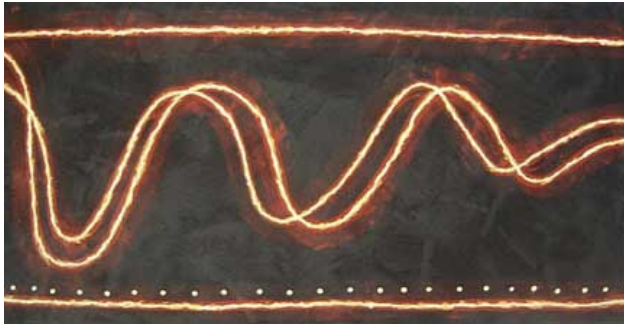


Metalepsis Seminar • Virtual Session 19

[metalepsis seminar](#) / WAAC•PSU / 7 mai 2014

acousmatics, song-lines, raising the dead

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



[Troy Bennel](#), Noongar Song Lines, Part 1, acrylic and sand on canvas

* bruce chatwin revisited

Those who have forgotten the impetuous, manic traveller, Bruce Chatwin's travels through Patagonia, Eastern Europe, Morocco and Northern Africa, Australia, etc., sometimes resulting in semi-autobiographical novels, sometimes photo albums, will want to at least remember the principle central to all architects and geographers that he manifested in [Songlines](#). This is about the idea of the cosmogram, an ideal geometry that activates, charges, and/or otherwise vivifies (cf. the old *animus* and *anima* idea of the Stoics) spaces and times. The aboriginal Australians believed that the landscape left on its own would die. It had to be lifted up from the dead by a walk guided by a song that was partly learned, partly invented as the walker went along. The song called nature into being, it named its parts, turned everyday words into love songs, as the lyrics of *La vie en rose* remind us.

Vergil's *Georgics* has much of the same flavor. Nature is fine but it needs something, the human touch. Nowadays we see that the human touch is more likely to spell disaster, degradation, the end of the world. It is hard to recover Vergil's idea of care, an investment in what is found to occur, to turn it into more of "what it wants to be." Louis Kahn authored the famous line about letting a brick "want to be a brick," vastly over-quoted and misunderstood. This is not a naive crude materialism, but rather the perception of a small remainder or margin, a place for human attention, or, dare we say? love? What creates an affinity between people can also be an attraction to the world, where the world waits at a margin, the edge of the stage, so to speak, for our attentions. Whether it's bee-keeping or picking up trash, this intervention can amount to more than a good deed. In fact, it was the original motive of architecture, Vitruvius's "opportunism" to make a great thing out of a good thing. Fire? Yes, let's create conviviality, cooking, and culture. Overhanging branches? Yes, let's make them a bit better so that they fend off fierce storms. But, wait, there's more.

Nature is affordance. Lacan tells us that it is also interpellation, a message from the thunder (Vico) that horrifies us and throws us into doubt. We are not simply in the

garden, gardeners. We are thrown into a wasteland. The opportunities we find sometimes have to be wrestled out, forced out, worked out by ingenuity. In the process, the mandate of nature/God has made us into hysterics. The "body" is the body of nature we load, through cathexis, investment. This body of nature is interpellated by our idea of the divine (spooky idea coming up) and its voids are sites of exceptions — new theory of sacred space! one to "beat the band" of phenomenology — where miracles, epiphanies, love just happens.

Who are we to ... well, who *are WE*? Our subjectivity is involve in this brand of sacred-space making, because cathexis is all about ideology but these voids are all about what comes next after ideology. From Mladen Dolar to Žižek, we know that the "end of analysis" has two things to it: (1) we see that Truth is in the first and fourth, or last position; this means that we find at the end what we put there at the beginning; this has to do with the subject-in-pieces, the *corps-morcélé* retroactively established by the damn image in the mirror, the ideal ego. The ideal ego is *imaginary* (hence the mirror image plays a critical role), the ego-ideal is symbolic: it is what amounts to "keeping up appearances." The ego-ideal contrasts with the superego, which enjoins us to "Enjoy!" in an obscene manner. It is the "dirty little fantasy" that is the counterpart of the official view that "nothing happened."



Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman in *Casablanca* (1942)

There is an [interesting essay by Žižek](#) that uses the film *Casablanca* as an example. Near the end of the film, Ilsa comes to Rick to get the essential letters of transit she and her husband Victor need to escape Morocco. There is a portion of the scene, in the bedroom, that the audience doesn't see. Instead, the camera shows the view of a lighthouse tower (don't go there, amateur Freudians!!!) and afterward Ilsa comes out with the letters while Rick smokes a cigarette, Hollywood code for "they did it." But, there are equally strong signals that they didn't, that the ego-ideal injunction was kept.

RICK: You said you knew about Ilsa and me?

VICTOR: Yes.

RICK: You didn't know she was at my place last night when you were... she came there for the letters of transit. Isn't that true, Ilsa?

ILSA: Yes.

RICK: She tried everything to get them and nothing worked. She did her best to convince me that she was still in love with me. That was all over long ago; for your sake she pretended it wasn't and I let her pretend.

VICTOR: I understand.

Well, no one else understands. The critic Richard Maltby gives a partial answer: both interpretations are correct, and the film allows us to see the reality, the Real of both. They both did it and didn't do it. The absence of the bedroom scene constitutes one of those holes in the inventory matrix of cathexis, a site of exception. The exception is the co-presence of both aspects of the fantasy, the superego dirty fantasy and the ego-ideal cleaned up version. Neither is an exception, the combination is the exception. Places where two opposite things can be true at the same time, and now we are in to Alireza Moharar's insistence that we think about time, and the times inside of times and times outside of time. These allow for $+x/-x$ convergences, *coincidentia oppositorum*, but unlike phenomenology, we must be explicit about these and not simply quote Jung.

It's often necessary to substitute the goal of dissensus for consensus. In consensus we must all agree about which is the correct reading. With dissensus, we agree that we can't agree. This is the condition necessary for places where contradictions abound: memory places, sacred sites, *terrain vague*, disaster sites, ruins, haunted landscapes — in short, the uncanny. NOW REMEMBER, CATS AND KITTENS, the uncanny and the canny *convert*. This is what makes the uncanny really really uncanny! The home and the unhomey — "that which should not have been exposed/let out has been exposed/let out." In other words, the sexual space that Actæon stumbles across during his stroll through the forest, certainly one kind of hole in our inventory grid of cathexis!

When you see sites of exception do not be picky. They are here there everywhere. They can appear and vanish. They are timeless but also time dependent (Dirac function). They can be parts of stories where the narrator does not know what the reader can imagine (Raymond Carver's "Cathedral"). There is not at present any critical methodology adequate to account for them, THIS IS YOUR JOB!

* summer

At the end of school semesters, terms, whatever we all have travel plans or work or play plans of some sort. The Newsletter will shift to an irregular publication schedule. Basically, it's the schedule of "whenever!" There are two events that some members will want to look out for however.

Summer Vico Institute. Some members have requested a few days of Vico study, a bit like the "retreat" held in the fall of 2013 for the combined Alexandria/PennState members. We will try to accommodate all who may wish to come. The general limit on our sunroom is 14, and again we will try to get Mary McLaughlin to cook meals for us. The general date will be around June 21, Vico's birthday, midsummer's day (John the Baptist = Giambattista = midsummer, the saint's day, get it?). We will talk about the humors in relation to Vico's theory, go over the role of the graphic materials at the beginning of *The New Science*, and review the basics of the theory. My book, *Thought and Place: The Architecture of the Imagination* is available on-line, and you should always refer to the Bergin Fisch translation of *The New Science*, not that other schlock edition, whose translator seems to know nothing about Vico's concern for the union of imagination and memory. The shorter works, *The Autobiography of Giambattista Vico*, *The Ancient Wisdom of the Italians*, *The Study Methods of Our Times*, and

the *Inaugural Lectures are important*, in that order (in my view). Don Verene's book, *Vico's Science of Imagination* (Cornell, 1992) is a fine book. Verene was my dissertation advisor, and the author of other good books on Vico. My view is a bit skew of the standard. It comes from conversations with Ernesto Grassi, Eugenio Battisti, Ivan Illich, Giuseppe Mazotto, and Giorgio Tagliacozzo. My book got some good reviews, even from David Leatherbarrow. Not to toot my own horn, but I just want to assure you that sometimes little books can be more important than Big Books, if you know how to read them. Before you "go there," let me advise you that almost everything Alberto Pérez-Gómez says about Vico in his book, *Built upon Love*, is dangerously misleading or flatly wrong. Sorry, Alberto, you need to take a hit on this one, from someone who actually read *The New Science*, something you weren't planning most readers to actually do. Bitter tirade aside, we will try to reach personalized understandings of *The New Science* (whose Italian title could easily infer "the science of nines") directed towards the "spatial studies" of architecture and geography.

The Ivan Illich Lovefest. Some local friends, including Sajay Samuel, have long wanted to convene discussions from topics introduced by our one-time guru, Ivan Illich. Anyone not knowing his work will be amazed at the span and depth of his interests. Illich came to Penn State and Penn for over four years back in the 1990s. He was already suffering from a cancerous tumor on his jaw, which he treated for pain only, saying that any doctor would have killed him years ago. He was right ... he lived long enough to convene many interesting discussion groups, seminars, and large events — he liked to pay for everything and often sent people plane tickets to come to events to make sure they would arrive. We don't know the topic exactly. Gender? Love? Politics? Illich's themes were broad, but of course his main theme was conviviality: what it means to talk together, food and wine in close proximity, with friends bound together by love rather than professional interests. All are welcome to come; locals will take up about 8 of the "slots," and we have room for about 16 in total. This will probably take place in August.

Impromptu visits. After June 15 (London/UK trip) Elaine and I will be around the house mostly and visitors are welcome. We can accommodate about six people at a time in the house but have friends who also will put you up (think of the Kleindorfer's farm for example). I expect some people to come up just to fantasize about horses.

MISS YOU ALL!