2020 marks 100 years since the publication of Sigmund Freud’s “Beyond the Pleasure Principle.” A turning point in Freud’s psychoanalytic theory, the essay complicated the pursuit of pleasure led by the sexual instinct or libido, ushering in a second, competing desire that moves life in the opposite direction and down a path of negativity and destruction, articulated by Freud as the ‘death drive’.

With a distinct, sex-positive approach, LOVE SPELLS & RITUALS FOR ANOTHER WORLD presents a seminar, a day of workshops, and film programme that together re-address the question of desire from the perspective of the contemporary moment.

Engaging with queer, feminist and decolonial approaches and drawing on developments in cultural studies more broadly, we move not just beyond Freud’s ‘pleasure principle’ but beyond Freud himself, and invite ourselves to think of desire as ‘schizo-’ instead: “A primary relay to individuated social identity, as in coupling, family, reproduction, and other sites of personal history,” desire, as Laurent Berlant notes in Desire/Love, is “also the impulse that most destabilises people, putting them into plots beyond their control”. As a kind of evental magick, this destabilisation also binds us together in unexpected ways, carrying the power to perform the impossible: it “reorganises worlds.”

How, we ask, do we call on this power of desire, reinvigorated today by black, feminist, and queer perspectives, to design rituals that further enable communities of difference and bring about another world?

With

Keti Chukhrov (National Research University Higher School of Economics, Moscow)
Mijke van der Drift (Royal College of Art, London; BAK, Utrecht)
Minou Norouzi (Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies)
Nat Raha (Edinburgh College of Art)
Nydia A. Swaby (Institute of Contemporary Art, London)

This programme is a Royal Holloway, University of London, PGR-led initiative, curated by Lilly Markaki and organised in collaboration with Sidonie Carey-Green and Lisa Moravec. It is funded by the newly launched School of Performing and Digital Arts, RHUL; the Humanities and Arts Research Institute (HARI); and the Department of Media Arts, RHUL. The film programme, curated by Minou Norouzi is supported by the Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies and the Arts Council England.
SYMPOSIUM PROGRAMME

DAY I / FRI, 29 MAY (Seminar)

10:00-10:30  Registration
10:30-11:00  Symposium Opening
11:00-13:30  Exchange #1: Participant Contributions followed by discussion
13:30-14:30  Lunch Break
14:30-17:30  Exchange #2: Participant Contributions followed by discussion
17:30-18:00  Long Break
18:00-19:30  Keynote Lecture #1: 'The Vicissitudes of Pleasure: Between the Machines of Desire and the Politics of the Good' by Keti Chukhrov
19:30-21:00  Participants Reception

DAY II / SAT, 30 MAY (Workshops & Screening)

11:00-13:00  Workshop #1: 'Queer desires, queer Marxisms' led by Nat Raha
13:00-14:00  Lunch Break
14:00-16:00  Workshop #2: 'Love from the margins: black feminism, love rituals, and the politics of pleasure' led by Nydia A. Swaby
16:00-16:30  Long Break
16:30-18:00  Keynote Lecture #2: 'Realistically Impossible: the Magic of Social Change' by Mijke van der Drift

20:00-22:00  Film Screening at Close-Up Film Centre curated by Minou Norouzi  (Details TBC)
Keti Chukhrov is ScD in philosophy, an associate professor at the Department of Cultural Studies at the Higher School of Economics (Moscow). In 2017-2019 she has been a Marie Skłodowska Curie fellow in UK, Wolverhampton University. She has authored numerous texts on art theory and philosophy. Her full-length books include: To Be—To Perform. ‘Theatre’ in Philosophic Critique of Art (European Un-ty, 2011), and Pound &£ (Logos, 1999) and a volume of dramatic writing: Merely Humans (2010). Her research interests and publications deal with: 1. Philosophy of performativity; 2. the impact of socialist political economy on the epistemologies of historical socialism; 3. Art-systems. Her forthcoming book Practicing the Good, Desire and Boredom in Soviet Socialism deals with the communist epistemologies in the Soviet Marxist philosophy of 1960-s and 1970-s.

Mijke van der Drift is a writer, educator, and performer, using ethics as a focal point in multi-disciplinary research about social transformation. Van der Drift lectures at the Royal College of Art, London and is a research fellow at BAK, Utrecht. Their current project The Logic of Loss in Bonding uses film and philosophy to formulate a counterpoint to managerial theories of accumulation. Their film A way of dying… (2017), co-directed with Alex Reuter, is touring. In addition, Van der Drift is currently working on their book Nonnormative Ethics: The Dynamics of Trans Formation. They obtained a PhD from Goldsmiths, University of London, London. Van der Drift lives and works in Amsterdam and London.

Minou Norouzi is a filmmaker, film curator and writer. She is currently a Postdoctoral Researcher in the Arts at the Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies, University of Helsinki (2019 – 2020). Her research examines documentaries in an interdisciplinary context drawing on decolonial feminist scholarship.

Nat Raha is a poet, trans / queer activist and scholar, living in Edinburgh, Scotland. Her third collection of poetry is of sirens, body & faultlines (Boiler House Press, 2018), and her creative and critical writing has appeared or is forthcoming in the South Atlantic Quarterly, LIES: A Journal of Materialist Feminism, and the Verso blog. Nat holds a PhD from the University of Sussex, and recently completed a postdoctoral position on the ‘Cruising the 70s: Unearthing Pre-HIV/AIDS Queer Sexual Cultures' project at the Edinburgh College of Art. She co-edits Radical Transfeminism zine.

Nydia A. Swaby is a creative writer, performance lecturer, and ritual artist working at the intersection of archives, ethnography, and visual culture. She has a PhD in gender studies from SOAS and specialises in theories of gendered, racial, and diasporic formation, black feminism, and black queer studies. Nydia is Curator of Learning at the Institute of Contemporary Arts. She is a member of Feminist Review’s Editorial Collective and is co-editing a forthcoming issue on how we engage archives in queer, feminist, diasporic, and postcolonial studies.