14:67-102
- Excerpt: Lachmann, F. (2008). Transforming narcissism: Reflections on empathy, humor and expectations. The Analytic Press

Week 4 (October 8, 2025): Encountering the Myth of Oedipus

In our final week, we will explore the myth of Oedipus and reflect upon its foundational meanings in psychoanalytic origins, its re-imagining through a self psychological lens, and its part in a vital disruption and transformation in our thinking about human development and upon our field.

Readings:

- Excerpt: King Oedipus. Loeb Edition.
- Excerpt: Freud, S. (1900) The Interpretation of Dreams. The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud 4:ix-627
- Excerpt: Wallerstein, R. (1986) How does self psychology differ in practice? [Ed] Goldberg, A. Progress in Self Psychology. The Guilford Press. (2) P. 73-74
- Excerpt: Kohut, H. (1982) Introspection, Empathy, and the Semi-Circle of Mental Health. International Journal of Psychoanalysis 63:395-407