

## Metalepsis Seminar • Virtual Session 10

[metalepsis seminar](#) / WAAC•PSU / 5 March 2014

[NOSUBJECT.COM](#), KEARNEY, CATHECTED FIELD OF YOUNGJIN PARK

**METALEPSIS SEMINARIANS, 9-ERS, AND AUXILIARY MEMBERS**



Fig. 1. Djanus/Djana, marking a boundary in the classic way, undermining Jean-Pierre Vernant's thesis that Hermes is the "outdoor guy" and Hestia the "indoor girl," a thesis picked up by Jean Robert and others to conceptualize Greek space. Being "two thinks at a time," all space is "chiralistic" and capable of being split by the cathexis of the sinthome, anyplace, anytime.

### \* **nosubject.com is back in service**

[NOSUBJECT.COM](#), the all-purpose Lacan reference web site has had a troubled history — poor funding, spotty management, unclear ownership, etc. — which is to be unfair to the unpaid highly dedicated and attentive supporters who have maintained this as the go-to place for initial answers to Lacanian questions. Beware: much of the site is still hors-de-service. Like Wikipedia, there will always be problems but the service far outweighs these. If you're a Lacanian and want a totally ruthless Subject-Supposed-to-Know, go elsewhere, or actually get out of Lacan altogether! You gotta think for yourself and be true to your desire! There's also [Lacan.com](#).



## \* kearney critique

Under the flag of those in the advancing front guard of the imagination, Kearney's [\*The Wake of the Imagination\*](#) (subtitle: *Towards a Postmodern Culture*) has been the Little Red Book fueling arguments for a **humanist view of the subject**. On many points it has undercut the other Red Guard advance movement, Vico's *New Science* brigade, always underfunded, misunderstood, and put at pains to explain Vico's complex theory of history and thought. Why not join forces? The answer lies in Kearney's silence on key issues, not the least of which is Vico himself, who receives no mention, not a sausage, in *The Wake*. This is particularly ironic since the "other wake," *Finnegans Wake* makes Vico into the principal character, Humphrey Chimpdon Earwicker. The "earwicker" part should cue you in to the psychoanalytical practice of using evidence of the ear over the visual presence of the written word, but Kearney mentions Joyce primarily *via* Derrida, Foucault, and Barthes.

Does he mention Lacan? Yes. Here we find the possibly reason why Vico made no impression on Kearney. In a five-page treatment, Kearney explains why Lacan is opposed to the humanistic vision. For an audience gathered together to get a good read on the imagination as the central component of the humanistic vision, this is not likely to be a friendly review. Lacan, Kearney quotes, says that the "unconscious is structured like a language." From this point, Kearney has it that "like" might as well take a break, that the unconscious is symbolic. This for Lacanians is a sour note in the solo that gets the performer booed off stage. The unconscious is noted specifically for resisting the Symbolic even while appearing entirely within the Symbolic, but Kearney takes no note of Lacan's distinction of the Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real. Stirring up the humanists for a torch-and-pitchfork parade, Kearney notes: "Instead of cultivating the humanist ideal of self-identity Lacan sought to expose it as an 'imaginary' contrivance. The *imaginary* level of illusion must, he believed, be unravelled in order that the *symbolic* language of the unconscious be heard" [p. 257]. Further: "Taking his cue once again from the structuralists model of linguistics, Lacan held that in the language of the unconscious the 'signifier' (word) is freed from any fixed reference to a 'signified' (idea)."

Lacan does say such things about the chains of signifiers, whose self-referential system is like a closed curved universe that operates independent of objective referential 'signifieds'. However, the unconscious cannot break into this system, except by "signalizing." The unconscious resists the Symbolic, which is why psychoanalysis looks for the "parapraxes" — the errors, the slips of tongue, the blind spots — in order to find traces of the unconscious. Kearney, by make the unconscious a symbolic matter, sees it simply as a question of hermeneutic interpretation. Like Jung, he sits in front of works of imagination wondering how to decode their eternal messages.

Yes, we all do this, but for Lacanians, this message is not a message in the ordinary sense.

What does Lacan say about the "language" of the unconscious. First, he says it is not a language, at least not in the form of the "sliding signification" that requires "quilting" and which is self-sufficient. The Symbolic has its own problems. The unconscious speaks in the language of myth. What the hell would that be? Here, Lacan follows Joyce and Joyce follows Vico. The language of myth is a-Symbolic. It is polythetic and polyphonic. It is the "two minds at once" that Kearney cites later in reference to Joyce. Is the unconscious *via* the mythic ever to be found in the Symbolic? As students of metalepsis, we know the answer at once: yes. It is present in the form of the material voids inserted, exploded, epiphanied, sinthomed, and clinamened into the smooth laminar flow of overlapping meanings in discourse. Vico, Joyce, and Lacan give us CLEAR PICTURES of how this happens. Kearney, by ignoring Lacan's tripartite structure of subjectivity and misidentifying the modality of the unconscious, passes on his confusion to countless others who, astounded by the breadth of his scholarship, assume he does not make mistakes.

The real damage Kearney does to the "imagination" is ignore the distinction between what Italians call the action of imagining, *immaginare*, and *fantasia*. Imagining can be put opposite reason, as a deviation, sometimes willful sometimes inadvertent, from the empirical truth of things. *Fantasia*, on the other hand, is always fictional, but it is not in opposition to reason. There is always "some reason in the fiction" of *fantasia*. Vico's big discovery was with *univesale fantastico*, translated as the "imaginative universal" but really the universal-fantasy. Here is Vico's claim to metalepsis fame. The first human idea is a metalepsis by which humans imagine their own nature to be behind natural appearances, but they fail to recognize what they have done. It is permanently and radically hidden from them, and this hiddenness leads to their respect for nature as demonic. This is not imagination but *fantasia*. Use the Italian word. Lacan understands this by giving fantasy its own *matheme*, the *pointon*,  $\diamond$ , and putting it between the barred subject,  $\$$ , and the *objet petit a*, the return point of the death drive, the place the unconscious continually steers us to, a "return to an ideal relation with nature" but also a self-constructed void, a "little other."

If you want a quick way to think about the difference between the "humanist human" (not a subject) and the Lacanian **subject**, think of this. Humanism always uses the expression "the human animal" — i.e. everyone's an animal, but humans are special. With Lacan, it's the "naimal human": within each subject is a void, a hollow, within which operates the animal, the automaton, the Other. Basically humanists are Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm, Lacanians are the horror movies. If you still want to be a humanist, insist on the whole human, not just the nice parts.

We cannot understand the mathematics of desire without the drive. We cannot understand the drive if we confuse the unconscious with the Symbolic, with language as a network of relationships of signifiers. Being "structured like a language" does not mean that the unconscious is in the mode of the Symbolic. Kearney misses key points of Lacan's system and then tells others, authoritatively, what it is about. Kearney has done a lot of damage; don't pass it on.

## **\* the difference between polemic and survival strategies**

In pointing out the flaws in Kearney and others, it may seem that the metalepsis project has sunk to the low of polemic bickering. Actually polemics is the place where some works insist on residing to avoid critical review. As an advocate for something — the list of victims is famous (women, immigrants, racial minorities ...) — or militant force *against* something (the famous case in architecture is "against instrumentality"), ideology is the main cover theme. But, the kicker here is that no argument made inside ideology has a proper end. It is only a "for or against" rhetoric, hopefully landing on the right side, with the right sources and pre-approved examples. In other words, it's not thinking, it's just taking sides.

The problem with ideology is that it's hard to escape. Even when one objects to it, chances are that the objection has already been worked into the system, as when Amish youth are given the

chance to escape the constrictive culture in the years of *Rumspringe*, where they are encouraged to drink, have wild sex, take drugs, etc. ... i.e. "get to know the English way of life." This is the forced choice situation in pure Hegelian terms. Ideology is never more pure than when we feel we are exercising free choice, when we have lots of options and no one is pushing us to decide.

There are two antidotes to ideology: "the political" (which seems like only more ideology!) and "the unconscious" (i.e. the Freudian-Lacanian field). With the political we have a lot of help distinguishing between "politics" and "the political," which means a take-back of the Symbolic, with such ideas as **Rancière's dissensus** — the idea that we don't have to agree, that consensus is ideological. Here we open the way to the idea of the collective memory, and of collectivities of thought as well as action. It's exciting to see how these collectivities all lead in the direction of "emergent" knowledge, where explanation eludes the formulas of ideology. Zizek's "parallax view" addresses this directly.

With the unconscious, we have (refuting Kearney) the issue of resistance, in particular resistance against the Symbolic. We cannot "put the unconscious into words," and even the symbols and images, while structured "like a language," can only signalize. They cannot be translated directly. Here, we run into the "interpretation" theory, which is nothing more than a Kearney-style attempt to say what the unconscious says, something we know is impossible, so it must have an ideological basis. In the style of Jung, the intent is to offer the interpretations and then group subsequent interpretations around them, to form a loose "family" that has philosophical pretensions. Such is the case, I feel, with Bachelard, whose insights are certainly helpful but whose habit of leaving out evidence forces him to terminate his arguments ideologically rather than philosophically. Heidegger *does* terminate his arguments philosophically but many readers and commentators cut this short and prefer to extract an ideological message. A particularly cruel example is the general architecture school portrayal of Heidegger as a philosopher of ecological harmony, when in fact he is the pre-eminant philosopher of "dissatisfaction" — the subject's existential Angst as the basis of *Dasein*. It is hard to make it to the end of Heidegger's difficult texts, but there you find philosophy rather than ideology. Almost all abbreviations — which seem so helpful in graduate school where tedious tasks fill the day — are ideology instead of philosophy. AND, when you run across someone who is eager to provide as many captions, accounts, descriptions, and summaries as possible (e.g. Kearney) you can be *sure* the intent is ideological — to "capture" ideas at the wholesale level and then retail them with a lot of re-packaging. INSIST ON GOING TO THE PRIMARY SOURCES. If someone says "As Socrates said ..." you can be sure they are repackaging, because discourse was used with high irony (Menippean satire?) in all of the Platonic dialogs. And, when Joyce employs Menippean satire in *Finnegans Wake*, he ideology-proofs his book permanently.

In taking on any large project, such as a thesis or dissertation, you have the chance to decide whether the work will belong to you or someone else. The ideological termination in a premature conclusion, with forced concealments of relevant evidence, effectively puts you in debt to whoever approves your betrayal. Many honorable candidates have given in to pressure to do this, don't feel too bad! But, if you hold out, and if you learn how to smuggle ideas in ways that are not detected by the "ideology police," you can reach a private happy ending. This is the point of using the term "idiot" (a private person). Sometimes you will appear to others to be an idiot, and sometimes you will need to play the fool to get around ideology's drive to conscript a supportive cast of debtors. You can tell the difference between the ideology crowd and the philosophy crowd. The (true) philosophers "don't give a damn" what you think as long as you think, as long as you decide not to terminate your thought by resorting to ideology. They know in advance that there are only a few effective escape routes. Plato was one, Vico another, Hegel still another. No one *likes* these guys because they do not offer answers, only plans of resistance. But, the real payoff is a means of relating public life (the political) to the private one (the unconscious). Remember those key words! Your subjectivity is at stake!

**\* fresh air: youngjin park's paper on the sinthome**

For some unknown reason, a grad student at the University of Toronto sent me his [perfectly wonderful paper about Lacan and the sinthome](#). From the title ("Post-Fantasmic Sinthome") you can guess it's going to clear up a lot of complications in sorting out terms that seem to overlap. Separating the Imaginary from the Symbolic from the Real has never been easy. YounglinPark makes some very clever moves and I hope he won't mind me forwarding his essay to you, *via* the PSU server. I am sending the version with my comments all over the place, so you will see how confused I can get. There is [an un-commented version](#). You might want to [follow Younglin Park](#) yourself. This paper fits in to our consideration of the shift from the inventory-style fetish cathexis and sinthome cathexis. Thanks again to Marina Marmelic for finding the Zizek essay on Tibetan Buddhism that exemplifies this shift.

## **\* next time**

You have heard a bit about Shannon and Weaver's famous communications theory diagram. Not a few people have noted that Lacan's theory of discourse is, after all, a very close transposition of this "simplistic" model, with the result that we see Truth and Production in the place of the signal-to-noise filters that the scientific model requires. Sounds like metalepsis to me, but you be the judge. NEXT TIME.