On Psychoanalysis and Aesthetics
A Presentation of Papers, with Panel and Audience Discussion

Saturday, April 27th, 2013, 9:30-4:30

Harbour Centre, Simon Fraser University
Room 1800, Terasen Room

Pre-register with Sandra Zink by email at sgz@sfu.ca
Event is free of charge
Funded by SFU Institute for the Humanities
Conference Program

9:15  Registration
9:45  Opening Comments
     Moderator: Samir Gandesha
10:00 “Now it looks at me”: Aesthetic Experience and the Work of Psychoanalysis
     Shierry Weber Nicholsen
10:45  Audience Discussion
11:00 The Apprehension of the Unconscious through the Return of the Unknown:
     Aesthetic Experience Viewed from the Perspective of Psychoanalytic Theory
     Coleen Gold
11:45  Audience Discussion
12:00 Lunch Break
1:15  Afternoon Opening Comments
1:30  The Aesthetics of Love and Death in Thomas Mann’s, “The Magic Mountain”
     Janet Oakes
2:15  Audience Discussion
2:30  Freud and Aesthetics: “Errant Negotiations”, the Offspring of Creative Confusion - a
     Turn not Taken?
     Jerry Zaslove
3:15  Audience Discussion
3:30  Panel Discussion
3:50  Audience Discussion
4:15  Closing Remarks, Samir Gandesha

Papers

“Now it looks at me”: Aesthetic Experience and the Work of Psychoanalysis

Shierry Weber Nicholsen, Ph.D., F.I.P.A.

We often sense that there is something aesthetic in our psychoanalytic work. This paper attempts to find the basis for that feeling by exploring the commonality of aesthetic experience and the work of psychoanalysis. Beginning by noting the similarity between Paul Klee's “Now it looks at me” (regarding a painting in progress) and Freud's agenda for the analytic process, “Wo es war soll ich werden” [“Where it/id was, there shall I/ego come to be”], it elaborates a series of key metaphors or terms for processes at work in both aesthetic and psychoanalytic experience: face, field, enigma, rhythm, metaphor, and configuration, weaving together formulations drawn from psychoanalysts, artists and theorists of aesthetics.
The Apprehension of the Unconscious through the Return of the Unknown: Aesthetic Experience Viewed from the Perspective of Psychoanalytic Theory

Coleen Gold, M.A., BC-ATR, F.I.P.A.

From a psychoanalytic perspective, aesthetic experience can be understood as contact with the unconscious. Psychoanalytic processes such as free association and transference/countertransference can be conceptualized as forms of aesthetic experience. The apprehension of the unconscious and aesthetic experience have been described by psychoanalysts using concepts such as the unknown, beauty, truth, the sublime, love, wholeness, creativity, play, at-one-ment, infinity, etc. (as per Bollas, Bion, Mahler, Meltzer, Klein, Winnicott, Symington and others). Aesthetic experience is central to human life and to the essence of psychoanalytic work. Some of the concepts mentioned, relevant to an understanding of aesthetic experience as elucidated in psychoanalytic aesthetic theory, will be reviewed in this presentation.

The Aesthetics of Love and Death in Thomas Mann’s “The Magic Mountain”.

Janet Oakes, M.A., BCATP, F.I.P.A.

Applied Psychoanalysis considers aesthetic human creations; culture, art and literature, through a psychoanalytic lens. Aesthetic experience encompasses love and death; the dance of Eros and Thanatos. To love means also opening to the inevitability of loss and mourning. The poignancy of beauty lies in the truth that ‘everything passes, everything changes’. Thomas Mann’s story of Hans Castorp’s seven year sojourn on the Magic Mountain describes aspects of the human condition that also are the concern of psychoanalysis. Hans utilizes his stay at the sanatorium as a ‘psychic retreat’, a state of suspension that avoids loss and mourning. Donald Meltzer’s concept of the Claustrum and Ester Bick’s concepts of psychic skin and second skin phenomena provide ways of thinking about the spatial, geographic, and relational aspects of Hans’s psychic development and their parallels to the struggles of everyman. Thomas Mann’s literary creation beautifully illuminates psychoanalytic ideas pertaining to the human mysteries of time, memory and embodiment.

Freud and Aesthetics: “Errant Negotiations”, the Offspring of Creative Confusion - a Turn not Taken?

Jerry Zaslove, Ph.D.

At the turn of the 20th century aesthetic principles anxiously turned toward empathy with form and away from authorship and subject matter as methods for interpreting the principles of art. Freud crosses this threshold in several essays where he reinforces his passion for the unattainable final interpretation of dream and artwork, delusion and transference, erotic life in memory, restitution and destruction, and unconscious formations in authorship. His essay “Dostoevsky and Parricide” beautifully preserves how both Dostoevsky and Freud creatively deface the work
of art as a form of reality through a new universal - “the irreducible duality” of conscious and unconscious forces. This is a crisis of aesthetic representation about where to place inspiration, compulsion, phantasy, renunciation, and sublimation a tour de force that illuminates the Kantian problem of the will to depicting and resisting the desire for a permanently autonomous work of art, thereby raising the cultural question of the autonomy of the individual.

Presenters

Shierry Weber Nicholsen is a psychoanalyst and psychotherapist in private practice on Capitol Hill in Seattle. She did her analytic training at the Northwestern Psychoanalytic Institute (NPS) in Seattle and is on the faculties of both NPS and SPSI (the Seattle Psychoanalytic Society and Institute). A student of Theodor Adorno’s, she has translated a number of works by members of the Frankfurt School and is the author of Exact Imagination, Late Work: On Adorno’s Aesthetics (MIT Press, 1997).

Coleen Gold is an art therapist and psychoanalyst in private practice in Vancouver. She has a background in Fine Arts and a special interest in aesthetic theory. She has taught in a variety of university and clinical training programs and currently teaches psychoanalytic theory with the WBCPS and offers clinical supervision in private practice.

Janet Oakes is a psychoanalyst in private practice in Vancouver. She is on the executive of the Western Branch of the Canadian Psychoanalytic Society and serves on the Extension Committee organizing and teaching seminars on Psychoanalytic theory and technique. Janet is an artist and has an ongoing interest in applied psychoanalysis relating to social conditions, literature, arts, and culture.

Jerry Zaslove, Simons Chair in Graduate Liberal Studies, emeritus Professor in Humanities and English, SFU, has published work related to aesthetics, radicalism in the arts, and the socio-cultural history of art and literature. Recent publications are on “Kafka in the Penal Colony”, W.G. Sebald and Exile, Siegfried Kracauer - Photography and Exile, and, through a series of “Open Letters” using psychoanalytical frameworks in regard to how aesthetics relates to loss, mourning and return.

Samir Gandesha, moderator, is Associate Professor in the Department of Humanities and the Director of the Institute for the Humanities at SFU. He specializes in modern European thought and culture and is editor (with Lars Rensmann) of Arendt and Adorno: Philosophical and Political Questions (Stanford, 2012). He is currently finishing a book entitled “Homeless Philosophy” and editing a volume (with Johan Hartle) on “Marx and the Aesthetic”. His work has been published in New German Critique, Philosophy and Social Criticism, Thesis Eleven, the European Journal of Social Theory, Political Theory, The Cambridge Companion to Adorno and several other edited collections.