Society and Psychoanalysis – Multiple Perspectives on Freud and his Era

A Lecture Series

Course coordinator: Richard Lein | February 2-13, 2026 | 4 ECTS

Course Description

Around 1900, economic and social changes fostered deepening political and cultural conflicts. Emancipatory movements and mass phenomena demanded new approaches. Vienna was culturally highly complex and politically and socially divided. Religion and social conventions ceased to provide sufficient orientation. Mass movements and political demagogues characterized the public space.
Psychoanalysis offered new ways of dealing with actual problems and found its way not only into psychiatry, into art, literature, and music but also into the emerging social sciences and political analysis. This was a radical reaction against traditional views of the world.
Psychoanalysis would combine and elaborate developments that had been around since the 18th century. The scientific exploration of intimate emotions and of areas that were once taboo – like infantile sexuality or the profane foundation of religion and the functioning of propaganda – was considered scandalous but nevertheless gained a wide notoriety and eventually revealed dimensions of human behavior and cultural life commonly denied or concealed.
In this course we want to combine a look at the history of human sciences with an exploration of developments in the fields of society, politics and culture.

Requirements: The grading is based on **attendance and participation** during class (30 %), a **short paper** (30 %) and a **written final exam** (40 %).

Syllabus

1st week	
Monday, February 2, 2026 11:00 AM – 13:00 PM Seminarraum Geschichte 3	Introduction, Political and Social Situation in Fin-de-Siècle Vienna *Richard Lein*
Tuesday, February 3, 2026 11:00 AM – 13:00 PM Seminarraum Geschichte 3	Art and Psychoanalysis - Interpretation of Dreams *Elana Shapira*
Wednesday, February 4, 2026 11:00 AM – 13:00 PM Seminarraum Geschichte 3	Art and Psychoanalysis - The Uncanny and Art *Elana Shapira*
Wednesday, February 4, 2026 14:00 PM – 16:00 PM Sigmund Freud Museum	Mandatory excursion to the Sigmund Freud Museum Meeting point: 14:00 PM in front of the Museum (see Moodle for details) *Daniela Finzi*
Thursday, February 5, 2026 11:00 AM –13:00 PM Seminarraum Geschichte 3	Literary Anticipations and Reflections of Freud's Theories *Johann Georg Lughofer*
Friday, February 6, 2026 11:00 AM –13:00 PM Seminarraum Geschichte 3	Foundations of Creativity. The University of Vienna in 1900 *Klaus Taschwer*

2nd week	
Monday, February 9, 2026 11:00 AM –13:00 PM Seminarraum Geschichte 3	Introduction to the Fundamentals of Psychoanalysis – Part 1 The Discovery of the Unconscious: Basic Ideas *Sabine Schlüter*
Tuesday, February 10, 2026 11:00 AM –13:00 PM Seminarraum Geschichte 3	Jewish Emancipation and the Scientific Background of Psychoanalysis *Mitchell Ash*
Wednesday, February 11, 2026 11:00 AM –13:00 PM Seminarraum Geschichte 3	Introduction to the Fundamentals of Psychoanalysis – Part 2 Sigmund Freud: "The two Principles of Psychic Functioning": The Theory of Drives, Repression, and Defense Mechanisms *Sabine Schlüter*
Thursday, February 12, 2026 11:00 AM –13:00 PM Seminarraum Geschichte 3	Introduction to the Fundamentals of Psychoanalysis – Part 3 Sigmund Freud: "Creative Writers and Day Dreaming": Symbolization *Sabine Schlüter*
Friday, February 13, 2024 11:00 AM –13:00 PM Seminarraum Geschichte 3	Final Exam

Recommended Reading

Anderson, Erich: "Dreams in Color. Sigmund Freud's Decorative Encounters", in: Design Dialogue. Jews, Culture and Viennese Modernism, 2018, 161-178.
Beller, Steven: Vienna and the Jews 1867-1938, 1989.
Boyer, John W.: Austria 1867-1955, 2022.
Cockett, Richard: Vienna. How the city of ideas created the modern world, 2024.
Coen, Deborah R.: Vienna in the age of uncertainty, 2007.
Ehrenzweig, Anton: The Hidden Order of Art: A Study in the Psychology of Artistic Imagination, 1971.
Einstein, Albert; Freud, Sigmund: Why War? (exchange of letters 1930). 1932
Foster, Hal et al: Art Since 1900 Modernism Antimodernism Postmodernism, 2011, 64-68.
Freud, Sigmund: 'Civilized' Sexual Morality and modern nervous illness. 1908.
Freud, Sigmund: "Dreams as Wish-Fulfilments", in: The Interpretation of Dreams, 1900 Translated from the German and edited by James Strachey,2010, 147-157.
Freud, Sigmund: "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming,", in: Collected Papers, Vol. IV, Authorised translation under the supervision of Joan Riviere, 1953, 419-428.
Freud, Sigmund: "The Uncanny,", in: The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol XVII, 1917-1919, 1955, 218-252.
Kandel, Eric: The Age of Insight. The Quest to Understand the Unconscious in Art, Mind, and Brain, from Vienna 1900 to the present, 2012.
Jameson, Fredric: The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act, 1982.
Makari, George: Revolution in Mind: The Creation of Psychoanalysis, 2010.
Milner, Marion: On Not Being Able to Paint, 2010.
Nielsen, Erika: Focus on Vienna 1900. Change and Continuity in Literature, Music, Art and Intellectual History, 1982.
Pick, Daniel: Psychoanalysis: A Very Short Introduction, 2015.
Robertson, Angus: The crossroads of civilization. A history of Vienna, 2022.
Schorske, Carl: Fin-de-Siècle Vienna. Politics and culture, 1981.
Winnicott, Donald W.: Playing and Reality, 2005.

List of proposals for the final paper

Your essay should deal with one aspect of the lecture series. The paper should be around two to three pages long (6.500-7.500 characters incl. spaces).

Some suggestions for topics:
The political situation in the late Habsburg Monarchy
Political radicalism in Fin-de-Siècle Vienna
The University of Vienna as a cradle of ideas
Inner and outer reality (How are inner and outer reality connected?)
Creative working and primary process (How does creative working emerge from primary process?)
Reality principle and pleasure principle (How does the reality principle develop from the pleasure principle?)
The function of defence in the psyche (What is defence and why is it essential for everyone?)
The unconscious in everyday life (How does the unconscious manifest itself in everyday life? How does it help or bother us?)
The first (i.e. the topical) model of the psyche (How can the topical model be described?)
The dynamics of the drives (What drives exist and how do they interact?)

OR

A topic of your choice