Patricia Gherovici, Ph.D.

LIVABLE EMBODIMENTS: Trans* Psychoanalysis as a New Discipline

This course will help participants see the practical dimensions and the applications of a psychoanalytic practice based on a new ethics of sexual difference. This course will deploy the Lacanian theory of the sinthome, a way to rethink sexual difference, so as to demonstrate the possibility of extending it into the clinical practice as well as into the cultural landscape. This is a landscape in which notions of gender, sex, and sexuality have been transformed by what can be called “the democratization of transgender.” It will be of interest to psychoanalysts, psychologists, and other mental health clinicians and to scholars interested in gender studies, queer studies, sexuality.

Descriptions

Friday: Lecture
From Gender Trouble to Livable Embodiments

“I had no choice. I would be dead if I hadn’t transitioned—I would have killed myself.” Drawing on her clinical experience as a psychoanalyst working with gender-variant analysands, Gherovici argues that those compelled to change gender often do it because they are facing the most crucial issues of life and death. What is at stake is less gender fluidity than finding a way of being. Challenging the pathologization of transgenderism historically enforced by psychoanalysis, the presenter makes use of Lacan’s notion of the sinthome to propose an embodied ethics of desire capable of fundamentally rethinking sexuality by taking seriously the issue of mortality inscribed in sexuality.

The Friday evening lecture should appeal to a wide audience because it is based on clinical vignettes, case analyses, and sex change narratives. The case material gives the participants a clear sense of the importance of the issues discussed. This presentation can be of critical importance for clinicians because the presenter will explore inbuilt prejudices that obfuscate clinical efficacy and expose the audience to new clinical modalities of how to approach sexual and social difference.
Saturday: Workshop:
*Writing the Body: Theory of the Sinthome*

Can psychoanalysis talk about sexual difference without a direct reference to the Oedipus complex and to the highly contested notion of the phallus? Lacan did not hesitate to go beyond the Oedipus complex when he proposed a form of the symptom that he called “sinthome.” Thanks to the “sinthome,” sexual difference can be tackled without fully relying on the notion of phallus. This section of the course explores a new notion of the symptom. We should no longer think of the symptom as something to decode, as the carrier of a repressed message or a signifier to be deciphered by reference to an unconscious “structured like a language,” but as the trace of the unique way someone enjoys his or her unconscious. Thus we move beyond the confines of the pathological and witness an act of creation. The symptom renamed by Lacan the “sinthome” can be defined as a singular invention whose very function is to allow someone to live. This definition of the symptom has important consequences for a positive ending of analysis especially when dealing with analysands who identify as trans. The notion of the sinthome will be further unpacked; it will find a precise clinical application in the example of the case of Jay, a case that will be discussed and compared with the work of a transgender artist, Swift Shuker, for whom bodily transformation ends up generating a reconciliation with life.

**Bibliography:**

Sunday: Workshop:
*Depathologizing Trans: A Critical Analysis of Lacan’s and Millot’s Analyses of Transgender Cases*

Today’s practitioners may not know that Lacan was the first psychoanalyst in France to work with a gender-variant patient who requested a sex-change. Moreover, Lacan intervened in a manner that expressed an ethics of sexual difference. With Henri, whom Lacan saw every week between 1952 and 1954, Lacan sketched the lineaments of a new theory of sexual identity. In a 1971 seminar, Lacan remarked that transsexuals have trouble with the phallus because they dispense with lack; they also confuse the actual organ with the signifier, meaning the material side of language. Lacan was aware that the transsexual demand for the surgical removal of attributes like the breasts or the penis can in some cases derive from an inability to use metaphors for those organs; they thus literalize the Freudian mechanism of castration. As a result, Lacanian psychoanalysts, led by Catherine Millot, started pathologizing transgender manifestations. The discussion of this workshop will be aimed at challenging the systematic pathologization of trans expressions by revisiting Lacan’s “transsexuals” as well as examples from the presenter’s practice and from sex-change memoirs from the perspective of trans* psychoanalysis.
Bibliography:


Patricia Gherovici

Patricia Gherovici, Ph.D. is a psychoanalyst and analytic supervisor. She is the co-founder and director of the Philadelphia Lacan Group, Associate Faculty, Psychoanalytic Studies Minor, University of Pennsylvania, and Honorary Member at IPTAR the Institute for Psychoanalytic Training and Research in New York City.


Who may attend?
The Distinguished Speakers Workshop is open to the public.

Inquiries

Any inquiries should be directed to Marilyn Henline at 412-396-6520 or henline@duq.edu.

Mission Statement of the Department of Psychology at Duquesne University

The Department of Psychology at Duquesne University educates students who are sensitive to the assumptions that underlie any effort to understand human beings, and the historical, cultural, relational, and embodied character of all human thought and activity. Accordingly, faculty and graduates are sensitive to the multiple meanings of existence, work towards the liberation and well-being of persons individually as well as in community, and do so with a deep and abiding consideration of ethics.