the calculus of krazy kat

Krazy Kat was an Hearst newspaper comic strip conceived cartoonist George Herriman (1880–1944), which ran from 1913 to 1944. The animal family (main characters: Ignatz, a mouse; the policeman Officer Pupp; and the indeterminately gendered Kat) lived in Coconino County, Arizona, where Herriman vacationed. Hearst was fond of the strip and gave it his tacit support, despite the surrealist and philosophic themes that kept Krazy truly crazy. The stories swirled around a love triangle that, like Lacan’s Borromean knot relations between the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real, required a topological account akin to the Möbius band’s strange twist. The Kat is, thanks to memories of an ancestral “past life,” in love with the mouse. The mouse, although somewhat haunted by his own version of this past love affair, continues to play out an “ideological” antipathy to Krazy, on behalf of the cat species’ past genocides of mouse populations. Officer Pupp represents the Law and the counter-ideology to Ignatz’s desire for revenge. To complicate matters further, Officer Pupp has a secret love for the Kat and is particularly vigilant. The mouse’s medium of attack is to throw a brick at the Kat’s head; but Krazy interprets this through her (his?) ancestral memories of the time the mouse was a suitor, and the brick was used to throw a love-note up to the cat reclining on a high pedestal. The “pow” and heart Herriman drew to show the contradictory results of the brick’s direct hit represent the two orthogonal components of what Lacan would call “the act”: one action that takes place in two space-times. Herriman knew what he was doing. The inner logic of the love triangle never varied as Herriman pushed it into countless boundary-intensive situations, where he was able to demonstrate the superiority of topology over projective space. “Trajectory” becomes an important matter for the calculus, since it is the efficient cause of what becomes a fully elaborated Krazy Kat discourse. Thanks to Herriman’s consistency, we can use Krazy Kat to discover just how metalepsis reveals a sophisticated philosophical materiality with full dialectic capability.

“Once upon a time there was a Mouse, a Dog, a Kat, and a Brick.”

K ◊ M

K ◊ M

K ◊ M

In ancient Egypt, where cats were worshiped, the proto-ancestor of Krazy and all other cats was treated as a goddess. Ignatz’s counterpart was then nothing better than a slave, but seeing the beautiful Kat on her pedestal stirred a love that was not to disappear for eternity, though it would be forever confused by the act through which the slave-mouse communicated his love. With great pains he wrote a love note on papyrus and wrapped it around a brick to give it weight. He tried to toss it up to the cat’s pedestal but it hit her on the head by mistake. He was immediately seized by the ancient version of Officer Pupp, then one of the Egyptian Royal Guard, whose originary protective feelings toward the cat and suspicion of mice would be preserved through the ages, emerging full-blown in Coconino County, Arizona, in the person of Officer Pupp. Thus, each character in the love triangle embodies a double construction to tolerate/side-step the over-presence of the Real, the original love of “impossible opposites,” which, like the love of Pasiphaë for the white bull in Crete, leads the first architect to construct, first, a prosthesis for copulation and, second, a prison of fractals. In Mladen Dolar’s insistence that “love is the answer” in response to ideology’s apparently seamless construction of subjectivity, the question of Eros, as both demonic threat (to, among other things, a proper ending of psychoanalytic treatment) and a way past the foreclosure of forced choice, remains central. If “love is the answer,” it is only as a premature short-circuit to the problem central to subjectivity. Eros must be regarded with respect, carried back to its ancient (Socratic) roots, interrogated about its relation to death and the compulsive drive to void. We must not ignore any detail in this long and complicated story, composed of equal amounts of Kat, mouse, and bull.

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THE WALL. The theme of the tiny opening through which a wealth of signifiers escapes into plain air is carried directly from Pyramus and Thisbe to Krazy Kat in the theme of walls; the temporary visual blind of the gratuitous walls that abound in the strip mask the tossers of tossed bricks; agency is foreclosed by the walls. What the Kat refuses to see is Officer Pupp’s “inability to see,” leading to a confusion of agency for act — the means by which the “subject of the statement” (énouncement) of Krazy signification is distinguished from the act (the subject of enunciation, the unconscious subject). The “I” or ego that speaks and the subject that emerges from the unconscious is carried directly into the ambiguity of Krazy, which is why Krazy is crazy!

FACTS OF THE CASE:

1. The Kat (=hysteric) wants continuance of the w/pow! effect, which is a hysterical substitution of pleasure for pain. This is an interpretation, but ALL interpretation involves this kind of substitutability. ALL INTERPRETATION involves (1) continuance as an automation of the Other as the efficient cause. Without knowing it, the mouse is kept from the truth (objet petit a) of his own history in order to perpetuate the misreading (S2, “knowledge,” is suppressed) that produces the material cause (brick) of the trajectory, which the Kat (mis-)interprets as love.

2. The mouse is the ideological Other (S2) who is enlisted to power the emergence-machine that keeps the bricks coming. Like San-ta Teresa, the bricks are valuable because they produce the q/p-essential to emergence of pleasure from pain. The anamorph q/p- is a pure chirality that creates a remainder (“loft”) that carries the brick to its destination (the Kat’s head). Thus the “letter” that “always finds its destination” in Lacan’s famous expression. The letter is “literal”: a brick as q/p-, the apparatus of hysteria powered by the unconscious mouse. The mouse IS the expression of ideology. Love as interpretation is the last-ditch effort of the Kat to avoid free subjectivity (unlimited semiosis).

3. What’s at stake: In the master-slave metalsepsis, the final deal is that the subject (Master) accepts the poor terms that allow “him” minimal recognition (all masters, in accepting this, sign on to a “masculine” paradigm of inclusion). The deal is a reversed predication: in exchange for being a Master, the Master must be assimilated by the House (the name). The subject of mastery becomes his house in order to identify recognition with continuance. Continuance is the point of hysteria. The hysterical subject must engineer an unconscious operating in the heart of the other, an unconscious that will work as an automaton to produce an ambiguous effect: the q/p- of w/pow! In (psycho-)analysis this is the “last resort effort to avoid the unconscious subjectivity,” the aim and termination of analysis. w/pow! and q/p- are expressions of the conversion necessary to this task, which is called “love.”

4. In Althusserian ideology, the policeman’s whistle is the “principle of distance” by which the Other reaches subjects with an accusative call to Order. This Order is inscribed in the subject(s), at their center, but the inscription is an empty space, a void, defined by the “Ché vuoi?” It becomes the subject’s responsibility to guess what is the enigmatic desire of the Other, something impossible to do, and this impossibility confers on the Other its “Real” (it’s presence as trauma, as unbearable proximity). The LOFT of this distance of travel is a rise and fall, an engagement of a verticality to afford a horizontality. This is the daemonic “erotic” that builds in the component of affinity, desire “love” — which is nothing more than the desire for continuation. The break from ideology offered by psychoanalysis (in Dolar’s terms) is, temporally, the threat that free subjectivity constitutes to (hysterical) continuance.

5. Continuance is the repetitive-compulsive cycles of the death-drive, a painful cycle that produces pleasure at the return to the gap (objet petit a). Continuance is the narcotic of the imagination, ideal for the comic-strip medium with its daily or weekly demands for entertainment. Herriman’s job requirement frames the comic strip but appears inside the strip in the pure metaleptic form of the chiralistic Kat. Inside the strip, continuance meets continuance with a pitfall: they only work in one form or another, but that this is in a very real sense the desired ending of all entertainment — a conclusion that does not foreclose the possibility of another work of art, and another: unlimited semiosis, an “art machine.”

6. The subject faced with the prospect of free subjectivity is the prisoner of the Platonic cave, whose bonds have been removed and is allowed to walk to the edge of the cave. In this moment of lucid realization, akin to seeing how the Móbius band is constructed, the prisoner walks back and assumes his original position. “The master becomes his house” is equivalent to “the prisoner of the cave becomes the cave.” By internalizing the space in which exception has been ruled out, the subject becomes the “space of exception” by renouncing free subjectivity. The automaton is no longer necessary. Free subjectivity is no longer a goal of the system that eclipsed it by its very structure (soft-trajectory). The negations of the forced choice have been turned on themselves, to create a real freedom. Unlimited semiosis and silence are the same, because the same is self-dissimilar — chirality is the Kat.

K <…>

...> M

The Lacanian relation of jouissance and sinthome yields a surprisingly geographical result. The poionton is, after all, a diamond, a quadrature, and hence a field. We know to add: “a field for the stochastic resonance of a weak signal, a signalizing, and the weak signal that signalizes is the original love letter that, in Lacanian terms, must as always, "arrive at its destination."” The letter’s trajectory, like the brick’s, plays out the themes of the journey, with its orthogonal determinants of purpose and accident. Odysseus does not run an errand; he submits to the unknown of foreign lands and peoples. His travel is elliptical in a poetic as well as a cartographic sense, pulled home by not one but two invisible points whose relation might be compared to ‘11’ in relation to the singular ‘10’. We are back to the theme of “mortification” associated with the uncanny condition of “between the two deaths” — enjoyed “topside” (by the living) as the inscription of fate/death within the affordances of everyday life (tuché). Double inscription is key to the operation of φ as automaton, the “machine” that automates an emergent outcome, by which every subject is a “hysterical subject” whose organs have become “organs without a body,” where the Kat’s head and the brick cannot be distinguished. In Hegel’s formulation ("spirit is a bone") we have only a slight modification: the bone-spirit is a fired clay brick. And, now, we return to the architecture of the ziggurat, Bab’e, the “gate of God.” And, now, we know the Kat’s true identity, the She of that ziggurat, the She of the dove. The She of Cooconino County, Arizona.

Why is the “matheme” of the hysteric important here? The Kat is clearly trapped within the repetitive-compulsive cycles of the death-drive, whose main aim is to continue indefinitely the relationships held together by the “Borromeo knot” (a.k.a. Móbius band) relations of his/her subjectivity. The Kat maintains dual gender membership thanks to this hystera. The male Kat is able to identify with the field (Cooconino County) that Symbolically, thanks to the Law of Officer Pupp, supports and grounds the “intransitive” relationships binding the dog, cat, and mouse. At the same time, the Kat is an outsider, a not-all, a remainder, an “inside frame” whose misinterpretation of the “message” of the brick restores an “ancestral memory trace” of lost love. The Kat thus works geographically, introducing intrasitve situations and conditions that constitute sites of exception. Pupp keeps the Kat inside, Ignatz keeps Kat outside.