

ENG 4015 What is Desire?

Class# 26784 Section 9008



Instructor Name: Pietro Bianchi

Course meeting times & location: MWF 7 (1:55 PM – 2:45 PM) Weimer Hall 1070

Office Hours: Wednesday 9 AM – 11 AM Turlington 4342 (or Zoom) or by appointment

Course website: elearning.ufl.edu

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“Desire is not a simple thing” Sigmund Freud used to say. Still, sometimes our empirical experience seems to be the opposite. It would not be difficult to list all the material objects, things and experiences that would fulfill the phrase: “make a wish”. Yet, psychoanalysis teaches us not to confuse “desire” with “will”. If it is true that we live in a society that has monumentalized self-confidence and “knowing what you want”, the place of desire, as separate from will, seems to remain elusive. Beyond all the material goods and at the bottom of all the commodities that surround us and that we would like to have, there is something about ourselves that remain opaque and cannot be expressed. This is what psychoanalysis calls “desire”: a question about our own identity; a blank spot in our own subjectivity.

Course Objectives

Through active and persistent engagement with course materials, activities and discussion in class students will:

- Become familiar with the different theories of desire that will be presented in class.
- Be able to conceptually and historically contextualize the theoretical debates that will be studied during the semester.
- Develop advanced skills in reading and interpreting works of critical theory, philosophy, critical sociology and film studies.
- Improve critical analysis capabilities in the process of analyzing and writing on films.
- Become familiar with basic notions of psychoanalytic theory and practice.
- Find and use scholarly research on psychoanalysis, theory and film studies in an academic essay.

Required Readings and Films

All readings will be available on Canvas in the Files section of the website. No textbook purchase is required for this class. While not always substantial in terms of number of pages the readings will have to be studied thoroughly and with extreme care: together with the films, they will be the subject of class assignments, in-class discussions, presentations and two in-class quizzes. Reading will consist in scholarly articles, excerpts of theory or philosophy books, or on-line articles about psychoanalysis and theories of desire. You will see that especially during some weeks some of these readings will be considerably challenging: while every reading will be accompanied and thoroughly explained in class, you are expected to come to class prepared and to be able to faithfully summarize the content of every assigned article or book chapter.

Quite often, together with the reading, the main assignment will consist in the analysis and discussion of a film, that will be assigned to watch before coming to class. You will be asked to discuss them and give your opinions about them. Films are integral part of the assignment for the class and need to be watched with extreme care and attention (avoiding breaking down the vision in parts, avoiding check the cell phone while watching them, always keep a notebook where to write down your impression during the viewing etc.). You will be provided with links to stream them and watch them at home. Some films required for this course might include scenes of menace, violence, and the deaths of humans and other living beings. Some scenes might include nudity and scenes of sexual activity.

Organization of the Class

This is a discussion-based course, where participation is vital and it will be significantly considered for the final grade. Students are strongly encouraged to participate actively in class discussions by asking questions, draw class attention to passages of the film or of the reading, or offering a possible interpretation. In general (but there will be exceptions, so always check the schedule of classes!) the course will be organized as follow: on Monday I will introduce the reading or the film and offer a historical and conceptual contextualization of the topics of the week; on Wednesday, the class will be briefly introduced by two or three of you where you will share – with a 5 minutes presentation – your reflections on the assigned film and reading, and open up the discussion with the class; on Friday we will continue the discussion and I will eventually further material for our discussion.

Course Requirements

The requirements for this course fall under four categories:

Attendance and Participation (10%)

The core of this class will be the discussions class, where your active participation will not only be graded but will be a fundamental component for the success of the class. I firmly believe that more than an individual performance, a university class is a collective effort to increase the knowledge of everyone and regarding which we should all be considered responsible. Please be an active participant of this class! Also, be aware that, **especially in this class**, discussions will often include review of materials not among the assigned texts or films. For these reasons, your presence in class is essential and attendance is mandatory.

No more than three unexcused absences for personal reasons will be tolerated. Each additional unexcused absence will reduce your total final grade by 3 percentage points (for instance, if your final grade is 91% and you have 5 unexcused absences, your final grade will be 85%). **More than 6 unexcused absences will result in the automatic failure of the class.**

For every other absence (for medical reason or family emergencies) you should provide documentation as soon as possible, and make up the material covered in class, which includes viewing films and getting notes from class discussion. Absences for religious reasons do not require written documentation, but students should inform me timely so that they reflect credit for attendance. **I will take attendance at the beginning of class. If you are not there when I call your name, you will be counted as absent.**

Requirement for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found at: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/attendance-policies>

Post on Canvas and short introduction to the class discussion (20% + 5%)

1. Every Wednesday (starting 1 September), you will be asked to post a short paragraph (around 150 words) on the Discussion section of Canvas with a short reflection and/or a few questions regarding the film/reading assigned for the day. The purpose of this assignment is not to test your knowledge about the film/reading (you do not have to summarize them!) but ask you to share with the class what you believe are the most interesting problematics and questions that emerge from them. This can also have the form of a question or a series of questions. An original post or a response to someone else's post will equally be counted (discussions are encouraged!). The deadline of the posts on Canvas is **Wednesday at 8:00 am**. You have the possibility to skip this assignment once in the semester without penalty. After that, every post uploaded after 10:00am of the due date will not be considered and receive a failed grade.

2. Once in the semester you will be asked to give a **5 minutes presentation** where you will share your reflections on the assigned film/reading and open up the discussion with the class. Every Wednesday class will be opened by three of you who will introduce and present the assigned material (a calendar will be given in the second week).

Short Quizzes (20% + 20%)

Twice times during the semester there will be a short quiz based on few open-ended questions related on the readings and films analyzed in that section of the semester. They can cover general or specific topics related to the readings, films and discussions held in class.

Final research essay (25%)

A final 1,500-2,000 words research paper on a research topic related to the material covered in class. The paper is a research project, wherein you will have the opportunity to further expand upon, analyze in more detail, or take in new directions the material covered in the course. You may want to explore in more depth one of the topic that we analyzed; make connections between several of them; examine a specific theme or issue that emerges in a number of different works; compare and contrast the arguments of different scholars; or try something else altogether. All paper topics must be approved in advance by the instructor (either coming to office hours – which is strongly encouraged – or by email) and submitted before the Thanksgiving break. The essay is due the last day of class.

Evaluation

Evaluation method in this course is consistent with UF's policies on grading

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx> (Links to an external site.) (Links to an external site.) (Links to an external site.)

Grades are calculated on a numeric scale, as below:

A 90–100	A- 87–89	
B+ 84–86	B 80–83	B- 77–79
C+ 74–76	C 70–73	C- 67–69
D+ 64–66	D 60–63	D- 57–59

A grade of 56 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

Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of the intellectual works of others, including published and unpublished material from the web or friends, as well as purchased papers or other research materials. Every form of cheating will result in a letter grade F for this course and in a report of misconduct to the Dean of Students Office.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/ ([Links to an external site.](#)) ([Links to an external site.](#)) ([Links to an external site.](#))) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter which must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester and contact the instructor as soon as possible.

Statement on Harassment

UF provides an educational and working environment for its students, faculty, and staff that is free from sexual, racial, ethnic, gender, and religious discrimination and sexual harassment.

Online Course Evaluation Process

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu>. Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results/>.

Health and Wellness

U Matter, We Care: If you or a friend is in distress, please contact umatter@ufl.edu or 352 392-1575 so that a team member can reach out to the student.

Counseling and Wellness Center: <http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc> and 392-1575

Sexual Assault Recovery Services (SARS): Student Health Care Center, 392-1161.

Class Schedule

PART I: INTRODUCTION

Week 1

8/23 Presentation of the course

8/25 What is Desire?

8/27 What is Desire?

Week 2

8/30 Alfred Hitchcock, *Vertigo*

9/1 Alfred Hitchcock, *Vertigo*
Blog post # 1 (Presentation #1)

9/3 Alfred Hitchcock, *Vertigo*

PART II: THE DIALECTIC OF DESIRE

Week 3

9/6 (Holiday: Labor Day)

9/8 Bruce Fink, *The Dialectic of Desire*
Blog post #2 (Presentation #2)

9/10 Bruce Fink, *The Dialectic of Desire*

Week 4

9/13 Bruce Fink, *The Dialectic of Desire*

9/15 *The Imitation of Life* (John M. Stahl, 1934)
Blog post #3 (Presentation #3)

9/17 *The Imitation of Life* (John M. Stahl, 1934)

Week 5

9/20 Presentation of Lauren Berlant, *Desire/Love*

9/22 Lauren Berlant, *Desire/Love* part I
Blog post #4 (Presentation #4)

9/24 Lauren Berlant, *Desire/Love* part II

PART III: LOVE DESIRES

Week 6

9/27 Presentation of Plato, *Symposium*
Julia Annas, *Plato. A Very Short Introduction* (excerpts)

9/29 Plato, *Symposium* (part I)
Blog post #5 (Presentation #5)

10/1 Plato, *Symposium* (part II)

Week 7

10/4 Charles H. Kahn, *Plato's Theories of Desire*

10/6 *Call Me By Your Name* (Luca Guadagnino, 2017)
Blog post #6 (Presentation #6)

10/8 Holiday (Homecoming)

Week 8

10/11 Quiz #1

PART III: DESIRE AND CHRISTIANITY

10/13 Introduction to St. Augustine, *Confessions*

10/15 St. Augustine, *Confessions* (excerpts)

Roert R. Edwards, *Desire in Saint Augustine's Confessions*
Blog post #7 (Presentation #7)

Week 9

10/18 St. Augustine, *Confessions* (excerpts)

Roert R. Edwards, *Desire in Saint Augustine's Confessions*

10/20 *Joan of Arc* (Carl Theodor Dreyer, 1928) (excerpts)

10/22 *Joan of Arc* (Carl Theodor Dreyer, 1928) (excerpts)

PART IV: THE MULTIPLICITY OF DESIRE

Week 10

10/25 Introduction to Gilles Deleuze's theory of desire

10/27 Gilles Deleuze, *D as Desire*

Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* (excerpts)
Blog post #8 (Presentation #8)

10/29 *Spring Breakers* (Harmony Korine, 2012)

Week 11

11/1 Introduction to David Lynch's *Lost Highway*

11/3 *Lost Highway* (David Lynch, 1997)

Blog post #9 (Presentation #9)

11/5 *Lost Highway* (David Lynch, 1997)

Week 12

11/8 Introduction to Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality. Part 1* (excerpts)

11/10 Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality. Part 1* (excerpts)

Blog post #10 (Presentation #10)

11/12 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (excerpts)

Week 13

11/15 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (excerpts)

11/17 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (excerpts)
Blog post #11 (Presentation #11)

11/19 Quiz #2

Week 14

11/22 Recap Final Papers

11/24 Holiday (Thanksgiving)

11/26 Holiday (Thanksgiving)

PART V: CONCLUSION

Week 15

11/29 *Magnificent Obsession* (Douglas Sirk, 1954)

12/1 *Magnificent Obsession* (Douglas Sirk, 1954)

12/3 *Magnificent Obsession* (Douglas Sirk, 1954)

Week 16

12/6 Concluding remarks

12/8 Final paper due