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review newsletter

1 message

Metalepsis Seminar / Virtual Session 1

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REVIEW OF THE SESSION OF OCTOBER 17

Discussion animated itself around the four Lacanian discourses, producing some clear results:

1. The question was — "Why THESE four 'characters' (S1, S2, a, \$)?" A good question in that it leads to the matter of the form of Lacan's symbolizing the discourses as a four-on-four "matheme" (a word Lacan used to describe his cryptic symbolic abbreviations, akin to our use of the word "calculus" — in both cases *economy* and *parsimony* are not just motives but ruling spirits that must be brought into the conversation and questioned). Also (a related issue), why "only" four discourses, or why THESE four (hysteria, master-servant, university, analysis). My answer is, again: "don't know!" I have ideas of course, and I refer to Groucho Marx's statement, "These are my principles, and if you don't like them, well, I have others." I would hold on to the idea of economy and take responsibility for why economy is "necessary" or "desirable." Occam, in defending his razor, had no answer for this. The problem is, if you have to have a rule for every particular in the universe, you might as well just have another whole universe of rules, without any room for things to be the case for the rules! Thought IS economy. We think a multitude by thinking of small things, details. IN FACT, the relation of the small thing to the infinite thing is, as in the case of Borges' Aleph, a key to the nature of truth.

2. Now, the question of my "arrows" in the four mathemes ("Aren't they wrong?") was insightful. However, I found out that I am not the worst boy on the block. In Lacan's own *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, the arrows are pretty much in the same position in all four discourses, and mine correspond to that. So, Jacques and I are on the same side, defending against such shenanigans as ...

If you can't see this really stupid diagram, try this [LINK](#).

The point however is to think of the spaces in terms of vertical and horizontal relationships. Now, something VERY INTERESTING comes about when we do this. And, we — my friends — are possibly the only people in the universe positioned to understand this. The discourses have a METALEPTIC interior. Going left to right, we notice that there are relations of predication, > to <, <...>, etc. The agent relates to the other in terms of encapsulating, enclosing, possessing, and alternating. The vertical relationships — and this is a KEY insight — relate according to the logic of the "demonic" ∂/\emptyset . In the master-servant discourse for example, the "agency" of mastery is "demonized" by the subjectivity of the servant. The servant's function is to "appear at the right time," at the behest of the master; and to otherwise "not be seen." There are staircases, hallways, and other architectural devices to keep servants out of the sight of the masters. Roman palaces even had a system of secret hallways built into the walls. So now this is interesting! — Architecturally!!!

OK back to the Nobel Prize stuff. This horizontal/vertical thing helps us see how horizontality and verticality work in the calculus,

where the predicating field, <...>, is like a flow of "eve and adams" (even atoms — Lucretius), where ideology maintains a "normal scene," which Jacques Rancière credits to a "police" order. Within this even flow, the uncanny appears as an exception, and we know that exception takes two main logical forms (Da and Ad — the dead person who has forgotten how to die and the living person drawn to a fatal end) and four poetic forms (double, travel through time, story in the story, and contamination of reality). Verticality is metalepsis as the "super-natural" (taking this literally) ability to step outside of space and time, and to enter into the predicating field *vertically*, from above or below. Luckily in art we have abundant evidence of how smart people have imagined that this happens, and how it has constituted a special aspect of subjectivity. And, sometimes they give the secret away, as in Hitchcock's *Vertigo*: a horizontal pursuit that is "demonized" by a climb and a fall.

3. In the context of verticality and horizontality the case for referring the matter of discourse back to artists, poets, and composers is clear. If you are still wondering about the relationship to architecture you now have been given the whole cake at once, so please eat your fill! For example, the verticality of the Baroque can be revisited, back through Derrida to Tafuri to Giedion and beyond. We should even re-think the "primordial architecture" that relates sky and underworld to the temple, without getting too mystical about it. With horizontality and verticality, we have a key relating the discourses to metalepsis and its own set of circumstances, especially as we annotate those circumstances using Bloom's set of six key terms.

4. Back to the "economy" of the four terms. We have S1, the ambiguous order/command whose "other side" is the servants production. This is the framing element of COMMAND< ... production...>PRODUCT. We can understand the Biblical/Koranic idea that the world is the "speech of God," that God makes things happen simply by finding the right word, which is automatically the thing. Adam seems to have this power as well, but in reverse. He names things that exist or so that they exist, and thanks to the name they become a part of the Garden. This is the famous case of "Adamic speech" cited by George Steiner in his wonderful book, *After Babel* — by the way, Steiner is someone you would enjoy reading in general. Production in the above matheme is contained by the carats: < S2 >. S2 is the "field of signifiers," and you should know this very well because you spend your time as an architect designing "treasuries of signifiers," i.e. places where lots of things are put for definite reasons, and where placement confers value. We can see how 'a' has a kind of primordially vertical function, and when it occurs in horizontal relations with its neighbors, S2 and \$, we have special conditions. In the University, we have the ideological condition whereby, as Fredric Jameson puts it, the entirety of reality is "mapped mentally" to produce a paranoiac result: all of the predicative field is controlled by a master plan, which operates from "behind the curtain" so to speak. Another horizontal condition is hysteria, where 'a' and S2 constitute the hysteric's body, re-organized and re-tooled for the enjoyment reported as pain. This is not just the clinical condition of the 19c. hysteric of Viennese society. It is the religious ecstasy of Bernini's SantaTeresa.



Is this enough verticality for you? Well, the Hysteria of Teresa and the paranoia of the University have a lot of horizontality (think of the American university's campus plan) and verticality (bell tower, with appropriate snipers) going on.

5. With the <...> of horizontality and \emptyset/\emptyset of verticality, we have some metaleptic questions to ask when we visit works of art. Here, my point is serious: we are not philosophers or psychoanalysts. We — rather, YOU — are architects and artists. You have a background to visit, critically, works of art, literature, music, etc. and to understand these works genetically, analytically, etc. as CONSTRUCTIONS — "the work of works," so to speak. Formerly, this critical visitation has been dominated by the inane methods of art historians, who have asked so many wrong questions that every critical stance has been contaminated by circular questions such as "what did the artist intend?" It is difficult to break the spell of these evil enchanters, but if we look to the best of them (Leo Steinberg, Richard Bernheimer, Mario Praz ... there are others) we can gather up some clues. Not to gloat, but these joyful art historians also happen to know a thing or two about metalepsis, which makes them "natural Lacanians." What we can gather from the Lacanians who argue that popular culture offers the best means of studying Lacan (Zizek, Dolar, Zupancic, Santner, others), we can again take up the critical project. We have "learned how to think."

6. My life as a pretend radical philosopher hinges on this one advocacy: the idiot theme. Not only must we be able to make constructive mistakes in order to learn important truths, we must use the test of "privacy" (= idiocy) to confirm such discoveries

by seeing them not as content but as action. Our aim is "kenosis," "knowing without knowing," and hence the literal idiot component serves a purpose. The etymological component, the literal meaning of idiot as "a private person," has to do with the fact that kenosis as a project runs in parallel with the understanding of subjectivity — our subjectivity — not as "personalities" or "egos" (these are forms of mis-recognition) but as discoverable within the "clinical" field of Freud and Lacan, and here we must remain focused on the importance of the death drive as constitutive of ALL THE OTHER DRIVES, and extimacy, the principle that "the truth is out there," not inside the skull *per se*. This last point seems to me to be essential for any artist or architect, because it gets rid of the "what did you intend to say?" stupid question for once and for all. We interrogate the things as things, not in a pathetic "crude materiality" kind of way, but as embodying the "thought" that we had formerly mis-located in the artist. The artist makes things "in order to think, through them and by means of them." We must take this literally! Architecture is a kind of brain. Without it we cannot think properly. This is by the way also the key to Camillo's memory theater. See Lou Beery Wenniker's thesis, "An Examination of L'Idée del Teatro of Giulio Camillo, Including an Annotated Translation, with Special Attention to His Influence on Emblem Literature and Iconography," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1970.

You, too, can be a real idiot. I make you that offer.

7. The question has come up, "Yes, this Lacan stuff is all very interesting but how do I use it when it comes to 'making architecture'?" Ouch. I thought we had gone through reversed predication enough to break the spell that has us thinking that there is a 'we' who 'make' 'architecture'. When we talk to earthlings of course we have to use their language, and this language has it that architects make architecture. But, as residents of the Planet Metalepsis, we know that architecture makes us. Architecture is "already there." We enter into it; we create interventions. Otherwise, where would architecture actually *come from*? Architecture does not come from paintings, needs, formulas, clever diagrams, poetry, or (least of all) from ideas. Architecture is not the result of a "translation machine" that takes one thing and makes it into another that we can use from shelter. However, it takes an idiot to stand up to this ideological mis-representation, and by now you have the right stuff to be perfect idiots. We intervene in to an already-always architecture by making *buildings*, and the more our buildings are *economical* (even to the point of minimalism) the more they are able to create, within that architecture, sites of exception. I point to the history of architecture to make this point. Even where peoples have been limited in the extreme by a lack of machines, materials, etc., they have created sites of exception that outstrip ours; their "architectures" have been more complex and integrated into their entire system of (cosmic) knowledge, theology, and philosophy than ours can ever hope to be. Let's for once take them seriously and learn a thing or two. THEY presume that architecture is "already present," let's try it, too.

Like Don Quixote, we will be misunderstood using this kind of talk. Quixote as you know, held that the "normal world" is the result of evil enchanters. That we do not see the reality of magical relationships that hold the world together through the genius of an economy (only a few stories, as in Calvino's *Castle of Crossed Destinies* constitute the entire field of affordances, *tuché*), is our built-in blindness, and like the game of "Blind Man's Bluff" (no antifeminism intended), the blind man is allowed to *move freely* while others are frozen in place. The blindness automatically comes with the impression of complete freedom. As Zizek says, ideology is strongest when we feel we are making completely free choices.

For Quixote, things are "frozen" until they are unlocked by those who *renounce* this kind of false freedom. In architecture school this is the *ché vuoi* of "what are you going to do?" question and the stupid crits where students are asked to explain why they "made the corridor this way" or "the atrium without a skylight." These questions are rarely called out as being completely misinformed and destructive. When Quixote called out, for example, the puppet master it was because he had misunderstood the relationship between the characters, a part of an already ancient traditional tale. His "metatheatrical" intervention was a true Hegelian *Verleugnung* — renunciation — leading to foreclosure, *Ververfung*! I don't suggest you destroy a student's architectural project or chase the other critics around with a wooden sword, but you have to think of something to adjust the situation. "Magic" as we have learned from Apollo Robbins, is only for the dunces who use belief instead of practice. The real effectiveness that appears as magic is the transactions between the horizontality of predications (pickpocket term: "the mark") and the verticality of the stealthy hand.

8. SUMMING UP: Don't loose heart, here. We are focusing on an ECONOMY that will shrink complications into a calculus that is so personal that you won't be able to share it ("idiocy") easily with others; it will be a "proof to you," personally, in that it allows you to "enter into an already-always architecture" to construct exceptions, sites of exception. You will not "have theories" about how to do this, you will experimentally construct theory, although you are allowed to write and talk about it later.

PS — to the Penn State Webster's coffee group, apologies since most of this is based on the presentation made in Alexandria Thursday night, October 17. You can reconstruct some of the "situations" of course, and since the discussion focused on how popular culture can be used to understand Lacan's idea of the four discourses and their relation to ideology, you already know some of the basics. I can show parts of the presentation made at the WAAC meeting, if you like.

PPS — about the upcoming November 8–10 retreat ... I have most of the "forms" needed for making room assignments. I will make these this week when my hosts all confirm. The horses will be a part of the deal, so bring some carrots with you (they really like carrots). Apple orchards will be a part of the deal. I just hope good weather will also be a part of the deal. Driving instructions to follow.

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