



The politics of unreason: mood, emotion and the unconscious

Gregynog Theory School 2020

March 12-13 2020



Welcome to Theory School 2020

The annual *Gregynog Theory School* has been funded by the ESRC Cohort Development Fund to provide a forum for post-graduate students throughout the UK to engage with theoretical topics in a supportive and collaborative setting. The Theory School is organised and sponsored by the Wales DTP but is open to all post-graduate students wishing to take part in the event.

DELEGATES

DTP Postgraduate Researchers:

[Redacted names]

[Redacted names]

[Redacted names]

DTP Academic Staff:

[Redacted names]

[Redacted names]

[Redacted names]

Guest Researchers:

[Redacted names]

[Redacted names]

[Redacted names]

Guest Academic Staff

[Redacted names]

[Redacted names]

[Redacted names]

Schedule

Thursday March 12th

12.15 – 13.15:	Lunch
13.15 – 14.30:	Welcome and Keynote: Prof Anna Secor
14.30 – 16.00:	Seminar 1
16.00 – 16.30:	Tea break
16.30 – 18.00	Seminar 2
19.00	Dinner
20.00	Film: The Pervert's Guide to Cinema

Friday March 13th

8.00 – 9.00:	Breakfast
9.00 – 10.30:	Seminars 3-5 (student choice)
10.30 – 11.00:	Coffee break
11.00 – 12.30:	Seminars 3-5 (student choice)
12.30 – 13.30	Farewell briefing

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‘man’s craving for grandiosity is now suffering the...most bitter blow from present-day psychological research which is endeavouring to prove to the ego of each one of us that he is not even master in his own house, but that he must remain content with the veriest scraps of information about what is going on unconsciously in his own mind’ (Freud, S. E. XVII, 144)

The idea that humans are not self-conscious beings making rational choices based on objective information is one that has been with us now for some time, even as there remain whole disciplines predicated on the idea that humans are rational actors. In recent years, research in this area has intensified as more comes to be known about unconscious processes through neuroscience and other cognate fields. The recognition that humans can be social, economically and politically manipulated through the configuration of various desires has engendered a range of new sub-disciplines and fields. Non-representational theory, affect theory, psycho-analytic theory and various other schools have all explored the potential of non-reason or unreason as a political tool and have asked probing questions about the potential of various kinds of pre-conscious, un-conscious and sometimes trans-conscious strategies to generate social effects.

The 2020 Theory School begins with the recognition that geographers have been highly attuned to the politics of unreason. In the literature on austerity (Anderson 2016, Wilkinson and Ortega-Alcazar 2019, Hitchen 2019), neuro-liberalism (Whitehead, Lilly, Howell, et al. 2016, Whitehead, Jones, Pykett et al. 2012), and the politics of precarity (Rose 2014, Woodward 2014, Joronen 2017, Gokariksel and Secor 2018) there has been an attention to how affective and/or unconscious registers of experience can be mobilised to generate social, economic and political effects. Yet, while there is a broad interest in exploring the political potential of these mechanisms, there is also a certain slipperiness in their (a) conceptualisation and (b) distillation into an object of study. In terms of the former we might ask questions about the difference between Lacanian and Deleuzian notions of affect? Whether mood is a political or existential condition? And to what extent is desiring itself political? In terms of the latter, there are questions to be asked about whether unconscious or pre-conscious motivations can be measured? What marks the difference between affect and emotion? And what proxies might we use to explore that which a subject does not (or cannot) know, recognise or articulate? Or indeed, how does the dialogic encounter itself (through interviews, focus groups and questionnaires) render the unconscious invisible?

The topic is divided into five separate seminars which will be explored over four sessions. While all attendees will participate in seminars 1 and 2 on Day 1, students can choose from seminars 3, 4 and 5 on Day 2. The schedule for the Theory School, along with seminar themes and readings is presented below.

Seminar sessions and readings

1. Psychoanalytic introductions: Lacan and the unconscious

Psychoanalysis – ‘the talking cure’ – began life in a clinical context but is now widely engaged in critical academic circles. While many of Freud’s concepts remain as potent and relevant as ever (e.g., the ‘unconscious’), it was the work of his disciple, Jacques Lacan, that reoriented Freudian thought away from science and biology (a biology of the mind) and towards society and culture. Lacan solemnized the marriage between Freud and the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, who proposed a ‘science of signs’ which allowed us to consider the role of psychoanalytic concepts – such as the uncanny – in broader sociological, cultural and geographical terms. The aim of this session is to explore some of the founding ideas of Lacan, how they relate to the psycho-analytic legacy, as well as how we might use them to provide insight into the ‘humans’ of human geography.

Readings

- Lapsley, R 2006() *Psychoanalytic criticism in the Routledge Companion to Critical Theory*
- Fink, Bruce. 1995. *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance*, Chapters One and Two: “Language and Otherness” and “The Nature of Unconscious Thought” (pp. 3-23).
- Interview with Lacan (1975)
Léxpress: <http://braungardt.trialectics.com/projects/psychoanalysis/lacans-life/interview-jacques-lacan/>

2. The political unconscious

What significance does the category of ‘the unconscious’ have for thinking about political theory and practice? It has been almost three decades since Slavoj Žižek argued that, for the subject of the unconscious, the gap between knowledge and belief allows for the simultaneous coexistence of the ultimate cynicism and the ultimate fanaticism (in such a form as: “I know that immigrants are guilty of nothing, but nevertheless I believe...”). And yet, in the age of Trump, Brexit, Facebook, and climate change denial, it seems that our political world is more ‘symptomatic’ than ever. The four selected texts provide glimpses into how attending to unconscious fantasy might offer us insight into the enjoyment – that is, the *jouissance* – that stirs the pot of politics.

Readings

- Žižek, S. (2002). *For they know not what they do: Enjoyment as a political factor*. Verso. Chapter 6: “Much Ado about a Thing,” pp. 229-277.
- Hook, D. (2017). What Is “Enjoyment as a Political Factor”? *Political Psychology*, 38(4), 605-620.
- Secor AJ (2018) I love death: War in Syria and the Anxiety of the Other. In Kapoor I (ed) *Psychoanalysis and the Global*, University of Nebraska Press. pp. 97-115.

3. Spatialities of consciousness

How is consciousness spatial? Can geographical lessons be drawn from attending to conscious dimensions of life? These questions have long been cast in the language of individual experience and (specifically) from a first-person perspective: *I feel, I see, I touch, I think*, etc. But what are the limitations of regarding experience as a vessel of meaning and derivative of intention and purpose? These readings explore how a world of experience unfolds before, during, and after human individuation and subjectivation and thus they allow us to consider what might be called ‘landscapes of consciousness’ – as opposed to the subject’s consciousness of landscape. In this session we will come to see how bodily movements create affective spaces, how both the onflow and the rupture of time changes these landscapes, and how relations between objects and their multiplicities emerge when the human is decentred and rigid social hierarchies become undone.

Readings

- Manning, E. and Massumi, B. (2014), “Chapter 1. Coming alive in a world of texture: for neurodiversity,” in *Thought in the Act* (Minnesota UP, Minneapolis, MN) pp. 3–22.
- Lingis, A. (2000), “Chapter 2. Bestiality,” and “Chapter 7. Innocence,” in *Dangerous Emotions* (California UP, Berkeley, CA) pp. 25–40, and 103–116.

4. Affect and the unconscious: Deleuze – Lacan

To the question of the politics of unreason, there is more than one answer. A psychoanalytic understanding of the role of unconscious fantasy troubles the surface of the political, demonstrating what is in it more than itself. At the same time, the politics of affect, or affective politics, provokes an analysis of how non-conscious, unnamed experiences of bodily energy and intensity temper our political attachments, beliefs, and practices. Indexed to Lacan and Deleuze, how do these approaches differ, and to what extent can they be reconciled? The selected texts grapple with the productive disjuncture between Deleuzian affect and the psychoanalytical unconscious.

Readings

- Zevnik, A. (2017) Lacan, Deleuze and the politics of the face. In Nedoh, B. and Zevnik, A. (Eds), *Lacan and Deleuze: A disjunctive synthesis*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Holland, E. W. (2012). I4 Deleuze and psychoanalysis. *The Cambridge Companion to Deleuze*, 307.
- Hallward, P. (2010). You can’t have it both ways: Deleuze or Lacan. *Deleuze and Psychoanalysis*, 33-50.

5. Ontology, social justice and the unconscious

In *What is Sex?*, the Slovenian psychoanalytic theorist and philosopher Alenka Zupančič argues that the unconscious, as a form of (not)-knowing, is structured by an ontological negativity we call sexuality. For Zupančič, it is not simply that culture or politics is a mask for sexuality, but that sexuality itself transmits the ontological lapse, the hole in our (cultural and socio-political) world. This is a challenging reading that productively short-circuits ontology and epistemology through a philosophical reading of unconscious sexuality.

Readings

- Alenka Zupancic, *What is Sex?* – Chapter 1: It's getting strange in here...
- LARB interview with Zupancic: <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/too-much-of-not-enough-an-interview-with-alenka-zupancic>