

CSTC Course Proposal Winter 2023

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

Allan Pero

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 prosdiorism occupies the hole in the Real—the same gap that renders the sexual relationship impossible.

The *sinthome* prevents the collapse of the subject into psychosis by producing a kind of radically Other *jouissance* which, like the prosdiorism, 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 split in the Real. 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, logic, and the *sinthome* is a re-imagining not only of psychoanalysis, but of the subject itself.

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%)

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!