

Metalepsis Seminar • Virtual Session 12

[metalepsis seminar](#) / WAAC•PSU / 19 March 2014

BUILT UPON (TOUGH) LOVE

METALEPSIS SEMINARIANS, 9-ERS, AND AUXILIARY MEMBERS



Fig. 1. In the film *The Matrix*, Morpheus offers the choice between living within the illusion of the Matrix (blue pill) or knowing the Real as such (red pill). Should we take the bait (= "forced choice") or should we, like Slavoj Žižek, ask for "a third pill"?

* from symptom to sinthome, the third pill

The polemical division that has dominated architecture education for the past 20 years has been a fake set-up. It is portrayed as a battle between the "humanists" and those reductionistic science types (parametricians, neural networkers, functionalists, etc.) who, lacking key sensitivities, have led architecture schools to hell in a handbasket (this part is true) while ignoring architecture's important alliances with poetry, philosophy, and the other arts (this is also true). The downside for critical theory is that the "political left" of this fight is dominated by phenomenology, with ambiguous debts to Heidegger, while the "right-wing extremists" have adopted Deleuze and Guattari as their "little red book." This allows them to incorporate, as all good conservatives like to do, biological metaphors, such as Manuel Delanda's "self-organizing matter" and Maturana and Verala's *autopoiesis* theories. The problem with this either/or situation is that the left endorses Being over becoming (although this is "the performative" as such), while the performative is hijacked by the "research studio," for whom performance is any idiotic demonstration of an algorithm set up and left to run hours on end. And, on top of this, as Eyal Weizman (*The Politics of Verticality*) has shown, Deleuze and Guattari lend themselves all too easily to the geopolitical concepts of occupation and warfare in our neoliberal culture of late capitalism. In other words, where to go, when the negatives of either side are unacceptable? In other words, we want to re-take "the performative" as a basis for architecture and its critical-theoretical annex, *and* we want to be experimental, without endorsing a Heideggerian model of Being. Is the choice really between Deleuze/Guattari and Heidegger? What about those "other guys and gals" who were neither "humanists" nor neural networkers? In the department of forced choices, this one particularly sucks.

Isn't this the case of needing a "third pill" — i.e. resisting the temptation to spend life without knowing how the wires are attached (which side *would* this be, eh?) or having the wrong circuit board to begin with — instead of the laptop motherboard we have the chip for a toaster. In certain writings about "brain science" there are a few of what I would call "interesting analogies." One comes from John C. Lilly, [Programming and Metaprogramming in the Human Biocomputer: Theory and Experiments](#), who argues that the mind-brain issue is a *boundary problem*. Putting up with the reductionistic language (human mind = circuits, etc.) allows us to journey back to Timothy O'Leary's preposterous but interesting idea of the "eight minds" that also eats away at both the reductionistic neuroscientific model of self while exploding the humanist proposition of the ethical ego.

If you can hold your nose through the pseudo-science reductionisms, you can see in these projects a common desire to push past the literal body (and skull) to find "mind" in the world, an entirely Lacanian notion. There is also acceptance of the idea that the super-ego voices inside the head are actually personality formations, internal discourses so to speak, that constitute mini-selves within the unitary order we impose to "misrepresent" ourselves to our "networks of symbolic social relationships." In other words, if a theory proposes order, any order, as "natural," run as fast as you can. We know that order is constructed "as we go," but that it appears in all kinds of places and guises. We have to be flexible on "where" the mind or subject actually "is," because the "where" and the "is" are also being constructed.

* against pictures/maps in the head

The variability of the "where" of subjectivity is the reason why the concept of "mental pictures" or "mental maps" is so idiotic while at the same time it offers an analogy for how extimacy works. Do not be drawn in by the idea that, as a part of being distinctive individuals, we all have "mental maps" of reality in our heads. By the time you're finished with the metaphor, you have bought the entire positivist program of neural ontogeny. We are just little circuit boards with inputs and outputs, no chance to "link up" with our fellow circuit boards except through pseudo-magic delusional feelings of camaraderie. We are, gasp!, all alone. But, once the positivist heritage is faced squarely, we can see the ideology of this proposition. It is ideology at its worst! It covers up the gap in our networks of symbolic relations (i.e. the hole ideology itself creates) with a fantasy, $\$ \diamond a$, that, as Park puts it, is like a picture covering a window, that shows what the view out the window should look like.

This is how the *sinthome* figures in as the third pill! The *sinthome* calls into question the humanist use of ideology to formulate subjectivity in terms of the "thoughtful individual," sensitive to the needs of others, just as it resists the reductionisms of neuroscientists who say we are nothing more than circuit boards. Yet, in each of our polarized forced choices, the *sinthome* finds a common interest in boundary. On the left, the humanist side, is the fear of them; on the right, an ignorance. The boundary — particularly the Lacanian "not-all" boundary — is the key. Where $\sim \sim P \neq P$ (i.e. where the double negative is not equivalent to a positive, or "you can't go home again") there is the option of Elsewhere, a construction that relates directly to the unconscious as such, a "fantasy-buster." The *poignon*, \diamond , gets split up vertically, into alienation and separation, while at the same time it is split horizontally, $\langle \rangle$, into the "detached virtuality" modeled by Borges as travel through time, story in a story, the double, and contamination of reality by the dream. Here we use "truth in the first and fourth position" in a Vichian way. We see that it is the "missing element" that, suppressed at the moment where communications divides *énoncé* from *énonciation* — speech content from speech act so to speak — to the last element, found within the materiality vector of the composite form connecting formal cause and material cause.



HIEROGLYPHS ON THE COPAN STATUE.

If all this sounds new and complicated, it is because it is the step *into the sinthome* — a step that psychoanalysis cannot take! — and, with this step, the implications of the *sinthome* in the arts and critical theory that we must perform make outside of both ideology and psychoanalysis. Just as Mladen Dolar cited "transference love" as the barrier to the conclusion of analysis, we must take this love and make it the "tough love" solution to the ideology-symptom domination of architecture theory. Transference love, in our case, becomes a "love transference," i.e. a radical and reformist feminism of gender now, gender tomorrow, gender forever. This, please note, is not the gender-ing of ideology but the creation of *difference* that allows for relationship, specifically a sexual (in the largest sense) relationship. We do not aim to divide space according to any Hestia-Hermes principle (sorry, Jean-Louis Vernant and Jean Robert). Rather, the point is to use chirality, super-symmetry, and ciphering to find difference and relation preferable to New Age equalities.

Our only comfort in this is the hypothesis that "others have been here before us," and, like the remnants of a lost

civilization lying in the dust at the feet of archaeologist breaking into an ancient tomb, we have to break their code, with the only clue being that *everyone who discovers the sinthome realizes its relationship to the cipher*. The cipher proof is at least a first idea that helps to see how other "lost civilizations" have solved the problem of the third pill.

* what's in the third pill?

The [metalepsis project](#) is about deploying the idea of the Lacanian symptom and sinthome within works of art, not as a means of interpretation but to facilitate the return of theoretical "resistance" through ideas of the unconscious and the political. Using Gérard Genette's strict confinement of metalepsis to "diegetic/framing" elements framing a "mimetic" interior, we use Lacan's idea of extimity to show how the binary signifier can be introduced "from the outside" to effect poetic conditions within conventional-material conditions, to create what we identify as "sites of exception."

In his book, [The Parallax View](#), Slavoj Žižek introduces the issue of the "binary signifier" in relation to "primary repression" (*Urverdrängung*). Don't stop reading! It's not tough! A binary signifier is one that attempts, through symmetry and complementarity, to account for a whole: death/life, high/low, inside/outside ... Hestia/Hermes? (Let's not go that far!). Some words embody this in their own dialectic etymology: "cleave" for example means both "to divide" and "to join." "Sacred" is another such permanently ambiguous word. Conventional communications cannot take place unless one aspect is given weight, and the other suppressed. Think of the conventional use of "he" when it's unclear whether the subject of the pronoun is a man or woman. Once suppression takes place, a master signifier can be formed that will settle any remaining turbulence in the chain of signifying relations. The master signifier takes on the symmetry of the binary signifier, but makes it into a self-contradicting structure, such as the anti-Semitic idea of the Jew as both deprived/weak and powerful/controlling. The shark in the film *Jaws* is a good example of a master signifier that appears and disappears but "makes things happen" all around it.

Signifiers proliferate, creating chains linked to chains ... predications without end, so to speak. These, however, continue to be "haunted" by the suppressed element. Metonymy is the form of this haunting, since it is the kind of metaphor that likes to act "at a distance." From the repressed component of the binary signifier, meanings rise out of the deep to constitute fantasies constructed to paper over the gaps in the signifying chain. These gaps exist because the chain exists specifically to distance subjectivity from the traumatic/Real, which would collapse the orderly relations of subjects and predicates, causes and effects. This is the "symptom," $\$ \diamond a$, the barred subject in relation to the *object petit a*, the repressed that has "returned" *via* metonymy to haunt conventional mimesis (words for things). NOW you see why ghost stories are important!

The symptom is illusional and delusional. It's what psychoanalysis aims to track back to its origins, so that individual subjects can gain self-awareness, even if they don't feel any better about themselves. But, wait ... the symptom isn't everything. There is the *sinthome*! This takes a step past psychoanalysis in a sense. It focuses on the way in which the symptom has structured communication (think of the Shannon-Weaver model) in ways devoted to the specifics of canonical kinds of subjectivity: Hysteria, the University, the Master-Servant, Analysis. In particular, it sees the role of Truth, which [as Paul Verhaeghe has claimed](#), is in both the "first" and "fourth" position in the discursive field. Truth can be seen in terms of the "four points" of the *poinçon*, (1) the vertical arrows that relate the "alienation function" of the forced choice that requires the subject to choose speaking over being from the "separation function" that takes the subject back to the primal "Ché vuoi?" — the enigma of the Other, its incompleteness, its failure, its non-existence for God's sake! and (2) the horizontal issues of the <>, the "greater-than-and-less-than" that constitute the idea of the Lacanian extimate, and the need for fantasy to cover up gaps in the signifying chain in the first place.

Key in all this, as [Youngjin Park](#) points out, is that the "equalization feature" of the master signifier makes sex impossible, because the difference between the binary signifier, man/woman, has been neutralized. When Lacan says "there can be no sexual relationship," he means that the symptom forces us to have four people in every sexual act — one each for the mis-recognized lover each partner needs to sustain fantasized love. Only when the sinthome uses the symptom as a *gateway* to the TRUTH can difference be re-introduced. Only then can the phallic law — the forced choice — be thrown over to get past speaking back ... not to pure Being in the Heideggerian sense but, rather, to *père-version* — a "turning toward the father" that doesn't use the natural father (proven inadequate) but invents a new father, as Joyce did in his construction of *Finnegans Wake*. This takes us DI-RECT-LY to Bloom's idea of affiliation, which is the name of what we're doing with perversion, a "turn toward paternity," which is something anyone can do, man or woman, but with the theme of piety in mind (cf. Diana and Actæon). When Vico says that the two Dianas are key to the understanding of human conceptual and cultural development, he's telling you, "think like a pervert about this!"

The sinthome takes us past this in the sense that it literally asks us to "make sense of pleasure" — *j'oui-sens* — enjoy-*meant*. This is Todd McGowan's move in his book, *The End of Dissatisfaction?* and it could be ours, if we use the sinthome to see how the symptom structures pleasure in works of art, architecture, landscape, films, etc. Don't miss this opportunity to see binary signification through to the end, so to speak, as an initial condition with final results that open up options that only art can pursue. After all, "that's our business!"