

Metalepsis Seminar / Virtual Session 5

[metalepsis seminar](#) / WAAC-PSU / 29 January 2014

IS CHIRALITY A QUALITY OF THINKING?

METALEPSIS SEMINARIANS, 9-ERS, AND AUXILIARY MEMBERS (and guest cc-ers, Alireza Moharrer and Claudio Sgarbi):



* mi-dire, zairjas, and super-symmetry: applied chirality?

Nothing could be weirder than the scene in *Mulholland Drive* where an agent of the Castigliani brothers, Ray Hott, visits the mysterious Mr. Roque — Lynch fitted out the famous midget actor, Michael J. Anderson (among whose many talents is the ability to speak backwards) with a prosthetic body so that his head would appear to be abnormally small. Roque is in a glass-encased room shrouded by red curtains, another favorite Lynch motif. In an out-take, Hott went down a series of corridors, stairs, and small alcoves, past a receptionist, and into a booth to speak through a microphone to communicate with this ultimate Big Other. Their conversation is a picture-perfect example of Lacan's *mi-dire* — a language of half-sentences, fragments, and clipped references where "nothing is ever said" but, as a result, everything *can be said*. Žižek has noted that this kind of speech is characteristic of some tribal kings still ruling in parts of Africa. In the film about the Dali Lama, it is the speech of the clairvoyant advisor brought in to give advice about the impending takeover by the Chinese. Lacan discovered it and realized its potential when he encountered it in the [private language of the Papin Sisters](#), two servants who had, in the 1940s, murdered their employers — a newspaper sensation that got national coverage for the full trial.

How can something be clipped off and, as a result, acquire dimensions of infinity? This is the central issue of all arts, and because the "paradigm exemplar" is rhetoric's aposiopesis, a sudden break-off that initiates the audience's mental-emotional completion of "what was really intended to be said," the arts could be said to "derive their main secrets from rhetoric." Indeed! The gesture itself is an attenuation of meaning. You could hit someone but it's a better idea to just waive your fist in the air before incurring a lawsuit. Very early on, the Symbolic mode learned that it had more power when it ceased doing what it did the best — predicate. Breakdowns, incompletions, fragments, blurred meanings all share with the puzzle and riddle the power of enigma — the "night where all cows are black" to use Hegel's characterization of conflation.

In the box of "I don't know," the logic of carnival allows maximal copulation (grammatically and carnally) of anything and everything, creating "monsters" in the rhetorical and poetic and possibly biological sense. *Mi-dire*, the language of paranoiacs, opens the way to this box. Perhaps this is why we should pause to consider how paranoia operates with respect to cathexis. In our spatialized model, drawn to fit Hitchcock's *Notorious*, cathexis charges a field with meanings, relations, intentions, values, and obstacles. As a collective, these "affordances" (and "avoidances") help us navigate. They are the map mentality; the picture-book world. When paranoia takes over, the field is over-charged. It jumps over the balcony rail, like the camera on the boom in *Notorious*, to find something — something missing. This project is doomed, because it leads the fetish strategy to its death at the point where scale ceases to hold the scene together with metonymy and becomes synecdoche — the part becomes the whole. Alicia's hand; the binary code of open-closed; the trip to the cellar! At this point we know where and what the cellar really is. Like all

unconscious, it has poison in a bottle where the wine used to be. It is a matrix of substitutions, and instead of a field we have a circle (or a double spiral) powered by the death drive, a logic of repetition and small object-causes of desire.

Our project: to see in this **switch-over point** the role of *mi-dire* and other tricks to open up the "unconscious" through signalized fragmentation. The *regle de jeu* is that we must find cases of this fully visible in works of art where such signalizing has gone unnoticed. It is as if the secret is best kept if written large. Why, for example, would George Hersey, in writing a book titled *Architecture, Number, and Poetry in the Royal Palace of Caserta* would the art historian focus on the Diana and Actæon myth, Ovid's version in particular, and *leave out the detail that there are thirty-three dogs*? Why would keen-eyed critics of Poe until [Richard Kopley discovered Poe's own "zairja"](#), a chiralistic arrangement of the text into two coded parts, dividing each expression into a half that made sense contextually but a new sense when re-united with its parent and original. Why has no one yet connected Poe's technique with the slightly later development, by Raymond Roussel, of the technique of the *procédé* ... despite Foucault's famous exposition of this trick? And, **why have neither Poe's chiasmus nor Roussel's procédé made the front pages in the journals of architecture theory?**

And, now, why do we not connect chirality in general to ... those dogs? Not for nothing, Vico claimed that human thought began with *two ideas of Diana* — one preserved in the myth of Diana and [Endymion](#), the beloved mortal whom Diana had to put to sleep in order to kiss, the other encoded into the story of [Actæon](#) the hunter, who sees the goddess naked when he is fully awake. If Vico puts Diana in the driver's seat and Vanvitelli, the architect of Caserta, pays attention, how does Hersey get to the the authority on the matter, especially after he misquotes Vico on the subject? Correction is overdue.



* more moonlight

Naming Diana as the new hero of a revived architecture theory, Lacanified, Vichianated, and *mi-dire'd*, will be tough. **Do it anyway**. Outside of the metalepsis seminar and related events, outside of the archive of lunatic essays assimilating Lacan, Žižek, Vico, and others to projects about the boundary, there is little support. In reply to Žižek's criticism — that such *apologias* have the false taste of suicide notes without the actual suicide — could be taken to indicate that the secrecy of chirality is permanent. That any "revival of interest" violates the very rule of the subject it wishes to promote. Obscurity is not just an accidental by-product, it is a structural feature. The advice to "Get over it!" brings the university discourse into full focus. It is the moment when fetish gives way to *sinthome*. It is the "Enjoy!" aspect of the phallic drive, where "enjoy what?" — *Ch'è vuoi?* — might be less of a puzzle and more of an operating procedure.

"Enjoy" could be about unlimited semiosis — back again to the carnival theme and the important *topos* of festival architecture. No better account of this can be found than in Lawrence Durrell's *Balthazar*, second novel in his *Alexandria Quartet*. Where all identities are reduced to singularities by the rule of one common costume style, only hands, and their rings, signalize to lovers who meet annually on this day. Or, rather, night. Rewrite architecture, and its history, by moonlight.

[Re-read Žižek on fetish versus symptom](#) to realize just how "architectural" Žižek can be in his review of Tibetan history. But, in the metaphor of the "raped jewel" is not the prize of this anecdote precisely the point

of finding, in Buddhist culture, an "already-always" obscene truth, that the jewel has been and always was "permanently raped" — i.e. never without the "ambiguity" Lacan used to specify the *objet petit a* in his [story about the sardine can](#) floating in the waters off the Brittany coast? Žižek demonstrates the habit of colonization of European thought. It always plants its quest-objects in foreign lands; it always draws treasure maps over the exotic Other Land. This, unfortunately, is what has happened to Phenomenology in architecture theory! Enshrining otherness generates a lot of dissertations and master's theses, but it is permanently damaging and delusional. Like any addictive drug, it not only messes up your own physiology, but it forces you to construct a world that supports your metaphor of addiction.

- Vernant, Robert, and Pérez-Gómez leave out Onians' **key information about herms** (thus misrepresenting the role of Hestia)
- Hersey leaves out **the number of dogs** (thus misrepresenting the role of mortification/shamanism and, further on, having to falsify Vico's account of Diana in her two forms)
- Poe scholars leave out **the role of chiasmus** (thus misrepresenting Poe's method of ciphering)
- Film theorists get the direction of Lacan's gaze backwards (McGowan, Copjec)

With errors like these, you don't need to search around for dissertation topics. Get out the tool box and do some essential repairs! "The secret" (the *sinthome*) is permanent and well kept even when the secret is front-page headlines! That should tell you something, about the unconscious and its use of transference love as a last-ditch effort to protect secrets (cf. Mladen Dolar) ... if not about your own evolved methodology. If only Dolar had added the bit about the two Dianas! Endymion sleeps in a forest; Actæon attempts an inventory of the forest but finds a liminal space containing what he should not have seen. You have all you need to know just what the forest is; and why Diana is the goddess both of the hunt and love!

* Vico on the two Dianas

In *The New Science*, Vico comes close to Dante, whose *Vita Nova* title could be translated as "Nine Life." He gives the two Dianas top billing in his theory of human origins.

§528 From this source imagination conceived the third major deity, Diana, representing the first human need which made itself felt among the giants when they had settled on definite lands and united in marriage with particular women. The theological poets have described the history of these things in two fables of Diana. The first, signifying the modesty of marriage, tells of Diana silently lying with the sleeping Endymion under the darkness of night; so that Diana is chaste with that chastity referred to in a law proposed by Cicero, *Deos caste adeunto*, that one should go to the sacrifice only after making the sacred ablutions. The other tells us of the fearful religion of the water-springs, to which was attached the perpetual epithet of sacred. It is the tale of Actæon, who, seeing Diana naked (the living spring) and being sprinkled with water by the goddess (to signify that the goddess cast over him the great awe of her divinity), was changed into a stag (the most timid of animals) and torn to pieces by his dogs (the remorse of his own conscience for the violation of religion). Hence *lymphati* (properly, sprinkled with *lymphæ* or pure water) must have been originally a term applied to the Actæons who had been maddened by superstitious terror. This poetic history was preserved by the Latins in their word *latices* (evidently from *latendo*), to which is always added the epithet *part*, and which means the water gushing from a spring. The *latices* of the Latins must have been identical with the Greek nymphs, handmaidens of Diana, for *nymphai* in Greek meant the same as *lymphæ* [in Latin], The nymphs were so named at a time when all things were apprehended as animate and for the most part human substances, as we have set forth above in the Poetic Metaphysics.

Vico gives an account of how privation, the limit defined as Okeanos or Styx or any other water source defined as sacred, generates prohibition — laws, first relating the marriage and burial, later to all cultural practices. This is as fundamental as Freud's realization that *Trieb*, drive, was at its heart the death-drive, not a desire for death but the sum of resistances offered by the subject in the face of (Symbolic) death. Lacan developed this through the trope of "between the two deaths," what mythology developed in the theme of the *katabasis*, or descent into Hades, the invisible.

The key word is *latices*, not in any Latin dictionary I could find, but a latice is an architectural device for concealment and *laticis* is the word for any kind of water. Vico may be in error technically but poetically he is on the mark when he says this word comes from *latendo, latere*, "to lie hidden." This is what the water of the spring does, what Diana in her grove did, what Semele/Diana protected by the cover of night. Titania and Nick Bottom meet by moonlight, and the story is obverted. Titania is in love with the weaver, who has been magicked into an ass (re: Apuleius's [The Golden Ass](#)). They are in the forest, and the forest is enchanted or (thinking in terms of reversed predication) the forest *is enchantment*.

You can guess why Diana is the goddess of both the hunt and love. Now, can you add to Mladen Dolar's already excellent essay about why transference-love is the last-ditch effort made by the unconscious to save itself from being exposed? Reverse predicate "lunacy" to find all you need to know, including the origins of the (political) unconscious.

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