

## Metalepsis Seminar / Virtual Session 3

[metalepsis seminar](#) / WAAC-PSU / 15 January 2014

### CLARIFY! CLARIFY! CLARIFY!

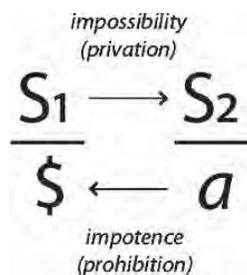
METALEPSIS SEMINARIANS, 9-ERS, AND AUXILIARY MEMBERS:



Hegel and Marx, David Levine

### \* hegel at the bar

The importance of Hegel's parable of Lordship and Bondage has never been doubted. It is possible that Lacan began with this idea and constructed his four discourses out of the elements that were evident in the ironic relationship between masters and servants, mastery itself and those in the service of mastery. By now we know the features of the Lacanian *matheme* for mastery:



The horizontal lines are called "bars," but it might help to think of a "real" bar, such as the one where drinks are served. We can imagine, easily, masters on one side and servants (bartenders) on the other. The master may know *that* he wants to drink and is thirsty (privation) but the bartender knows the stock and has access to the pleasures (*a*) on the mirrored shelves behind him. Prohibitions? They are converted from privations (how much can one drink?) into how much

should one drink.

This idiotic comparison serves the purpose of distinguishing how horizontal relationships can be spatially vertical, and *vice versa*. The master is on one side of the bar with the "other masters" — it's a system of masters, S2. The system of masters/mastery is held back from getting all it wants (privation) by a system of delivery based on rules (prohibitions). It is impossible for the master to master all the other masters and have what s/he wants, i.e. "respect." Hence, the necessity of the master to risk his life trying to prove a point. The servant opts out of this, knowing that there will be other masters to serve even though they kill each other off regularly. Their "impotence" is their renunciation of this killing game, also the willingness to be subordinated by the "Name of the Father (Master)," i.e. accept the aristocracy as an idea, even if only in the form of celebrity worship.



## \* staging issues? interrogate Stagecoach!

Popular culture comes to the rescue every time — an idea that Žižek has taught us! In this absolutely exquisite film that represents [John Ford's best western](#), the extimate is explored in detail, as seven characters (three couples and a rogue banker — talk about surplus capital!) are stuffed inside a small carriage. Orson Welles claimed to have watched this film over 30 times (the results are evident in *The Third Man*, *Citizen Kane*, and *The Magnificent Ambersons*, to say nothing of *Touch of Evil*), saying that it was his primary textbook on how to think in terms of film.

*Stagecoach* (1939) is case of "supersymmetry" — the metaleptic inclusion of "cosmic" features of humanity within a small group, as in the painting by Piero where the angels of the four corners are pulled into the visual field. But, wait! ... there's more! Ford knows how to tell a story visually, using glances, shadows, and framing to make silence more communicative than dialog. The plot line is simple. Nine people in the western territories of the post-Civil War US need to get from Tonto, Arizona, to a town some distance away, Lordsburg, in the New Mexico territories, not yet then a state. There are rumors that the rebellious Apache Indian chief, Gerónimo is threatening all travelers *en route*, and although the coach has a military escort for the first part of the journey, the relief troops promised to be at the first stop, Dry Wells, have retreated, leaving the civilians in a quandary. They take a vote and go on; the Apaches catch up with them at a ferry crossing, and a chase ensues, with the cavalry arriving at just the last minute.

The real drama happens among the travelers, who are typically cited as "representing" various aspects of society. Now is your chance to get even with the "interpretive" modality of theoretical inquiry! Yes, we can be happy with assigning each character to a value or interest, but what's the point? It's more interesting to see how Ford fashions the *dynamics* of their interaction with the non-representational media of architecture, shadows, silence, glances, gazes, and interior distances.

These exchanges take place across a social space carefully arranged to create symmetry as well as dissonance. The well-dressed gambler, Hatfield (John Carradine) has gone along on this ride to protect the aristocratic Lucy Mallory from the unseemly other passengers (a drunken physician, a booze salesman, a prostitute, and a sleezy banker). Compounding this complex social mix, the stagecoach encounters "the Ringo Kid" (John Wayne, who had before this been a B-grade actor), whom the sheriff arrests and pops into the coach. The passengers become couples. Ringo finds the prostitute to have natural human kindness and defends her against the coldness of the others. The doctor befriends the meek whisky salesman (whose real name is in fact Donald Meek, a famous character actor). The gambler is an ex-confederate who had known Lucy Mallory's family back in Virginia. Only the banker lacks a mate — for reasons that will be very important later.

At the second stage stop, Mallory is discovered to be not only pregnant but ready to give birth. The inn is primitive. It has a large room with a narrow hallway to some small back rooms, where Mallory is put for her delivery. The details of this are hidden from the audience, but the hallway wall works as a projection surface, against which we see shadows and silhouettes of the off-stage action (think "metalepsis").



In this device we get to see how the right angle is used to mediate the "demonic" relationship of the off-screen spaces *versus* the large aula where the other travelers are sleeping. Only the doctor and the prostitute travel between them — servants of Asklepius, the god of medicine, we presume. This new temporary couple is redeemed by the event of childbirth, which Ford added to the original story. Ford must have also realized the ambiguity of childbirth, i.e. how it constitutes a "feminine" space not to be violated by strangers, and hence a version of Hestia's domain. Handling the space with shadows constitutes the film's intellectual and poetic center.

Just when you might think you are finished with these ideas from *Stagecoach*, you should go back to [Crazy Kat](#), which takes place in exactly the same landscape, and figure out why both John Ford and George Herriman, the cartoonist, fell in love with Monument Valley. At the edge of the westward-expanding US, and still not technically a part of it (it is a Navaho reservation), it is both an inside and an outside, and the dramatic landforms create a semiotic union between earth and sky that is more than a romantic characterization. Does not *Crazy Kat* also use the right angle, the unseen space, the metaleptic frame? Are there not also couples and triangles, supersymmetries and silent languages? Now's your chance for a bit of unlimited semiosis ... you may link your predications, reverse them, and interrogate the gaps as much as you like!

## \* back to the master

With *Stagecoach*, you might be in the position to understand how the motto, "from privation to prohibition," actually works within the context of discourse. In this film, as I have said, we have a certain "laconic" quality. Dialog breaks off, is shortened ... silence takes over. There is not just

*nothing* to fill the gap, rather we have a *silent language*, to which we look beneath the bar for help.  $\$$  relates to *a* through fantasy, the *poinçon*,  $\diamond$ . In Lacan's famous expression,  $\$ \diamond a$ , we see that the silent language takes place when we must "take leave of the Symbolic," i.e. polite conversation, and enter into a world of glances, geometries, shadows, and the like. The artist not the philosopher is in charge in such situations. We learn from what we see in the world of art and art's use of architecture (which becomes the critical component). Since in the master discourse *matheme*  $\$$  is related to the *objet petit a* in the form of "impotence"/prohibition, we know that the dynamic spaces of *Stagecoach* are going to be formed around the breakdown of social convention, and that the  $\diamond$ , the *poinçon*, is going to be about scale rupture:  $\langle \rangle$ .

NOW, we have the linked clue: scale rupture takes place primarily at the joint between the fetishistic use of space (where cathexis attempts to make an inventory of objects it has invested with its own psychic program) and the target-like sinthomic space, where cathexis is re-engineered to become a clock ticking out the chiasmus where two lines of action, ascetic and demonic, finally engage. For "demons" we could read, simply, "Apaches" and go along with the 1930s racification of the invisible by those who inhabit the boundaries. But, there is the demon in each of the characters that broadens this chase, and the sinthomic stage of the  $\langle \rangle$  is now the gap within each of the couples that transforms them into angelic pairs. They have "realized their twinship" in the process of recognizing and identifying with the gap.

This recognition plays in reverse the scandal of foundation rites, where one twin must murder the other so that, together, they may reign over both visible and invisible. Here, the "impossibility" of combining visible and invisible, upper class and lower class, "Tonto to Lordsburg" — the S1 and S2 of the master's discourse — becomes the self-regulating autonomy of the couples as they find each other. Particularly moving is the "romance" between the doctor and the whisky salesman, which is in reality the hoped-for cure for the doctor's alcoholism. Everyone in the early part of the film presumes that the whisky salesman is a parson, and in fact his demeanor is very priest-like. By the end of the film, the doctor has seemingly sobered up enough to aid all of the characters. The feminization of the salesman has allowed this "couple" to wed in an ideal future.

In the birthing scene at the second stage stop, Ford draws our attention to three *bags* that the passengers have wished to carry next to them. The doctor carries his medical bag, the salesman carries his samples, and the banker has secreted funds embezzled from his bank. In the circulation of these three dark objects, Ford arranges dialog and action that reveals the hidden motives of the characters. When you think about what "cathexis" means, think of what is put into these bags! And of course this mystery is compounded by Ringo's *Nemesis*, the three Plummer brothers ("plumb" = both lead and the measure of the vertical). In 2's and 3's, this film has a lot to teach. Oh, yes, don't forget our beloved 11, which is not (just) 10+1, but one and the Other One, combined by two wheels that generate all that we will need for our trip from Tonto (*tanto!*) to the City of the Gods.

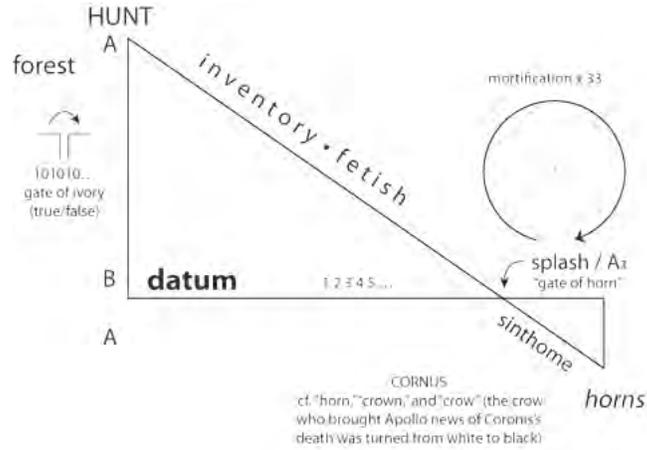
Get the point? Watch the film.

## **\* back to chirality**

The [essay on binaries](#) has made a pitch for all kinds of conflation ... the journal/map comparison is now leaking into information theory, which is leaking into *The Truman Show* effect, which is ... And, now, there is a [sequel in the works](#), named after the goddess who gives the Actæon myth what it takes for a story to survive, what, 2500 years? Clearly there are shamanistic elements and a lot of keys that feed into (even) film theory, but ... FIRST ... we should consider chirality, that interesting property of gloves and some long-chain molecules that prevents them from collapsing into simplistic reductionisms. I am discovering some new things in writing this. I owe Marina Marmelic a BIG THANK-YOU for finding that Zizek article on Buddhism, where fetish is described as a spatial approach. Here's where Zizek did not go far enough, for once. Using *Notorious* as a model of the "boom shot," it's possible to see how, near the end of the long glide to the small-

scale, there is a shift to what we could call a symptom, or (following Lacan) "sinthome." Thanks to this example, the sinthome here is a hand that opens and closes — now the chirality thing comes into play. Once you make a diagram of the situation a lot of other connections become evident.

I hope you will not hesitate to make suggestions or corrections, or to steal this idea outright and have your own go. Please do! There's enough for everyone. Here's the diagram applied to the Diana-Actæon story (but you can easily substitute *Notorious*) ...



As with all projects in the making, these two essays will suffer many revisions in the coming weeks, so check the dates at the footers of the page to make sure you have the latest delusional edition.

Archived newsletters: [8 January](#) / [1 January](#)

hello to everyone!



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