

THE TRUTH OF TRUTH: METAPHOR IN THE SERVICE OF THE EVERYDAY

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ABSTRACT. Truth in psychoanalysis takes several specific forms. First, there is the aim of the psychoanalytic session, when analysands are able, on their own, to allow “trapped signifiers” to escape their lips. This moment is staged by the analyst, for whom the analysand’s truth must not be trespassed or divulged; instead, the “truth of analysis” is the structuring of the egos in relation to the S (Es) and dummy role of the analyst, given in the L-Schema. I see this as a “twist” circuit connecting a primary virtuality — space within which the analyst and analysand sit as egos — and a secondary virtuality that Žižek has characterized as a space serving as the Efficient Cause of truths of the Imaginary, Symbolic, and Real. This is, in effect, the “truth of truth,” a phrase dreamt by one of Lacan’s analysands in Seminar IX, on Identity. In primary virtuality, things are true because they appear to be hidden behind appearances (climate change, motives, political plots). Secondary virtuality’s “truth of truth” binds psychoanalysis to the everyday via topology. Here, Lacan surmised, the unconscious is not a container repressing signifiers but a flow of surfaces continually reconfiguring ongoing thoughts and experiences in a way that, in a “Hegelian move,” preserves by canceling. I take secondary virtuality back to its roots in the history of projective geometry to show how topological features correspond to expanded ethnographic forms of the uncanny, as we encounter them in popular culture, the arts, politics, and everyday life. In particular, I make use of Mladen Dolar’s essay “Anamorphosis” to aspire to Dolar’s “wish to disentangle this concept from its mere placement in the field of the visual and give it a more emphatic range ... a structure [having] far-reaching consequences for the major questions ... of subjectivity and being.

1. It is a pleasure to be back among so many friends, and thanks to the organizers for making this happen. If we have to be virtual ghosts at least we are all haunting in good company.
2. My interests this year have focused on Lacan’s theory of metaphor, which I envision as a kind of efficient cause and virtuality related to the logic of dreaming. Anyone who has tried to grapple with Lacan’s somewhat complicated *matheme* for metaphor knows that it is not the usual kind of metaphor discussed in university English classes. As Stephanie Swales has recently written, you have to sort out Lacan’s many attempts to distance himself from the idea that a metaphor is a way to replace an ordinary word with a clever one, or simply an adaptation of the four terms of logical analogy.

3. Lacan does not relinquish the idea of one signifier replacing another. This in fact is a basic action of signifiers. When Lacan reversed Saussure's standard "signified over signifier" (s/S) to his own more functional "signifier over signified" (S/s), the idea was to show how the kernel of signification was fundamentally metaphorical. A signifier is a definition of what's on top, but it's a collection of signifiers of course, and we could, like the standard two-year-old, keep asking what this signified means until we run out of dictionary definitions. Jorge Luis Borges has written that the dictionary is really a circle of self-references and that all libraries are really circular. Lacan agreed but he wanted to acknowledge this circularity without requiring the need for a metalanguage position, a standing above and looking down on the circle to map its shape.
4. One of Lacan's solutions was this complicated-looking *matheme*, which I will try to unpack; but there are several important others. One is the grounding idea of extimity, the inside-out topology that is broadly represented from the Mirror Stage on. We are most familiar with this in the form of the Borromeo knot, but Lacan referred to many topological examples, the Möbius strip, Klein bottle, cross-cap, interior 8, and so on. Lacan's topologies have made a lot of heads hurt, because the matter of projective geometry on which they are based is not easy.
5. Projective geometry was "discovered" in 300 a.d. by Pappus of Alexandria. It was re-discovered by Girard Desargues and Blaise Pascal in the early 17c., misunderstood and forgotten until the 1800s, when it was revived and expanded. Without projective geometry there would have been no quantum physics or Relativity Theory, but the 20th century again forgot projective geometry and refers to its rich products as "non-Euclidean." This is like calling regular coffee non-decaf, because in fact projective geometry is logically prior to Euclidean geometry. You can derive Euclid from projective geometry but not the other way around. The theorems of Pappus, Desargues, and 19th century geometers go beyond Euclid's easy pictorialism and require us to twist and intersect surfaces that have only two dimensions. The "real projective plane" is akin to Lacan's idea of the Real, that is, something that is difficult if not impossible to symbolize. Its resistance is what makes it primary and profound, mathematically, and to some extent Lacan carried this same resistance into his theory of metaphor.

6. I can't do a whole lot with projective geometry since my mathematical talents are limited to say the least. But, there are two properties of metaphor that make topology more approachable by looking at ways that the category of the uncanny, which we encounter both in dreams and in the literature of the fantastic, show how projective geometry is critical to the fundamental operations of the psyche. Projective geometry can be summarized by two properties that we can readily see in the Möbius band, Klien bottle, and Borromeo knot. These are (1) non-orientation, about which Žižek has written, and (2) self-intersection.
7. To show how projective space works in psychoanalysis, consider Waldo taking a trip around the world. Waldo has suppressed the fact that he has experienced a trauma, which has pushed him into what is equivalent to a dream, in relation to the trauma, as the Real. This is what the Unconscious sees when it looks at what we consider to be waking reality. Only an Analyst can tell us that we're sleeping. Waldo imagines that he's traveling in Euclidean space but he's missing half of it, so when he gets back to his starting point he must invent a second virtuality to complete his journey and resolve the non-orientation he momentarily experienced but couldn't explain. He saw his double but dismissed this uncanny encounter. When he completes the trip in his terms, he arrives back at the situation Magritte has accurately show us. The latency of his tour is that it has taken 720° to complete 360° . Again, Magritte knows how to show this correctly. The mirror preserves this as its interior latency, a thickness that, in architecture, is called *poché* — hidden spaces inside walls, in cellars and attics. These are the places of the dream Phantasmagoria.
8. This is a sad situation for the mirror, who must be forced to see the ugly along with the beautiful, the sad along with the sanguine, the horror that it would have to watch without flinching. Once the mirror has an eye, once it is given the power of gazing, as Lacan realized we *do* give it suddenly at a point in our young lives, it becomes an Other like any Other, but with an important distinction. It is an Other who must watch without moving or flinching, an Other who is like the subjects strapped in place in Plato's Cave, forced to watch shadows projected onto the wall and accept their flat reality for all we are able to know.
9. The uncanny feature of mirrors after we give them the power to see is that they endure being nailed to the wall with stoic pain, while the prisoners of Plato's Cave

are like the dreamer, both of which are immobilized but unaware of their immobilization. They believe themselves to be in a Euclidean world where they are free to move about. Like figures moving across a fixed ground, they can visit the hidden sides of things they can't see from any one point of view — no problem! If they don't have time to do this, they have the principle that these unseen sides could be seen by someone, sometime; and anything left over from human inspection or beyond access can at least be seen by God, as Bishop Berkeley advised.

10. The Mirror is not so lucky. It knows it is fixed. The mirror we endow with the power of vision makes the earthly sphere into a two-dimensional surface that intersects itself but remembers what has happened, that the return is a twin of departure, and that the mirror has witnessed both events. Thanks to its memory, its *latency*, it shows the hero returned but it cannot orient the return as a circle, which would require slicing the globe. As a surface and *only a surface*, this globe does not exist. There is no third dimension. The surface that is closed and curved intersects itself but cannot preserve orientation because that would require another space outside, from which we look down to watch this trip around the world. Berkeley's God, this position looking down, is what gives the dreamer the feeling of moving free and easy, but we know that the point of the dream is to paralyze the dreamer by parading a world before her eyes.
11. This is a bit like the situation of the movie, *The Truman Show*, where a single character, Truman, believes that he lives in a pleasant town in Florida is surrounded by actors and a set built inside an ecologically isolated dome. He is a dupe, filmed from by devices that outdo Berkeley's God to make sure Truman never discovers the truth. This is Truman's Euclidean dream illusion, that like the dream aims to see how long it can preserve the dupe's imprisonment.
12. The "Haunted Mirror Tale" from the 1945 British thriller *Dead of Night*, shows Truman's paralysis induced by a mirror gifted by a wealthy socialite to her fiancé. The mirror has preserved a traumatic image. Its former owner had murdered his wife in a jealous rage. When the new husband shows up to stand before it, this latent image returns from the mirror's non-Euclidean depths. This reverses the normal figure-ground relationship. The new husband becomes the ground and is paralyzed until his wife smashes the mirror.

13. First, let me show how the impossibly complicated *matheme* for metaphor is actually a map of projective geometry's 2-d manifold. It does what Magritte's mirror does in successive operations that use latency in the same way the dream uses latency to paralyze the dreamer. It is important to remember this paralysis. It is the way the dream defends the dreamer by defending sleep against external stimulation. I count bodily disturbances as external, for in relation to dreaming, the dreamer's own body is something that is "on the outside" — a key piece of information if you want to understand projective geometry.
14. Dan Collins has written a perceptive essay about Lacan's *matheme*, I wish I could quote it here, but "not enough time." We have to look at the first action carefully, the S over s'. This might seem to be metaphor plain and simple, the replacement of one signifier by another that conceals a hidden or even inaccessible meaning. Collins uses a striking example I need to repeat here. A little girl says "Some day I will grow a tooth on my bottom." She cannot imagine, let alone articulate, the idea that she lacks a penis, so the tooth must serve as a metaphor. The tooth is made into a mirror by Lacan's *matheme*. As a denominator that is "pushed down" into the signified position by the metaphor "tooth," it is inverted to be a numerator in relation to a mystery factor, 'x'.
15. But, this 'x' inexplicably disappears. The signifier that is first given one apostrophe or prime is given another. This is like giving the signified "the third degree" as it appears on the right of the equal sign beneath a 1 and a bar. This is the way that Lacan says that the dictionary's illusionistic pretense of offering us a circle instead of a conclusive definition has been a ruse. We must accept that meaningfulness is not the same as an endless substitution of one meaning for another. Meaningfulness requires latency, and latency begins on the far left of the *matheme*, when the tooth has in effect *drowned* the penis. The little girl will not be able to realize the meaningfulness of what she has unwittingly said unless she is able to go through a psychoanalytical experience of interpretation. This is not hermeneutical interpretation, a combination of etymology and historicizing, but the process Lacan diagrammed in the L-schema, where the Analyst who sits in the room with the Analysand also must play the part of a dummy who "silently" coaches the Analysand by subtly noting a slip of the tongue or bungled explanation or nudging the Analysand's blah blah blah in a certain direction.

16. Just as the little girl has held a signifier's head under water to drown it, the Analyst must let it rise to the surface thanks to the buoyancy of the 'x', which is like the specific gravity of a fluid that allows s' to rise to the surface. It may seem that the two s-primes "cancel each other out" and disappear, but in fact Lacan has created a mirror with eyes and shown how this mirror has been forced to watch all that has happened to the subject: all the crimes, all the horrors, all the traumas. As with every human subject, these have been suppressed because they cannot be remembered in the same way a mirror might return an optical scene, immediately and without comment. What the mirror has returned, however, has introduced the theme of chirality, the left-right *handedness* of the world, which existed without us thinking about it before we stood before a mirror.
17. Drowning and rising again from the depths thanks to the creation of a mirror by someone who, like the Analyst, must sit still and be mostly silent, all this means that Analysis is really Metaphor in Action. The successful connection between the Unconscious on the lower right of the L-schema with the upper left position, the S, is the trip around the world back to Magritte's mirror. I would like to say more about the uncanny mirror. I would in particular like to get into why this painting offers a way to follow up the project that Mladen Dolar has proposed, namely to make the idea of anamorphosis into something that relates to the entire repertoire of the analytical subject. This normally optical trick is important because it shows that latency is central to psychoanalysis, but because latency is the stuff of metaphor, dreaming, and the uncanny, it shows us how to connect psychoanalysis to popular culture and the arts.
18. If anamorphosis is about non-orientation and self-intersection, it is also about the *après coup* of Analysis, about the mirror that, like the dreamer, is paralyzed, anesthetized, in order to extend sleeping for as long as possible. There is a name for this anesthesia, it's borrowed from computer science: "idempotency." In a nutshell, this is the way a system defends itself from outside attacks by turning the advance wave against the successive waves. This is precisely what Lacan does with the little s-prime, but recognizing this as idempotency allows us to see how a mirror can turn on itself and its own paralysis to store latent contents, a storage that will, we could say, preserve meaningfulness from further "attacks" by meanings in endless succession.

19. Lacan remarked that neurosis, psychosis, and perversion were not so much afflictions that separated subjects from so-called “normal behavior” but, rather, *defensive structures* that used one of three options defined in relation to the primary signifier, the *name* of the father. We all have access to this name, but not all of us can accept or use it, which makes us psychotic or perverted. These are different styles for preserving latency, although the unconscious is not available unless we are neurotic. But, as styles, Lacan has shown us that subjectivity takes psychosis and perversion *into itself* in the act of latent preservation, whether this becomes an unconscious available to Analysis or actions defining subjectivity through anamorphosis, metaphor, or the uncanny. These make latency available to all, though in different ways and with different results. This is the topology of subjectivity, the subject’s “creation of its own suffering” by activating a Euclidean world picture that will trap us by our very decision to escape.