

## CSTC 9440A: Of the Mycelium and its Gravity: Late Lacan, Sexuation, Sinthome, and the Baroque

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Office Hours: Thursdays 1:30-3:30, or by appointment

Class Times: Wednesdays 2:30-5:30 in SH 2348

This course will explore three of Lacan's late seminars in depth and breadth: *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis (XVII)*, *Encore (XX)* and *The Sinthome (XXIII)*. We will consider Lacan's discourses and their attendant social links (of the Master, the Hysteric, the University, and the Analyst) in relation to three other important dimensions of his late thought: sexuation, the *jouissance* of the Other, and what could be called the ontology of topology. In sexuation, which troubles received notions of biological sex and gender, we find the conjunction of three elements of machinic desire: fantasy, *objet a*, and phallic *jouissance*. The conjunction of Woman as symptom and the Other *jouissance* is necessary for the two forms of *jouissance*—phallic and that of the Other—to exist. The former is experienced as an identification with the “masculine” side of the formulas of sexuation, while the latter is, as you will recall, the result of its position in the Borromean knot, the site of “pure” *jouissance*. The differential, but mechanically connected, types of *jouissance* also preclude the possibility of a sexual relationship; with respect to the Borromean knot, they are dependent upon each other. In other words, there can only be a sexual relationship if *jouissance* no longer exists (*Encore*, 112). We will confront and theorize the problem Lacan encounters in conceiving the Other *jouissance* mathematically as *JA* (a problem which he does not resolve in *Encore*, and must wait until *The Sinthome* to resolve) is that it runs counter to his repeated insistence elsewhere of the lack in the Other—that there is no Other to the Other. If  $S(A)$  obtains, then Lacan must acknowledge that the matheme *JA* cannot. As we will see, there are several reasons for a necessary shift in Lacan's late thought: 1) in the final topological incarnation of the Borromean knot, which makes its appearance in *Seminar XIII*, 2) the “interface” of the imaginary (the virtual) and the real, and 3) how this interface redounds upon the matheme *JA*. Crucially, this shift does not mean that the Other's *jouissance* can now be conflated with that of the phallus; there must remain a pure site for the real to be encountered as One, the same impulse towards the One which, as Lacan wonders in *Encore*, is part of the tension which shapes Eros—the desire to be one with an other (5).

What then, does this shift mean in terms of Lacan's stated fidelity to the baroque? It prompts a re-imagining of the Borromean knot through the emergence of the sinthome, even as it sustains the logic of incompleteness which characterizes the baroque. The sinthome is a conceptual leap from the symptom insofar as it is 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 an ontological status that the other three registers do and cannot. The sinthome prevents the collapse of the subject into psychosis by producing a kind of radically Other *jouissance* which stands outside, forbidding imaginary capture, but not precluding an encounter with the imaginary; in this sense, the apparently mystical experience which he privileges in *Encore* returns, but, as topology, functions *not* as “an occultation of the symbolic”

(*Ecrits: A Selection*, 368), but of the imaginary—more specifically, in its fantasmic encounter with the real outside the symbolic. In other words, the sinthome can be understood not simply as yet another “medium” for the prosthetic god, but as Lacan’s confrontation with the limits of the symbolic—and the phallic function—to contend with the imaginary and the real. With these problematics in mind, we will investigate how Lacan’s late work on sexuation, topology and the sinthome is a re-imagining not only of psychoanalysis, but of ontology itself.

### **Course Texts:**

Lacan, Jacques. *Seminar XVII: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis* (Norton)

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%)

### **Method of Evaluation:**

#### **Seminar Presentation (30-40 minutes) - (35%)**

The seminar presentation will consist of a broader critique, assessment, or analysis of the issues that emerge from the readings that week. You should think of the seminar as a kind of lecture in which you are attempting to teach the rest of us something about the theory, as well as exploring your own position on it. Further, you should be working toward developing useful or provocative questions that will help lead the subsequent class discussion.

#### **2 Respondents to the Seminar (2 X 10%) = (20%)**

The seminar presenter is not alone in teasing out useful lines of discussion; the respondent’s role is to take up some of the issues or problematics raised by the presenter and work them in turn into fruitful questions that will be addressed not only to the presenter, but to the class as a whole. *The purpose of these exercises is to encourage class discussion; in larger terms, it is also meant to prompt you to start thinking like teachers - to take up issues and make them the basis of exciting and dynamic debate and conversation.*

#### **Major Research Paper - (5,000-6,000 words) (35%)**

The research paper is to give you the opportunity to synthesize in more depth one or more aspects of the theory opened up by the course material. The topic is open, but should engage at least some of the material on the course. Feel free to come and consult me about anything you’re puzzling over. Let it be a case of “analysis terminable” rather than “interminable.”

## **1 Response Paper (10%)**

### **Length: 400-500 words each**

The response paper is open: you may write a response to the any of the readings or concepts. They are meant to give you the chance to be playful and/or creative with the theory, work out a position on a text or point that haunts you like a “symptom,” or work toward a thesis for your major paper. Have fun with it--or, at least, enjoy--your symptom!

September 13<sup>th</sup> - Introduction

September 20<sup>th</sup> - Introduction

September 27<sup>th</sup> – *Seminar XVII* (pp. 11-83)

October 4<sup>th</sup> – *Seminar XVII* (pp. 87-140)

October 11<sup>th</sup> (**Fall Break—NO CLASS!**)

October 18<sup>th</sup> – **Seminars Begin!** *Seminar XVII* (pp. 143-208)

October 25<sup>th</sup> -- *Seminar XX* (pp. 1-37)

November 1<sup>st</sup> -- *Seminar XX* (pp. 38-77)

November 8<sup>th</sup> -- *Seminar XX* (pp. 78-103)

November 15<sup>th</sup> -- *Seminar XX* (pp. 104-146)

November 22<sup>nd</sup> -- *Seminar XXIII* (pp. 3-44)

November 29<sup>th</sup> -- *Seminar XXIII* (pp. 47-84)

December 6<sup>th</sup> -- *Seminar XXIII* (pp. 87-148)

**FINAL PAPER DUE TWO WEEKS AFTER CLASS ENDS (December 20<sup>th</sup>)**