

WHAT IS DESIRE?

Section 8P31 Class #11785



“Desire is not a simple thing,” Sigmund Freud used to say. Yet, at times, our empirical experience suggests the opposite. It is not difficult to list all the material objects, experiences, and possessions that might fulfill the phrase, “make a wish.” However, psychoanalysis teaches us not to confuse “desire” with “will.” While we live in a society that has monumentalized self-confidence and the notion of “knowing what you want,” desire – distinct from will – remains elusive. Beneath the material goods and commodities we surround ourselves with and long to possess, there is something within us that remains opaque, inexpressible. This is what psychoanalysis calls “desire”: a question about our own identity, a blank spot in our subjectivity.

Instructor Name: Pietro Bianchi

Course meeting times: M, W, F Period 5 (11:45 AM - 12:35 AM) Matherly Hall 115

Office Hours: Monday (1:30 – 3:30) at Turlington 4342 or on Zoom (personal ID: 561 851 9876). (NB: Zoom appointments have to be scheduled in advance by email, even during office hours).

Course website: elearning.ufl.edu

Instructor Email: pietrobianchi@ufl.edu

Course Objectives

Through active and consistent engagement with course materials, class activities, and class discussions, students will:

- Develop familiarity with the different theories of desire presented in class.
- Be able to contextualize theoretical debates both conceptually and historically.
- Acquire advanced skills in reading and interpreting works of critical theory, philosophy, critical sociology, and film studies.
- Strengthen critical analysis skills through the interpretation and written analysis of films.
- Gain an understanding of basic concepts in psychoanalytic theory and practice.
- Locate, evaluate, and incorporate scholarly research on psychoanalysis, theory, and film studies into academic writing.

Required Readings and Films

The following films must be watched (at home) for this class:

- Lauren Berlant, *Desire/Love* (Punctum Books)
- Plato, *The Symposium* (Penguin Classics)

The following films must be watched (at home) for this class:

- Alfred Hitchcock, *Vertigo*
- John M. Stahl, *Imitation of Life*
- Luca Guadagnino, *Call Me by Your Name*
- Harmony Korine, *Spring Breakers*
- David Lynch, *Mulholland Dr.*

All other readings—apart from Plato’s *Symposium* and Berlant’s *Desire/Love*—will be available on Canvas in the “Files” section. While the weekly readings will generally not exceed 50 pages, they must be read carefully and thoroughly. Since our discussions and assignments will draw heavily on these texts, it is essential that you keep up with the readings, dedicating the necessary time and effort to understanding them.

Assigned materials will include psychoanalytic theoretical and clinical texts, as well as reviews and scholarly articles offering interpretations and analyses of the films. Although these readings will be explained in class, you are expected to come prepared and able to provide a faithful summary of each assigned article or chapter. If you encounter difficulties, please schedule an appointment with me or visit during office hours; I will be happy to work through the material with you.

On occasion, films will need to be watched before class. You will be expected to discuss them and share your insights during class sessions. Films are an integral part of the course and should be viewed attentively and in their entirety. Please avoid pausing or fragmenting the viewing, refrain from using your phone, and keep a notebook to record your impressions.

Some films may be available online for free; others can be found on major streaming platforms (e.g., Amazon, Netflix, YouTube) and rented for a small fee. If you experience difficulties accessing a film, you must notify me at least one week before the assignment is due so that I can help you locate a digital copy.

Be aware that most of the films required for this course include scenes of menace, violence, sexual violence, and the deaths of humans and other living beings. Some may also include nudity and scenes of sexual activity.

All assigned materials (readings, films, and lectures) will form the basis for class assignments, in-class discussions, presentations, two in-class quizzes and a final exam. Students are encouraged to employ critical thinking and to rely on verifiable sources to interrogate all assigned readings and subject matter in this course as a way of determining whether they agree with their classmates and/or their instructor. No lesson is intended to espouse, promote, advance, inculcate, or compel a particular feeling, perception, viewpoint or belief.

Organization of the Class

This is a discussion-based course in which participation is essential and will count significantly toward the final grade. Students are strongly encouraged to engage actively in class discussions by asking questions, drawing attention to passages from the films or readings, and offering possible interpretations.

In general (though there will be several exceptions, so always check the course schedule!), the class will be organized as follows:

- **Monday:** I will introduce the assigned reading or film and provide a historical and conceptual contextualization of the week's topics.
- **Wednesday:** Two or three students will begin class with short presentations (approximately five minutes each), sharing their reflections on the assigned film and readings and initiating a discussion. All students are expected to participate actively in the discussion.
- **Friday:** The discussion will be continued with the instructor providing commentary on the film and/or readings. Supplementary sources or excerpts from additional films may be presented.

Attendance and Participation (10%)

Active participation in class discussions is central to this course. Your engagement is not only graded but also fundamental to the collective success of our learning community. *I firmly believe that, more than an individual performance, a university class is a collective effort to enhance the knowledge of everyone, and we should all share responsibility for its success.* Please come prepared and contribute actively to discussions. Note that discussions will often include materials beyond the assigned readings and films, making regular attendance essential. Attendance is therefore mandatory.

- **Unexcused Absences:** You are allowed up to **three unexcused absences** (including screenings) for personal reasons. Each additional unexcused absence will lower your final

grade by **3 percentage points** (e.g., a final grade of 91% would be reduced to 85% with five unexcused absences). More than **six unexcused absences** will result in automatic failure of the course.

- **Excused Absences:** Absences due to medical reasons or family emergencies require documentation submitted as soon as possible. Students must make up the material covered, including screenings and class notes. Absences for religious observances do not require documentation, but students must notify the instructor in advance so that attendance can be recorded appropriately.
- **Tardiness:** Attendance will be taken at the beginning of class. Students arriving within the first five minutes after roll is taken will be marked tardy. **Three tardies equal one unexcused absence.** Students arriving more than five minutes late will be marked absent, though they should check in with the instructor after class to confirm attendance.

Canvas Discussion Posts (20%)

Each week (normally before Wednesday's class, though occasionally before Monday's or Friday's class, always check the syllabus!), you are required to post a short paragraph (approximately 150 words) in the *Discussion* section of Canvas. This post should include a brief reflection and/or a few questions regarding the material assigned for the day. The purpose of this assignment is not to test your knowledge of the reading or film (you are not required to summarize them!) but to encourage you to share what you find to be the most interesting issues and questions that arise from them. This can take the form of a question or a series of questions. An original post or a response to someone else's post will both be counted (discussions are encouraged!).

Deadline: Tuesday (in case it is for Wednesday's class, or the day before class if it is for Monday's or Friday's class) at 8:00 PM. Posts submitted after this deadline will not be graded.

You may skip this assignment once during the semester without penalty.

In-Class Presentation (5%)

Once during the semester, each student will give a brief (5-minute) presentation introducing the assigned readings for the day. Presentations should highlight key issues or questions and serve as a springboard for class discussion. Two or three students will present at the start of most Wednesday sessions. A calendar will be distributed by the end of Week 2.

Short Quizzes (20% + 20%)

There will be two short quizzes during the semester, each consisting of open-ended questions covering the assigned films, readings, and class discussions that you will be required to expand upon and reflect on. Questions may address general themes or specific details, and are designed to test both comprehension and critical engagement.

Final In-Class Essay (25%)

On **Wednesday, November 19**, you will write a final in-class essay (50 minutes). You will be given five possible topics, all drawn from material studied during the semester. You will select one topic and develop a focused, analytical response. Detailed instructions and review guidance will be provided later in the course.

Evaluation

Evaluation method in this course is consistent with UF's policies on grading
<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>

Grades are calculated on a numeric scale, as below:

| | | |
|----------|----------|----------|
| A 93–100 | A- 90–92 | |
| B+ 88–89 | B 83–87 | B- 80–82 |
| C+ 78–79 | C 73–77 | C- 70–72 |
| D+ 68–69 | D 63–67 | D- 60–62 |

A grade of 59 or below is a failing grade (E). A minimum final grade of C is required for General Education Credit.

Cell phones and Computers

The use of personal computers and other electronic devices in class is acceptable only for purposes related to class discussion and collaboration. Casual web browsing, emailing, chatting, texting, etc. unrelated to class activities will not be tolerated.

Plagiarism and Cheating

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The Conduct Code specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. [See the UF Conduct Code website for more information](#). If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor or TAs in this class.

Policies on the use of GenerativeAI in this class

U-M GPT, ChatGPT, and other similar technologies are advancing rapidly and there are many instances where they will be key tools in your schoolwork and career. For the purposes of this class, we are asking all students to pledge that they will *not* use these technologies. We believe this is key for this learning environment because we want you to learn how to *critically engage with* the material we'll be discussing, including learning how to search for and identify relevant sources, synthesize these materials, and make recommendations without the aid of technology. Artificial Intelligence cannot do this learning for you. Students who are found to have used GenerativeAI or the like to complete their assignments will receive a grade of zero for that assignment.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the Disability Resource Center. [See the “Get Started With the DRC” webpage on the Disability Resource Center site](#). It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester.

Online Course Evaluation Process

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online. Students can complete evaluations in three ways:

- The email they receive from GatorEvals
- Their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals
- The central portal at <https://my-ufl.bluera.com>

Guidance on how to provide constructive feedback is available at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>.

Academic Resources:

- E-learning technical support: Contact the [UF Computing Help Desk](#) at 352-392-4357 or via e-mail at helpdesk@ufl.edu.
- [Career Connections Center](#): Reitz Union Suite 1300, 352-392-1601. Career assistance and counseling services.
- [Library Support](#): Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources. Call 866-281-6309 or email ask@ufl.libanswers.com for more information.
- [Academic Resources](#): 1317 Turlington Hall, Call 352-392-2010, or to make a private appointment: 352- 392-6420. Email contact: teaching-center@ufl.edu. General study skills and tutoring.

- **Writing Studio:** Daytime (9:30am-3:30pm): 2215 Turlington Hall, [352-846-1138](tel:352-846-1138) | Evening (5:00pm-7:00pm): 1545 W University Avenue (Library West, Rm. 339). Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers.
- Academic Complaints: Office of the Ombuds; [Visit the Complaint Portal webpage for more information.](#)
- Enrollment Management Complaints (Registrar, Financial Aid, Admissions): [View the Student Complaint Procedure webpage for more information.](#)
- UF Student Success Initiative: Visit <https://studentsuccess.ufl.edu/> for resources that support your success as a UF student.

Campus Health and Wellness Resources:

- UF Whole Gator Resources: Visit <https://one.ufl.edu/whole-gator/discover> for resources that are designed to help you thrive physically, mentally, and emotionally at UF.

This course complies with all UF academic policies. For information on those policies and for resources for students, please see [this link](#)

SCHEDULE OF THE COURSE

PART I: INTRODUCTION

Week 1-2

F 8/22

Explanation of the Syllabus

M 8/25

Introduction to the course: What is Desire?

W 8/27

Introduction to the course: What is Desire?

F 8/29

Introduction to *Vertigo* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1958)
(reading) David Spoto, *Vertigo*

Week 3

M 9/1 - (No class) Labor Day

W 9/3

(film) *Vertigo* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1958)

(reading) David Spoto, *Vertigo*

Discussion Post #1

Presentations #1

F 9/5

(film) *Vertigo* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1958)

(reading) David Spoto, *Vertigo*

PART II: THE DIALECTIC OF DESIRE

Week 4

M 9/8

Introduction to Bruce Fink, *The Dialectic of Desire*

W 9/10

(reading) Bruce Fink, *The Dialectic of Desire*

Discussion post #2

Presentations #2

F 9/12

(reading) Bruce Fink, *The Dialectic of Desire*

Week 5

M 9/15

(film) *The Imitation of Life* (John M. Stahl, 1934)

(reading) Donald Bogle, "*Imitation of Life*: Mother Knows Best"

(reading) Miriam J. Petty, "*Imitation of Life*: On Passing Between"

W 9/17

(film) *The Imitation of Life* (John M. Stahl, 1934)

(reading) Donald Bogle, "*Imitation of Life*: Mother Knows Best"

(reading) Miriam J. Petty, "*Imitation of Life*: On Passing Between"

Discussion post #3

Presentations #3

F 9/19

Presentation of Lauren Berlant, *Desire/Love* (pp. 1-68)

Week 6

M 9/22

(reading) Lauren Berlant, *Desire/Love* part II (pp. 1-68)

Discussion post #4

Presentations #4

W 9/24

(reading) Lauren Berlant, *Desire/Love* part II (pp. 1-68)

PART III: LOVE DESIRE

F 9/26

Presentation of Plato, *Symposium*

(reading) Julia Annas, *Plato. A Very Short Introduction* (excerpts)

(reading) Thomas L. Cooksey, "Plato's Symposium. Context and Introduction"

Week 7

M 9/29

(reading) Plato, *Symposium* Part I (beginning - 195a)

Discussion post #5

Presentations #5

W 10/1

Plato, *Symposium* Part II (195a-214d)

F 10/3

Plato, *Symposium* Part II (214d-end)

(reading) Charles H. Kahn, *Plato's Theories of Desire*

Week 8

M 10/6

QUIZ #1

W 10/8

Call Me By Your Name (Luca Guadagnino, 2017)

Discussion post #6

Presentations #6

F 10/10

Call Me By Your Name (Luca Guadagnino, 2017)

PART IV: DESIRE AND CHRISTIANITY

Week 9

M 10/13

(reading) Introduction to St. Augustine, *Confessions* (readings: entry on [Saint Augustine](#) in Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy [at least paragraphs "Life", "Work", "Augustine and Philosophy", "The Philosophical Tradition; Augustine's Platonism" but the entire entry is encouraged])

(podcast) "[Life and Time: Augustine Confession](#)" in *History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps*)

W 10/15

(reading) St. Augustine, *Confessions* (Book One, ch. VI, VII, VIII, pp. 6-10; Book Two I-X, pp. 25-34; Book Three, ch. I-V, pp. 37-42)

Discussion post #7

Presentations #7

F 10/17

No class (Homecoming)

week 10

M 10/20

(reading) St. Augustine, *Confessions* (Book Seven, ch. III-V, pp. 119-122 and ch. XII-XVII, pp. 130-137; Book Eight, (all), pp. 141-160)

(reading) Roert R. Edwards, *Desire in Saint Augustine's Confessions* (optional)

W 10/22

(film) *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* (Carl Theodor Dreyer, 1928) (excerpts shown in class)

(film) *Procès de Jeanne d'Arc* (Robert Bresson, 1962) (excerpts shown in class)

F 10/24

(film) *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* (Carl Theodor Dreyer, 1928) (excerpts shown in class)

(film) *Procès de Jeanne d'Arc* (Robert Bresson, 1962) (excerpts shown in class)

PART V: THE MULTIPLICITY OF DESIRE

Week 11

M 10/27

Introduction to Gilles Deleuze's theory of desire

W 10/29

(reading) Gilles Deleuze, *Desire*;
(reading) Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, *What is Desire?*
Discussion post #8
Presentations #8

F 10/31
(film) *Spring Breakers* (Harmony Korine, 2012)

Week 12

M 11/3
Introduction to *Mulholland Dr.* (David Lynch, 2001)

W 11/5
(film) *Mulholland Dr.* (David Lynch, 2001)
(reading) Todd McGowan, Lost on Mulholland Drive: Navigating David Lynch's Panegyric to Hollywood
Discussion post #9
Presentations #9

F 11/7
(film) *Mulholland Dr.* (David Lynch, 2001)
(reading) Todd McGowan, Lost on Mulholland Drive: Navigating David Lynch's Panegyric to Hollywood

Week 13

M 11/10
(reading) Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality. Part 1* (We "Other Victorians")

W 11/13
(reading) Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality. Part 1* (The Repressive Hypothesis)
Discussion post #10
Presentations #10

F 11/14

Quiz #2

Week 14

M 11/17
Introduction to Judith Butler and Monique Wittig
(reading) Veronique Mottier "The Invention of Sexuality"

11/19

(reading) Monique Witting, *One Is Not Born a Woman*

(reading) Judith Butler, *Imitation and Gender Insubordination*

Discussion post #11

Presentations #11

11/21

FINAL

Week 11/23-11/30 Thanksgiving Holiday

PART VI: CONCLUSION

Week 15

M 12/1

Final Discussion

W 12/3

Concluding remarks