

Looking at the Postcolonial through the Lens of Psychoanalysis

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The extent of colonial violence in Australia, and its repercussions for present-day Aboriginal communities and individuals, has become subject to public discourse in recent years. Yet it is fair to say that its treatment has been ambivalent at best, and deeply problematic at worst, as contemporary Australians attempt to distance themselves from responsibility for past violence and its present effects. Arguably, what is taking place in Australia is not a simple case of denial (at least in its colloquial sense), but rather involves a complicated effort to manage and conceal — and to identify with and repudiate — the injuries suffered by Aboriginal people.

The Masterclass will explore the ways in which psychoanalytic theory may help researchers to interpret the complex and contradictory investments of settler colonial subjectivity, and the often-perverse policies pursued by governments in the name of remediation. In particular, psychoanalysis can help us approach the hidden identifications and intents that are sometimes buried within projects of reconciliation. It can also support a critical suspicion regarding the stereotypes accorded to the “colonised other,” and the possibilities thereby available to them to participate in shaping community and cultural identity within the postcolonial nation.

Discussion will be led by Dr Faulkner, in relation to approaches taken in her own work, and leading into an afternoon seminar that will demonstrate these uses. Freud’s concepts of the death drive and the uncanny, particularly, will be drawn on to address questions of ‘home,’ displacement, sovereignty, temporality, and the return of repressed aggression in the postcolonial context. “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” will set the scene for interrogating the ‘repetition of the same’ in the field of government policy governing the lives of Aboriginal people. How may Freud’s notion of a ‘death drive’ — or a primal enjoyment of pain — help to motivate an interpretation of contemporary Australian cultural politics? Lacan’s interpretation of the death drive in terms of aggressivity and *jouissance* helps to contextualize this concept in relation to questions of national identity in its intercultural dimensions. “The uncanny,” in turn, refers us to the ‘unsettling’ predicament of being descended of settler colonials: of being both ‘at home’ and ‘out of place;’ of finding both familiar and incomprehensible the history of colonial violence and dispossession of which mainstream Australians have only recently become aware. It is hoped that there will also be opportunities to discuss other participants’ projects and the approaches opened therein by psychoanalytic thinking.

Reading:

Sigmund Freud, “Beyond the Pleasure Principle.” In *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Vol. CVIII (1920-1922) Trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1955): pp. 7-64.

Or (this secondary text is easier going):

Richard Boothby, “The Enigma of the ‘Death Drive,’” (Chapter 1) *Death and Desire: Psychoanalytic Theory in Lacan’s Return to Freud* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991): 1-20.

And/or:

Sigmund Freud, “The Uncanny.” In *Psychological Writings and Letters* Ed. Sander L. Gilman, Trans. Alix Strachey (New York: Continuum, 1995): pp. 120-153.

And:

Lacan, Jacques. “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function.” In *Écrit: A Selection*. Trans. Bruce Fink et al (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2002): pp. 3-9.

Related:

Faulkner, Joanne. “The Eternal Jouissance of the Community: Phantasm, Imagination, and ‘Natural man’ in Hobbes.” *Theory & Event* 12[3](2009):

http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/theory_and_event/v012/12.3.faulkner.html

Faulkner, Joanne. “Compassion and the Stolen Generations,” in *The Politics of Compassion*. Eds Michael Ure and Mervyn Frost (London and New York: Routledge, 2014): pp. 139-157. (the pre-published version can be accessed

at http://www.academia.edu/6660133/Compassion_and_the_Stolen_Generations)

Faulkner, Joanne. “Freud’s Concept of the Death Drive and Its Relation to the Superego,” *Minerva – An Internet Journal of Philosophy* 9 (2005): pp. 153-176:

<http://www.minerva.mic.ul.ie/vol9/Freud.pdf>