

Metalepsis Seminar / Virtual Sessions 1

[metalepsis seminar](#) / WAAC-PSU / 1 January 2014

THE SEMINAR THAT FORGOT HOW TO DIE

METALEPSIS SEMINARIANS, 9-ERS, AND AUXILIARY MEMBERS:



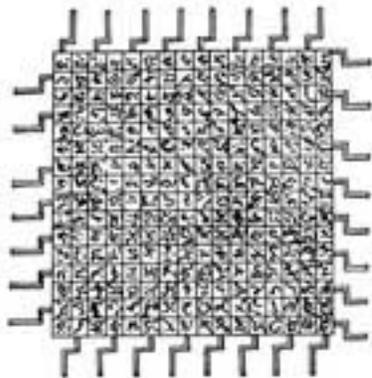
Father Sarducci ([Don Novello](#)) suggests classes that last only as long as what we will be able to remember.

* between the two deaths

[Lacan](#) and [Ernst Jentsch](#) have a name for what we're doing ... forgetting how to die. This category of the uncanny will have to serve as the flag for the next session of consultations, some meetings, lots of e-mails, and hopefully some collaborative efforts during the next academic semester. Since the fall ended on a somewhat polemical note, critical of the university's weaponized mastery and immersion in the Symbolic (after all, the university has its own form of discourse!), perhaps we should start up where we left off — a bit of the political (= ideology in all its glory), a turn towards idiocy (polythetics and the zairja!), and a fresh commitment to the clinic (i.e. Freud and Lacan). **Two amazing turns took place** thanks to initiatives from the WAAC contingent: (1) The Hermes-Hestia relationship

turned out to be something of a scandal leading to, among other things, a discovery of Richard Onians' claim that the Herm of boundary marker fame was none other than Psyche, in her dual personality of *mens* and *Eros*. Back to reverse predication and the tradition of the first herms, the piles of stone that defined the sites of exception for silent trade. (2) The [Žižek essay](#) on the transition from fetish to sinthome, graphically evident in the West's attraction to Buddhism but not yet treated by our calculus of predications. Add these to the several discoveries of the 9rs group at PSU (the gap that needs to be interrogated, the disappearing 9, the importance of agency ...) and you have a Big Fat Greek Wedding of rhetorical and philosophical terms (metalepsis, analepsis, aposiopesis, anacoluthon, prosopopoeia ...) to fill up your dissertation basket.

Just when we were getting the idea of the four (Lacanian) discourses under our belts, along comes Allan Pero's essay on "[The Chiasm of Revolution: Badiou, Lacan, and LeFèbvre](#)." Using symbols and distinctions very close to our own calculus, Pero treats the discourses as combinations of Impossibility (privation) and Impotence (prohibition). The parenthetical terms are the "original" ones from Boundary Language days (1996–2007). Pero's]("impossibility") and [("impotence") help us think of the discourse terms agent]other and truth[production in predication terms. There's a lot of work to do here! "Going the full distance" will require us to include #1 and #2 discoveries alongside the issue of the "convertibility" of privation to prohibition (= we perceive what we can't do, think, or see in terms of what we shouldn't).



* the polythetic aim of metalepsis

In "[The Role of the Thunder in *Finnegans Wake*](#)," Eric McLuhan, son of the famous Canadian theorist Marshall McLuhan, put his finger on the metaleptic heart of James Joyce. What is metalepsis (as discovered from

our calculus of predication) other than the "privation" of what is not known, seen, or actual converted into the "prohibition" converting these negatives into *sinthomes*? It takes discourse to do this, of course, which is where Allan Pero's magic decoder ring comes in handy for seeing the options. For us simpler folks, perhaps, it is easier to use Hitchcock's *Notorious* — the boom-shot from the mansion balcony to Alicia's clenched fist holding the stolen key to the wine cellar — to understand all of this through the dramatic shift from a perspectival **fetish function**, where "cathexis" arranges a symbolic code according to some kind of "values table" (the networks of symbolic relationships), to the heart of this cathected spatiality, which is also the "heart" of the mansion's space that must be transgressed. True to the logic of the interval "between the two deaths," we have an interval of time, actually *two intervals* superimposed on each other. One is the interval of contingency/chance, the other is that of fate, or rather an *automaton* that turns out to be the world's most efficient recycling machine, since output exactly equals input — no remainders! If a *zairja* is anything, it is an automaton that produces unlimited semiosis without any left-overs, and that is why the **sinthome** is what it is ... a emissary from the unconscious.

[**See below:** Mikhail Bakhtin's idea of "polyphony" — an important innovation in managing the unstable point-of-views generated by Menippean satire — is akin to our idea of polythetics. There may be a way to relate the fetish-to-sinthome procedure to the transition from stable points of view to the "acousmatic," and hence stereognostic and stochastically resonant, condition of dissensus, putting this all in terms of the ideological condition developed by Rancière, Lacan, and others.]

Naturally, those who wish to pull out their *zairja* in academic settings, instead of laptops or iPads, are taking a risk. The internal workings of the *zairja* — reversed predication switches, gap collectors, discourse rotator wheels, etc. — can be isolated for discussion but the aim of **unlimited semiosis** based on polythetic relationships (the *fin*-agains) will forever be in conflict with the academic/ideological obligations to Succeed! Lead! Achieve! The antidote might be Hitchcock's three-part slogan: *CLARIFY! CLARIFY! CLARIFY!*

*** so, *this* is clarification????**

By "clarification," Hitchcock meant that the audience should not be groping around to find its place in the work of art. What is this *place*? Understanding art demands that we see everything as a case of "the

performative" (this was Vico's big discovery) and we could extend this rule to say that art's rule is drawn from life, where life "imitates" art in that it imitates. The performative involves the screen or frame; it involves the stylization of time that uses space to measure it; it involves the binary relationship between stage and auditorium that reverses with the rise and fall of the curtain. Life, too, has its curtains, and the machinery that raises and lowers them is called metalepsis. Clarification is not reductionistic interpretation, it has to do with synchronizing thoughts and experiences. So, when Piero offers us the juicy detail of Jesus reaching for a carnation amidst four differentially color-coded angels, we know, thanks to this "supersymmetry," we are offered the chance to be on the same page as Piero — to understand what he meant about not letting painting be a kind of "slice of time." We don't need to interpret this — we need to *clarify* it. The [CALCULUS OF PREDICATION](#) forces us to do just that, namely it forces us to make and recognize errors and discover what adjustments are needed to recover a minimal sense of consistency with the Freudian-Lacanian clinical model. Within the calculus, we are allowed a few luxuries. Main among these is the ability to overlay Harold Bloom's six "revisionary ratios" as a system over the moving parts of metalepsis. This shows up some interestingly informative "axioms" of predication — many involving blindness and visibility, the role of Eros, the Hegelian irony behind ideas of mastery, the architecture of the festival (and, hence, architecture's problematic relationship to the Vitruvian "virtues," *utilitas*, *firmitas*, and *venustas*). The key to everything seems still to be Freud's discovery of the death drive as central to the other drives (oral, anal, phallic, gaze, voice). Possibly Freud's own work could be aligned to Hitchcock's boom shot in *Notorious*: a long glide through the fetish-space of the Symbolic until a threshold is reached that corresponds to the placement of the gaze, a "vanishing point" where a key turns a lock opening the way to the sinthome. No longer can the Symbolic be contained within language. The Real, obscene and over-present, collapses time and space. In short, it sends us to the cellar looking for the "not-Champaign." We feel that at this point Hitchcock is in touch with the myths of Actæon, Cupid and Psyche, Endymion, and other Orphic tidbits. Not far off is the Homeric tale of the Cyclops; and the stunning silence of Olimpia in E. T. A. Hoffman's *The Sandman*.

* the secret seventh axiom

There are six axioms for the "calculus of predication," one for each of the six elements of Bloom's system of revisionary ratios (no relationship, really), but now it is time to reveal a SEVENTH, and [SECRET AXIOM](#),

having to do with the process of [binary deduction](#). This axiom explains the irony behind binary oppositions, such as master-servant (the main example), high-low, dark-light, public-private, life-death. As in the last case (life-death), we have already noted that irony creates a "cross-inscription" condition: life that is haunted by death or fate, and death that is extended in space and time by the momentum of life at the point of literal death (the death drive becomes the death dream). This exceptional axiom addresses the role of the "phallic" underdog/subaltern, able to appear and disappear without warning.

* back to the crossroads and the sinthome

QUOTE FROM A PAST NEWSLETTER: "[Richard Broxton Onians' book on European thought](#) is excellent and, although it leaves many questions unanswered, has essential clues. For example, one of them is about the "herms" that some scholars have emphasized as sexual. Actually, Onians points out that the head-to-phallus boundary marker of ancient times was representing the *gens/genius* of the family, since the head was regarded as the source of seed. This made the herm a direct connection to *Hades*, the home of the *manes* (ancestral spirits). This is consistent with the use of the original herms, the pile of stones, as places of silent trade, where the wealth of Hades/Pluto was imagined as the source of traded goods. Overlooking the Hermetic role in silent trade led to a premature gendering of Hermes and simplification of the "kind of space" he represented. Gendering the crossroads is premature, because we know that Hekate/Diana was just as much a part of the boundary tradition as was Hermes. In any event, personification and, hence, gendering, came late in the mythic tradition."

What we see in the scholarship that rushed to thematize the relationship between Hermes and Hestia was a premature conceptualization, "premature" both in the sense that mythic thought had not yet developed the art of conceptualization when it evolved its "emergent" medical-pharmaceutical-magic-literary-poetic-metaphysical-psychoanalytic wisdom about space and time, and "premature" in the sense that scholarship — particularly phenomenology — wishes to establish a case history of examples where "antiquity" provides evidence against the forces of instrumentalism. In other words, the strategy to counter instrumentalism is ... instrumentalism!!! This rush to find a good legal case for the prosecution of modernism and its evils needs to be *delayed* in the full Duchampian sense, i.e. through the unlimited predication of polythesis. BUT, it turns out that polythesis is what the Hermes/Hestia system was all about in the first

place!

With ideology we are at the fetish level of cathexis, and our "investments" are designed to secure a utopian order, but one that produces two kinds of fantasy, one positive, one negative. The "dirty little fantasy" behind phenomenology is that it requires the full apparatus of academia and all its ideological regalia to function: the promise of mastery, the slogans of achievement — all without the irony of wit that, as [Menippean satire](#) discloses, the audience is able to be on both sides (reversed predication!) of the here-and-there, now-and-then, Jekyll/Hyde of framing-predication. Note that *even the great* [Eric Auerbach](#) misunderstood the "joke" about the over-priced fish in Apuleius's novel, *The Golden Ass*, because he did not understand, as the Russian scholar [Mikhail Bakhtin](#) did, the links connecting shamanism with Apuleius and Euripides, Plato, Cervantes, Rabelais, Shakespeare, and into the modern period with Poe and Dostoyevsky. Don't forget our filmic metalepsarians, Chaplin, Kieślowski, Lynch; or our painterly clue-givers, Antonello, Breughel, Velázquez, Holbein, Picasso ...

*** don't think for yourself ... get help**

We should not be too tough on poor Auerbach, but neither should we spend time giving him Hell for missing this key point. The matter should be resolved "graphically," i.e. through the calculus that holds open the directional potentiality of polythetic experimentation. Our zairja needs repair if we prematurely close down its fate-mate potentiality. Hestia is too easily whisked off to the man-cave of the prytaneion for a big sitesis banquet and sing-along. Give the shadow scholarship of those such as [Nicole Loraux](#) a fighting chance. Don't take the evidence that was *intended to be found* as definitive.

The links that connect Loraux's divided city, the custom of involving twins as city founders, the "Castor-Pollux rule" that leads to the "Orpheus rule," etc. are the ways of approaching issues of ideology and gender without relying on the play-books of the very Big Others whose command to Enjoy! keeps us in the dark.

If the last season of the metalepsis seminar was a tour through the land of reversed predication, the next season will be devoted to weaponizing our collection of vacation mementos. Here are some possibilities:

- continue corresponding and meeting on topics related to individual

- thesis/dissertation research
- maintain the metalepsis seminar web site as a center for circulating writings and conversations
 - circulate writings, establish a collective "critical pool" of documents and commentaries
 - meet weekly (Websters in State College)
 - meet monthly or bi-monthly (Alexandria)???
 - have another retreat when the weather warms up
 - *rendez-vous* (*rendez-fous*?) at the [Cincinnati conference](#) and/or the [Alexandria Frascari conference](#)
 - develop reading groups within the metalepsis network to "report on findings" or collaborate on projects

We don't need to take a vote ... just take initiative. Remember Monty Python's Brian: —We're all different! —Not me! Ideology is always pitched in the key of offering choices and options. Just look at the thick catalogs of courses and programs of every university! Get past this mastery phase into the metalepsis of the zairja, and for God's sake DON'T THINK FOR YOURSELF. Get the zairja plugged in and turn your "no machine" into a "know machine." Then anyone can be the "woman who knew too much."

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