

CSTC Course Proposal Winter 2023

“A Vermilioned Nothingness”: Late Lacan, Sexuation, Sinthome, and the Prosdiorism

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This course will explore three of Lacan’s late seminars in depth and breadth: ...*Or Worse* (XIX), *Encore* (XX) and *The Sinthome* (XXIII). We will consider Lacan’s theorization of logic and the split in the Real in relation to three other important, imbricated dimensions of his late thought: sexuation, the *sinthome*, and the universal and its discontents.

A close reading of Lacan’s late seminars reveal that he was describing, if not anticipating, the current problematics surrounding discourses of gender. His theory of sexual difference is in fact organized around failure; specifically, that the concepts masculine and feminine are, in their non-complementarity, both asymmetrical, failed attempts to answer the material questions which inform sexuation. In this case, the failure is both freeing and revelatory. This is one of the reasons why, as he notoriously avers, “there is no sexual relation.” In this respect, Lacan’s theory of sexuation thus troubles received notions of biological sex and gender, even as it radically re-imagines elements of desire like fantasy and *jouissance* around the gap between knowledge and the body.

It prompts a re-imagining of the Borromean knot of Real, Symbolic, and Imaginary through the emergence of the *sinthome*, even as it sustains the logic of incompleteness which characterizes Lacan’s reading of the concept of the universal. The *sinthome* is a conceptual leap from the symptom insofar as it utterly independent of the symbolic, and is thus unanalyzable. It sustains the Borromean knot (which, as Lacan points out, is no longer sustained by itself, but by the *sinthome*, but is in no way dependent upon it (*Seminar XXIII*, 13). In this respect, the fourth link—the *sinthome*—enjoys a rhetorical and logical status that the other three registers do and cannot. In approaching the *sinthome*, he privileges the concept of prosdiorism or the quantifier that transforms a particular negative as a negation of universality into a logic ultimately predicated of the universal affirmative. In this way, Lacanian notions the “not-all” do not negate the universal “all”; rather, they demonstrate that a term like “all” is itself a prosdiorism that does not define or signify the subject. The prosdiorism stands outside the machinations of the universal. For Lacan, “what the prosdiorism contains has no meaning before functioning as an argument, that it only takes on one by entering into the function” (*Seminar XIX*). In sum, the

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imaginary—more specifically,
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Course Texts:

Lacan, Jacques. *Seminar XIX: ... Or Worse* (Polity)

Lacan, Jacques. *Seminar XX: Encore* (Norton)

Lacan, Jacques. *Seminar XXIII: The Sinthome* (Polity)

Course Assignments:

Response Paper (10%)

Seminar: (35%)

Respondent to the Seminar (2 x 10% = 20%)

Final Essay (35%)