Our aim in this seminar is to introduce you to the origins of a psychoanalytic approach emphasizing the phenomena of object relations, as articulated in the work of six of its prime originators: Melanie Klein, Joan Riviere, Michael Balint, Donald Winnicott, W.R.D. Fairbairn, and John Bowlby. We will show how this approach to early childhood development and personality organization began in the 1920’s and 1930’s, how its creators influenced each other, and how major changes ensued over the next forty years. We intend to study the lives and work of these thinkers, and in particular to demonstrate how their clinical and naturalistic observations of young children led them to propose novel theories of mental structure. A central theme will be the various theorists’ views of the relationship between internal and external reality. At the conclusion of the course we expect students to assess these theories critically, and to use them more clearly and effectively in clinical work with patients.


Week 1


Learning objective: Students will be able to describe the novel play techniques Melanie Klein developed for the psychoanalytic treatment of very young children, and the two most important and surprising of her findings about the onset and content of their anxieties.

Week 2


Learning objective: Students will be able to describe two of Mrs. Klein’s observations of children’s play, daydreams, and spontaneous stories, in which their wishes and fears are personified as ‘objects’.

Week 3


Learning objective: Students will be able to explain two key, controversial aspects of Klein’s theory, as they were presented in Riviere’s 1936 lecture to Viennese followers of Anna Freud.

Week 4


**Learning objective:** From the reports of Michael Balint, a contemporary participant and observer of the psychoanalytic scene in the 1930’s, students will be able to identify and discuss a central difference of opinion regarding the typical mental contents of infants and very young children.

**Week 5**


**Learning Objective:** Students will be able to describe how Donald Winnicott, a practicing pediatrician as well as psychoanalyst, initially made use of Melanie Klein’s work on early child development suggesting an ‘inner world’ of objects.

**Week 6**


**Learning objective:** Students will be able to outline one of Winnicott’s most original contributions to psychoanalysis, the idea of transitional objects and transitional phenomena—neither inner reality nor outer reality, but “a whole intermediate territory between ‘inner psychic reality’ and ‘the external world as perceived by two persons in common’…”
Week 7


**Learning objective:** Students will be able to describe and critically evaluate W.R.D. Fairbairn’s account of the clinical observations and theoretical reasoning which led him to make major revisions to Freud’s theory of motivation and psychic structure, which he then called an ‘object relations theory of personality’.

Week 8


Supplemental reading: Bowlby, J., Figlio, K., and Young, R.M. (1986). An interview with John Bowlby on the origins and reception of his work. *Free Associations*, 1(6), 36-64. [PEP Web Link](#)

**Learning objective:** Students will be able to describe the direct observations of children and the theoretical arguments marshalled by John Bowlby in his critical review of previous psychoanalytic views regarding the nature of early attachment to mother and the consequences of disruption of that attachment.