

## 2025–2026 Course Proposal

**Megan Sherritt** msherrit@uwo.ca

**Course Title:** Cutting together-apart: Bringing psychoanalysis and Indigenous critical theory into dialogue

This course brings Indigenous critical theory and psychoanalytic theory into a dialogue to create new understandings and possibilities. The aim is to (re)imagine the (potential) relationship between the fields and how they may intersect in ways that interrogate or disrupt our expectations and encourage creativity. This course is also an attempt to incorporate Indigenous critical theory into “mainstream” theoretical discussion, to move the field beyond critique and the siloing of Indigenous voices that often occurs within academia.

**Course Description:** Indigenous critical theory has been hostile to Western psychology, yet much of it contains remarkable parallels with psychoanalysis (noting, however, that Indigenous criticism of psychology often neglects psychoanalysis). For instance, both Indigenous thought and psychoanalytic theory value experience and recognize *something* beyond what we can easily talk about or understand. This recognition is not (exactly) a willingness to naively believe or believing without “evidence”; this recognition is that unspeakable experience, even in absence of double-blind randomized controlled trials, *is* evidence. Neither area denies scientific facts; instead, both recognize the (Lacanian) logic (as described by Zupančič) that fantasy is the frame of reality—that our subjectivity is what permits objectivity, and “fantasy” is inherent in the *structure* of reality.

The course will begin with looking closely at selections of Freud’s writing from *Totem and Taboo* and *Civilization and Its Discontents* alongside introductory material related to Indigenous critical theory (Chris Andersen) with an optional reading to set the stage for the course (Karen Barad). A selection of texts from Indigenous critical theory and psychoanalytic theory will be looked at in a sort-of pseudo dialogue related to overlapping themes from each field. Main psychoanalytic texts will be from Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, Melanie Klein, Philip Bromberg, Thomas Ogden, Donald W. Winnicott, and Jessica Benjamin. The psychoanalytic thinkers will be paired with Indigenous critical theorists such as Glenn Coulthard, John T. Ward, Shay Welch, David Garneau, Daniel Heath Justice, Linda Tuhiwa Smith, Chris Andersen, Darryl Leroux, Leann Betasamosake Simpson, Eve Tuck, and K. Wayne Yang. (Final lists are subject to change.) Through the various pairings, we will explore topics such as fantasy, dreams, creativity/arts, self/subject/relationality, identity, human nature, the unconscious, the body/phenomenology, narrative/repetition, silence, reconciliation/Lacan’s (university) discourse(s), and decolonization/metaphor.

Although the focus is on Indigenous critical theory and psychoanalysis, the topic of focus overall will be broad enough for students to bring their own research interests into the dialogue. There are no predetermined understandings that students must attain; rather, we will develop ideas through ongoing discussions, and students could explore (in their final paper or reflection piece) how new understanding(s) might influence sociological theories or philosophical ideas of what it means to be a subject (or human), or what could be gained by incorporating critical race theory or anti-colonial, post-colonial, de-colonial thought (e.g., Franz Fanon, Fred Moten, Sara Ahmed) into the dialogue, etc.

## **Method of Evaluation:**

### Presentation/Seminar (20–30 minutes): 30%

Presentations will be on the readings from *either* the Indigenous critical theory *or* psychoanalytic theory readings for the week. You are not expected to relate the readings from one area to another (see below re. Respondents), although you may. There are up to two seminars a week, one from each area: presenters are welcome to work together if they wish but it is by no means required. Focus is on understanding(s) and analysis of the text itself.

### Respondent to seminar (x2): $10\% \times 2 = 20\%$

Prepare to lead/encourage class discussion on the two works (or two areas discussed in that day's seminars. Since the presenter's focus is on only one area, the respondent's role is to synthesize or problematize the readings in combination and to raise ideas and facilitate a larger group discussion on about the intersections (or tensions) between the two areas.

### Research paper (5000-7000 words): 35%

Taking the overall theme of the class into account, you will explore in-depth one or more aspects arising from the course material. Papers must take both Indigenous critical theory and psychoanalytic theory into account but may also (but need not) delve into areas not covered by the course. Take this opportunity to weave your own interests into the course material and see how your thoughts on the material might apply to those interests.

### Reflection (500-1000 words or the equivalent): 10%

A short submission on any of the readings, in any of the areas. The paper can be on the readings (plural) for the week or one reading that is of particular interest. The paper does not have to follow a standard format, and you are free to be creative, that is, your response does not *have* to be a paper; however, if you wish to develop a response using another medium, please discuss it with me first so we can establish some parameters.

### Participation: 5%

Participation isn't merely about talking. Participation can include active listening, emails that raise issues that you didn't bring up in class, discussion in the hallway, etc. I just need to know you've engaged with the material.