

## The False-False

*Your Name Here*

In this issue we confront the centrality of language as the means by which humans distinguish themselves from other animals. It is important not to regard this as a “for once and for all” issue, that after making the distinction, humans can just “take it from there.” The borderline between human and animal is portable; and it migrates, in a kind of metastasis, to other parts of the “domain/field” of the human.

The matter of the trace is taken up by Lacan to demonstrate this difference, *vis à vis* the remainders used to track or find animals — i.e. the whole host of issues around the phenomenon of camouflage. Let’s go right to the heart of the matter. While the animal can fake the sign, Lacan claims that only humans can fake faking. The double negation, the false use of falsehood, so to speak, is what’s at issue in the matter of the trace, the track, the trail. The quickest way to identify the essence of this is to attach the Liar’s Paradox: “All Cretins are liars.” The element of self-reference has fated this expression to various levels of skepticism. The Cretin of course may be telling the truth, in which case he will not be telling the truth, or is at least possibly lying at the present moment. If not telling the truth, then he is telling the truth at a “presentational/performative” level. He is saying “I’m really lying” by ... *really lying*. The content of the statement becomes the claim-value, the status of the claim as such, i.e. “what I’m telling you now is the truth” and the “contents” of the statement contradict the claim.<sup>1</sup>

It gets no clearer if the Cretin says that he’s telling the truth. In fact, it makes matters worse, if that’s possible. In either the lying or truth-ing mode, the Cretin shows that there is, in the signaling function of language, a “signalizing” going on — what alerts us in fact to the comedy of the Cretin saying that he’s a lying son-of-a-bitch. The false trace is camouflage, what animals can and do accomplish. The false-false is hysteria, and we know of no animal who can do this, because animals do not *hold together layers of signifiers using the “quilting” process known as the pointe(s) de capiton*. These quilting points are created to structure the signifying chain, allow it a temporary stability. The “point must be made” (pun intended) that this is only a temporary stopgap, something that always leaves a residue — a doubt.

Thus, there is always an “anamorphic” element in communication, in meaning. There is always a point of view that is able to see the loft between the layers of potential meaning, and this point of view is “held at bay” or “held in reserve” to varying degrees. In conventional communication it is the potential for irony that can be reduced through various signs of sincerity — “No, I really *really* mean it!”, “I’m not kidding”, “No joke!” However, not only the irony that allows us to treat any seemingly sincere statement with doubt but an irony alert to the possibility of the use of the lie to tell the truth (i.e. the extreme of hysteria) is commonplace.

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<sup>1</sup> A more instructive example is the case of the sole objector, in the Monty Python film, *The Life of Brian* (1979), who replies, in response to Brian’s admonishment of the crowd wishing to parrot his beliefs: “You are all DIFFERENT!”, “Not me!” This statement *signalizes* by virtue of its failure to signal. It has performative value precisely because it is a breakdown in the cause-and-effect structure of the chain of signifiers.

Jewish joke: two Jews living in Warsaw meet outside the train station; one sees that the other is carrying a small suit-case, and says, "So, where are you going off to?" The other replies "I'm taking the train to Kraków tomorrow." "So, why are you lying to me, when I know very well you ARE taking a train to Kraków tomorrow!" So, the difference between Derrida and Lacan on this matter lies at the functional level: it has to do with how layers of truth and lies can result in truth, at some level. In Michael Riffaterre's book, *Fictional Truth*, the author points out the obvious: there are some truths that can only be told through the "guise" of fictionality, i.e. a falsehood. The issue is how to treat these truths, since they are of a different order than those presented "diagetically," i.e. as true (documentary-style) truths.<sup>2</sup>

We move from the level of the signal, where the *point de capiton* is applied to stabilize things temporarily, to the level of signaling. This action could be mapped, following Lacan, as a movement from metaphor, where the representational screen is filled, so to speak, with diagetic "content," to metonymy, where meaning "resonates at a distance." This distance should not be treated as a figure of speech. It is a constructed distance that involves the presence of time and space that has been created to make this distance function as a factor in meaning. In the idea of echo, for example, we need the concept of space and time to allow the delay of the echo have any meaning whatsoever. When Narcissus sees his image reflected in the pool, there is only metaphor, an immediate return on the input, direct cause and effect. With Echo, there is a delay and necessary distance. In the trace, there is also a distance. In the case of the tracking of an animal, the animal is by definition not in the same place or time as the trace. It is "elsewhere," we know not where, and while we are looking at the trace it is getting clean away!

At this point we have a choice, whether or not to engage Derrida's approach to this problem or Lacan's, or some other. For Derrida, it seems impossible to avoid the reference to Heidegger's *Dasein*, a subject about which there is much ambiguity. The Lacanian comment about *Dasein* would be that we too often forget that *Dasein*'s "being there" is "being there for an Other." Heideggarians frequently forget this key element, which is a means of distinguishing the dreaming butterfly options in the fable of Chuang-Tze. The *for-other* is Hegelian, and Heidegger is trying to distance himself from Hegel's options about the Absolute. My point is that unless you really want to get into this at Heidegger's attempt to avoid a metaphysics of presence, by which he re-packages Hegel by avoiding Hegel's directives about the negative, try something else.

In my reading, many B-team commentators get hung up on language as that which distinguishes humanness. They ignore the ways in which animality is retained in human language, and fall victim to a simplified dichotomy. "Do animals have language" is an idiotic question. No. They have something that is much better on many scores. By not having the effect of sliding signifiers, they can use their sign systems in much more productive ways. Language has sliding, quilting, *points de capiton*, and breakdowns in the signifying chain. That's that! Animals just don't have it. Hence, laughter, which can be found to some degree in chimpanzees, is no reason to throw out the general thesis that animals don't have language as we have language. For Kelly Oliver, for example, Lacan's views will always be "fetishes" about animals and mathemes,

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Riffaterre, *Fictional Truth* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University, 1990).

while Derrida will always have the insights.<sup>3</sup> Such academic temper tantrums point to an inability to face the issue of hysteria, the real basis for any discussions about lying.

For Lacan, hysteria is both a field of clinical studies and a discourse. As discourse, the field is divided into one side (agent/truth) and an opposite side (other/production). These zones tell us about what kind of operations take place in discourse, a kind of “call and response” structure. The formula looks like this:

$$\frac{\$}{a} \longrightarrow \frac{S_1}{S_2}$$

Figure 1. Lacan’s matheme for the discourse of the hysteric. The barred/divided subject is in the place of the agent, the master signifier S1 is in the position of the Other. The subject conceals the role played by the object–cause of desire, for which the subject constitutes a kind of “field of affordance,” allowing the effects of *a* to play across it in unpredictable ways, converting *from the inside* organs in their corporeal functionality into partial objects functioning on their own. S1 in the position of the Other indicates that the subject–as–field is intended as a presentation to the Other–as–authority, as it was in the case of clinical hysteria. Knowledge, the systems of signifiers represented by S2, are thus set into production in novel deployments, not with respect to an epistemology of objectivity but in regard to a “subjective objectivity” initiated by the *objet petit a*, as it is deployed across a randomizing and unstable field of the subject.

The subject, \$, is barred or “divided,” and one part of this division has to do with the subject as a field across which something lost/disguised may range — the symptom. This is “presented” as a key (S1) within another field, that of signification. In the clinic, the hysterical patient has a phantom pain that becomes a clue (S1) that confounds the system of medical knowledge (S2). There are other, more officially correct ways of paraphrasing the discourse of the hysteric. This one suits our purpose in that it allows us to describe the phenomenon of signaling–as–metonymy. In particular, it directs us to the figure of metalepsis, the so-called “metonymy of metonymy.”

### Recursion

The trace implicates the subject that observes it in the following way. The subject is *late*. The trace remains after what has made it has moved on. The second type of implication has to do with being duped. Is the trace left “unconsciously,” as a by-product of movement that has converted

<sup>3</sup> Kelly Oliver, “Duplicity Makes the Man: Or, Can Animals Lie?” in Clancy W. Marti, *The Philosophy of Deception* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 104–117.

natural circumstances into a medium of sign-making? Or, was the trace constructed intentionally to make the future tracker come to the wrong conclusion; to put the tracker off the track? Or, is there not some third possibility that combines these two possibilities in a “larger game” such as that expounded by the literary psychotic, Hermann Hesse, in *The Glass Bead Game* (*Das Glasperlenspiel*, 1931); or by the British author John Fowles in *The Magus* (1966)? We will consider this problem as lying within the genre set up by Slavoj Žižek using the example of *The Matrix* (1999), where the *epebe* is offered a blue pill to allow things to “remain as they seem,” a red pill to encounter the Real beneath the constructed reality; and where Žižek desires to have a third pill. The third pill is not an option within the same logical space dichotomized by the red and blue pills. It relates precisely to the so-called “fourth wall” by which we imagine the scene to be observed/observable by some Other, the presence of whom frames and converts facts, objects, subjects, etc. to the level of the *performative*. In film, the theme of recursion is frequently used in the construct of the “story in the story,” a popular example being David Mamet’s 1987 film, *House of Games*, which deploys metalepsis in its most common form: the scam.

Moving from the hysteric’s discourse to the metalepsis of the scam affords us an “insider perspective,” since the fourth wall presumes that the mysteries surrounding the trace can be re-tooled to construct intentionally deceiving and rather standard flim-flams. If by recursion we mean the short-circuiting of a linear process “into itself” at a point that cuts off (forecloses) an intended sequence, we must amend the idea somewhat to say that the scam creates, through metalepsis, a short-circuiting that both happens and doesn’t happen. It is present as a possibility, just as the issue of double negation sustains a “straight story” (the trace as literally a remainder unconsciously left behind) and a false clue (a trace created intentionally to deceive). There is also the “third pill,” the move past the scam’s inventor and victim toward a condition that we can only at this point call a “natural history option,” the false-false — i.e. “just how far does the scam go?” If we are watching *House of Games* in the safe darkness of the movie theater, is it not possible that, in the unfolding of concentric blinds, each of which has been made precisely to dupe the “mark,” the victim who is made to believe that she is the neutral observer of a “natural history” condition of a deceived and deceiver, we are also a mark?

The scam, in short, is metonymy gone viral. Metalepsis, as the ultimate condensation of the condition set up by metonymy, is either (1) the continually elusive logic that “drives the system” as long as it is insulated, as logic, to serve as an Unseen Hand, a kind of S1 operator; or (2) an internal agency operating at the scale of a catalyst, neutral with respect to the substances whose transformation it affords. The first order of business, in cases such as this where the text has put

the reader (and writer) literally “out on a limb” through successive suppositions and speculations, is a “reality check.” Is there not — we should ask — some example or case where, if the situation of the false-false indeed leads to the option of the external or internal principle of “fourth-walling” the false-false, it works “naturally”? The answer is “yes,” and the case is provided by Jorge Luis Borges famous short story, “The Garden of the Forking Paths.”<sup>4</sup>

There are two ways to read this story. The first, which shall be immediately discarded, as an instance of literary abracadabra, i.e. the employment of the genre of the fantastic, where “anything goes.”<sup>5</sup> The second reading takes seriously the idea that Borges knew what he was doing when he wrote the story with its particular engagement of the metaphor of choice (the forking path), and that a sign of the span of his awareness is the connection of the protagonist’s predicament to the reader’s predicament, in relation to the author’s own “production of signs (traces).” At this level we may be able to confirm or deny the pathway that leads us from the trace to the hysteric to the false-false to the scam to the fourth wall to metalepsis — if we find ourselves, as readers, in the position of collaborating with the idea and its underlying logic.

### **The Garden of the Forking Paths**

[summary; discussion; conclusions]

### **Detached Virtuality and its Consequences**

[summary; discussion; conclusions]

### **Metalepsis, Signalizing, and the Function of the Cipher**

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<sup>4</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, “The Garden of the Forking Paths,”

<sup>5</sup> “Abracadabra,” *Wikipedia*, “The first known mention of the word was in the third century AD in a book called *Liber Medicinalis* (sometimes known as *De Medicina Praecepta Saluberrima*) by Quintus Serenus Sammonicus, physician to the Roman emperor Caracalla, who prescribed that malaria sufferers wear an amulet containing the word written in the form of a triangle.” Accessed January 17, 2012, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abracadabra>. As with Jasper Johns’ depiction of alphabets and number sequences as picture-fields, the issue is to move from any perceived symbolic relations of letters or numbers to a principle of *movement* within a restricted frame. Like the fabled abracadabra triangle, which allows readings of the alphabet sequence to take place in three “dimensions,” Johns sequential presentation of 0–9 afforded diagonal, sequential, and vertical readings, as well as a “fourth reading” based on the sigma values of the numbers. See Cecil Balmond, *No. 9, The Search for the Sigma Code* (New York: Prestel, 1998) for an explanation of the positional consequences of sigma as revealed by the division of a circle by nine points.

[summary; discussion; conclusions]

**The Creation of a Gateway *via* Metalepsis**

[summary; discussion; conclusions]