

Metalepsis Seminar • Virtual Session 16

[metalepsis seminar](#) / WAAC•PSU / 16 April 2014

adventure of the sinthome: medievalism, eros, radical feminism

METALEPSIS SEMINARIANS, 9-ERS, AUXILIARY MEMBERS, and OCCASIONAL GUESTS



The troubadour tradition carried Europe from gnostic christianity into literary modernity

* more than everything, less than nothing

Slavoj Žižek makes an important point in his book *Less than Nothing* (2013), a book that, incidentally, doesn't cost less than nothing and weighs more than a lot of things. This is the point that theory is an *act*, that it is continually self-dividing, lacking specific content. This radical idea of theory keeps it free from ideology, but the question remains, "free for what?"

The aims of the metalepsis seminar are compact but complex:

- **unlimited semiosis:** unleash those signifiers, whether into the form of a dissertation, diary, love letter, or manifesto ... and pack those signifiers with *jouissance* (j'ouïs-sense) — a.k.a. polysemy — so that they act (act!) more like train stations than designators.

- **my darling automatons!** invest in the world and the world invests in you; use the method of wishful thinking to turn cathexis into a fetish operation to make it a sinthome machine. James Joyce did this by making meticulous notes, saturating his little book to the point where the aleatory collisions of trivial events and people constituted his own personal *zairja*.

- **read the same way:** sinthome cathexis works for the world, it also works for reading the primary sources (everything becomes primary in this way), turning every book into an lexiomancy experience. Books that tell you your fortune become true *grimoires*, the "magic books" filled with

diagrams and poetry only the adept could understand. This is not a fancy invented by professors romanticizing the past. This is real stuff.

• **love is the answer:** but hold your horses, this is not phallic *jouissance* we're talking about, which is fine as it stands (pun not really intended), but rather a radical feminist sinthome-based logic of staying true to the impossible-Real. Youngjin Park: "Never give up on the possible while holding onto the impossible by keeping the void." This is not abstract advice, but a "continuous project" stretching from god knows when, through Plato's symposium, through the Cabalists, Camillo, Ficino, etc. to those committed to the impossible-Real (think of Žižek's story about the Nobodies stuck in the "no man's land" in WWI), including Joyce but also Iris Murdoch, Fay Weldon (*Life and Loves of a She-Devil*), Lawrence Durrell (*Alexandria Quartet*), Roland Barthes (*A Lover's Discourse*), Vladimir Nabokov (*Lolita*, read with an ear to allegory rather than pedophilia), and even Raymond Carver ("What We Talk about when We Talk about Love").



Rose, c'est la vie ... it's time to return and return seriously to Eros, the name of the dæmon of Harold Bloom's six-part system. This is our access to the sinthome. This is our brave new world. This is the site of ... a nightmare if you want to know the truth, and everyone who enters the sinthome knows that, like the case of "falling in love," the ratio of pleasure to pain is hardly inducing. In re-reading Lawrence Durrell's *Alexandria Quartet* in honor of the treasured semester at WAAC and the follow-up ecstasies at the *Confabulations* conference, it seems that the symbolic offers a special way out of the pain given its eternal symbol by Dante, in the image of Paolo and Francesca (who might have been also Paola and Francesco), two lovers held apart and together at the same time by a whirlwind represented by artists such as Blake in ways that, if noticed by scientists, would have led to the discovery of the double helix molecular structure 20 years earlier than it happened! P&F begin by reading together. They see, in the love of the fictional couple, an omen of their own love. They then carry out a mandate that was spectrally determined before them, an omen that leads to destruction. Their "detached virtuality" of the double, of travel through time, of the story in the story, and of the contamination of reality by the dream finds, within this *sinthomatic state*, a dimensionality within which the WORK OF ART must draw things to a conclusion. We are treading on critical ground here. No one — no one! — has ever pulled together the many threads that constitute this fabric, but it should be those who *make things* who take on the responsibility. Grab your tools! your thoughts! your blood! — and hold on to your hearts. Neither should you lose your head, a key to sobriety in navigating the *mi-dire* of the signifying chain. It will help you *construct*.

your tools:

askesis
clinamen
tessera
kenosis
apophrades

and rose ...



Rose is *ros marinus*, the magical substance of sea-foam at the feet of Botticelli's Primavera. Read up on this with your favorite *grimoire* close by. You actually have to smell the plant version to get the main clues. This is not a literal "rose," but something closer to the (in)carnation you can see Jesus reaching for in that short interval of timeless time captured by Piero when he shows the Virgin, Jesus, and the four angels (the four quarters and their pivot). Rose mari-nus, the rose of Mary homophonically transformed into sea-foam. The rose of Mary is incarnation. When you cook with it, it's quite obvious.

Keep repeating Youngjin Park's slogan: "Never give up on the possible while holding onto the impossible by keeping the void."

* catalepsis

From metalepsis to catalepsis? The challenge here is to adopt to the challenges of neo-neuro-nativists who attempt to ground the human project, architecture included, into repackaged brain science. This resurgence of the Positivism that Maurice Merleau-Ponty effectively discredited in *The Phenomenology of Perception* (carried over into an underappreciated text by the Canadian, Mikel Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*) has the brain as the master control room of subjectivity. Lacan warned that any such localization of subjectivity would over-empower the ego and ideology, and his predictions have come true, even among some phenomenologists who have opted to "celebrate" synapses over synergy. The "prediction" is that the body acts in many ways as a partner or sometimes wise parent to the brain. It acts *before* the

brain is aware of the action, according to recent research, and in that interval between a bodily movement and a cognitive response, there is *time outside of time*, a temporality specifically keyed to the ACT. This is "knowing without knowing."

In the past few days, earthlings on the east side of the U.S. have been able to see, if skies had been or are clear, one or more of the four total eclipses taking place. The moon, full or nearly full, goes dark as the earth intersects the light of the sun on the other side of night. Once dark, the moon turns red. This is the light reflected from "sunsets being enjoyed all over the earth, in different locations," said an NPR reporter. This is not a poet waxing eloquent, it is a "scientific state of affairs." Our images of beauty and truth are fused by the world around us, but it takes a certain conscious awareness to realize what the hell is happening. In this magic interval of the moon's darkness we see "darkness shining through the light," as William Blake put it once. This is pure reverse predication, because it would be just as lovely to say that lightness is shining through the dark, although light shining through dark is the white-bread position. We opt for the grotesque, left-hand side of the equation, the eclipse. And if we are thinking properly we remember Semele who must put Endymion to sleep in order to kiss him. There are kisses that can take place only in this "unconscious," this interval of blindness. This, says Vico, is one half of the story, Actæon is the other (Vico, taking at the mid-point of *The New Science*, or "the science of nines").

Catalepsis ... what is that to us? Here are some possibilities. We can take apart the \diamond of fantasy, vertically and horizontally. Vertically we get the division between "separation" and "alienation." Alienation comes from the Big Other, the imaginary being whose impossible demand, the forced choice, introduces us to ideology. We take this "to our heart," a void, through the act of interpolation. We are, in our imagined freedom, completely ideologized. We think it's great to have 134 channels to watch but of course there is nothing on cable TV as a result of this freedom. The freedom to choose is only an illusion of subjectivity. In separation we live the nightmare of the *Ché vuoi?* but remember that this is Diderot's ghost story about the devil who, taking the form of a young woman, falls in love with the idiot, pursuing him, madly attracted, but he pays her no notice until, at the point of her death, he realizes this upside-down love. Separation takes us to the void, and is the nadir in contrast to the zenith of alienation.

Horizontally we have the continuity of the symbolic chain, but also the function of scale, $\langle \rangle$, that we thematized through the crane shot in *Notorious* and *Young and Innocent*. At a critical point, fetish cathexis (thank you, Marina) gives way to sinthome cathexis. Substances transform. The Champagne becomes poison, the poison becomes elixir, the music (*Young and Innocent's* "The Drummer Man") becomes saturated with sideways meanings. Then we get the metalepsis: the lock and key (*Notorious*) that will take us past the poison; the syncopation that will take us to the arrest of the murderer (*Young and Innocent*). In the latter film, Nora Pilbeam, the heroin, stands between her father and her lover, looking at each. She is "between the two fathers," the natural one and the constructed one. *Père-version*. You don't get lessons like this in textbooks!

With horizontal and vertical forces dispersed into their separate vectors, we have something like a "four quarters" design. Catalepsis is about the flesh made word, and this is the basis of necromancy — the relation of the living to the dead, the voice of *apophrades*. In Paul Wheatley's (today forgotten) masterpiece, *The Pivot of the Four Quarters*, we find that at each of the seven centers of evolving urbanism the city began as a necropolis. A specialized ethnic group operated as undertakers, assimilating the languages, customs, and burial needs of nearby groups, who were themselves forbidden to mingle (the fear of the stranger as contaminating Other). The undertakers evolved a system of signs to interpret the messages of the dead ancestors — the first writing! — and became the first priests, "nobodies" since they were outcasts of all the client tribes. In times of external threat, however, their function modulated into that of priest-kings, able to negotiate, raise armies, coordinate defenses. Their "intel" couldn't be beat! With the dead on your side, you are invincible against any living being!

The four quarters has to do with the idea of each point on earth being a center, thanks to the closed curved surface we inhabit. There is no boundary, and every point is a center. Borges, quoting Pascal: "God is an infinite sphere whose circumference is nowhere and center everywhere." The "silence" of the central point is critical. It is the Hermetic point of passage, between living and dead, lover and loved, heaven and hell. Silence is our symptom turned into sinthome, by the way. It is Truth, in the first and the fourth place, Truth deployed across the vectors animating the discourses, Truth packing, saturating, all signifiers with ... what? ... emptiness? Polysemy perhaps is an approximation of this riddle, because polysemy is itself a kind of riddle. But, YOU TELL ME. There is a lot of work to do here, work "beyond" the scope of psychoanalysis, work that may carry us into the logic of the troubadours, the madness of Bataille, the forgotten intricacies of Duchamp, the doubly or triply forgotten magic of Vico. Like Virgil as the tour guide for Dante's descent, I can only take you part way. Told from the point of view of Virgil, the *Divine Comedy* would be quite a different tale — one where Virgil uses a "stranger" with warm flesh and fresh blood, to allow him to re-animate memories locked inside words and images.

This reminds me, don't forget the forgotten classic, *The Cumæan Gates*, by W. F. Jackson-Knight — a commentary on the sixth book of the *Æneid* ("funeral games"). No one in architecture or geography theory references this book. It is still fresh and insightful. In later life, Jackson-Knight claimed that he talked to Virgil in his dreams, but that the Roman poet's Latin had gotten a bit rusty. He imagined that 2000 years of being dead can have some effect on a fellow's grammar. (By the way, Jackson-Knight was a good friend of Joseph Rykwert, who told me this story.)

* california friend

I have met by chance Alireza Moharrar, a brilliant engineer and mystic who has found some of our writings and offered insights into parallels in physics and mathematics. I am encouraging him to contribute more to the metalepsis project. He has developed an [introduction to the work of Paul Dirac](#) ("Dirac's *Valis* Equation") that you will find fascinating.

We also have our friend in Modena, Claudio Sgarbi. I am inviting him to publish in the newsletter, to continue the ideas he introduced at the *Confabulations* symposium. Our newsletter, being R-rated, can make an exception here and there. The point is to expose Claudio to the critiques of our own evolving radical feminism and, after the dust settles, see what treasures remain. ALL METALEPSARIANS are invited to post key texts on the art3idea server and link them from the newsletter. This project is a collective, we cannot accomplish it working in isolation. Thanks to the Friday Club (a.k.a. "Niners," "9-ers," "Misquoters," "RRR RRR RRR" ...) that sometimes met on Wednesdays, Bloom was assimilated to politics through Lacan; their work may be seen in the recent projects of members, in presentations made at professional conferences. The Metalepsis seminar at WAAC led to revolutionary modifications to the political model and the present focus on the symptom-to-sinthome revolution, our "Rose Selavy" project. Carolina Dayer and Berrin Terim helped take the show to the Zizek world, and to fairly tally the wins and losses. Everyone has my personal thanks. Without this collective I would still be writing up notes every morning over coffee, with my cat, Mitzi, on my lap ... a slow if enjoyable process. (This is where I am at this moment, in fact.)

* studio texts

I am donating several key texts to the WAAC division of the Metalepsis Seminar. Look for the arrival of Zizek's *Less than Nothing* and Jean-Pierre Dupuy's *The Mark of the Sacred*, also W. F. Sebald's *Natural History of Destruction*. *Less than Nothing* is set aside for permanent sharing, the last two titles are in the trust of our disaster specialist, Karima Benbih. She will take them home with her eventually, so read up now. If *Less than Nothing* ends up in the library, it should be hidden behind the other texts. It is dangerous stuff!