

Psychoanalysis and / of Architecture

The Structure of Latency in Metaphor¹

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Figure 1. Master of the Judgment of Paris, *Daphne*, ca. 1450. The Henry Barber Trust, The Barber Institute of Fine Arts, University of Birmingham. Lacan: “I [suggest] that we should perhaps conceive of pain as a field which, in the realm of existence, opens precisely onto that limit where a living being has no possibility of escape Isn’t something of this suggested to us by the insight of the poets in that the myth of Daphne transformed into a tree under the pressure of a pain from which she cannot flee? Isn’t it true that the living being who has no possibility of escape suggest ... what one might call petrified pain? ... [I]sn’t there in architecture itself a kind of actualization of pain?” (*Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, 60).

Can architecture be psychoanalyzed? This is a question with many potential digressions. My suggestion, given the limitations of this particular presentation, is to say:

“Architecture, like psychoanalysis, depends fundamentally on the distinction between meaning(s) and meaningfulness.”

With this basic idea in mind, the next step is to show how Lacan used this same distinction to expand the function of **metaphor** in his claim that there is no such thing as literal meaning. This moves metaphor from being a poetic replacement of a conventional word to the general basis for the Symbolic as such. Metaphor addresses both the idea that there can be meaningfulness without meanings *and* how there can be no metalanguage in psychoanalysis. Metaphor distinguishes Lacanian psychoanalysis from other therapies and extends it potentially into ethnography of cultural practices, including the creation and use of architecture.

Metaphor as *structure* is key to the way that the unconscious relates to the aims of Analysis. In the L-schema, the Symbolic is at right angles to the Imaginary that contains the Analyst and Analysand as two ego’s in a Euclidean space. The Symbolic of the Unconscious must slip past, thanks to the difference that separates meaningfulness from meanings. The Analyst plays a strategy based on the fact that the former always seems to be “beyond words,” and yet every Analysand says more than she intends. The Analyst plays the role of the dummy in bridge, coming in “late” to underscore a slip of the tongue or by nudging Analysand’s to say a bit more. Early and late are like the goalposts, giving the Unconscious a chance to bolt through the Analysand’s lips. Meaning-*ful-ness* is an experience rather than

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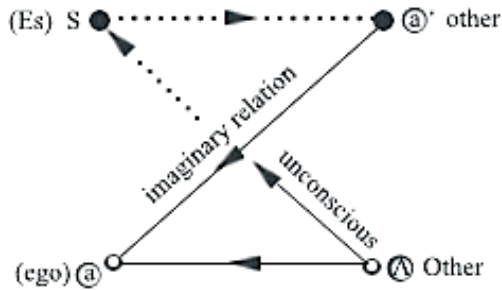


Figure 2. The famous L-schema of Lacan appears in various forms in the 1950s and later. All versions are, as Dylan Evans puts it in *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, “a number of points connected by a number of vectors.” But, the basic geometry is that of a rectangle or square that has been twisted so that two of the vectors cross to form a barrier blocking the attempt of the unconscious S from communicating directly to the constructed Other, the position of the psychoanalyst constructed by the ego of the analysand. The Unconscious must break free from the “blockade” of the Imaginary, but it will be forced to deliver its message in an inverted form. The arrows in the traditional L-schema seem backward to this account, but it is the S, the subject, who waits to “hear back from” the analyst, normally the listener, but now a virtual Other able to say what his own Unconscious has said.

an explanation. Metaphor is a form of this early and late, providing something in experience that seems first but is actually grounded on something logically prior.

The L-schema shows the Symbolic and Imaginary running against each other. This self-intersection is none other than the *après coup*. This is the way the end of the sentence retroactively informs the beginning of the sentence. What we hear is *magnitized* by latent meanings we find only later on. Latency first occurs inside Euclidean virtuality, the invisible behind the visible, but it logically engages a temporality. This temporality comes out in the dream, because the dream needs to *immobilize* the dreamer. The waking subject’s freedom to move around and the sleeper’s paralysis is a clear contrast, but it’s also about Lacanian extimity. When we look at the *après coup*, we see this contrast in the simplest graphic expression. For waking experience, the latency of dream is already a geometry, a motion, and the uncanny possibility that the dream might *contaminate* reality. For the dream, it the paralysis

of the point of view produces phantasmagoria.²

Lacan’s second program for latency is metaphor, not as the replacement of a conventional word for a poetic one, but a broad logic underlying all discourse. Metaphor pulses latency down a chain of signifiers charged with an unknown ‘x’, which becomes a demand for an unknown signified. This pulse is modulated by flips and self-intersections to replicate the *après coup* as a first experiential encounter, on the right side of the equals sign, to presuppose a logical first of a first on the left. Metaphor is like a traumatic event³ that re-

² Phantasmagoria is a show-biz term arising in the 19c. advancement in the technology of illusion production, thanks to lighting and scrim, but even here the aim was the paradoxical means of keeping the audience *in* their seats (as paying patrons) while scaring them to the point of jumping *out of* their seats. Issues of audience immobilization relate generally to the hypnotic/paralyzing function of the fourth wall and “la Gournier’s phenomenon,” the means by which audiences seated at oblique angles to the proscenium nonetheless have the sense of facing the stage frontally. Phantasmagoria has the means of not simply immobilizing the viewer but constructing their presence as a face to face relationship. See Enrique Rabasa, “La Gournier versus Monge,” *The Nexus Network Journal* 13, 3; DOI: 10.1007/s00004-011-0088-y.

³ Actually, it’s like “holding a signifier’s head below water.” Lacan’s account of metaphor in *Écrits* makes reference to the continued ringing of the bells of a drowned cathedral, from Claude Dubussy’s piano composition, “La Cathédrale engloutie.” This makes sense only if one imagines that metaphor is the force holding a signifier beneath the bar, in an act of suppression/stifling, but with the result of an emergent uncanny new signifier that cannot be explained, an *S’/x*.

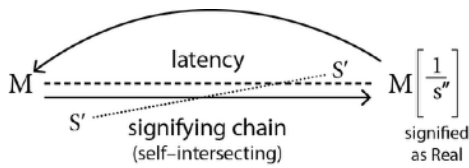


Figure 3. By re-writing Lacan's metaphor *matheme* in the form of an *après coup* relationship between the conclusion (to the left of the original equals sign) and the origin (M/S'), the role of latency can be assigned to (1) the initial replacement of S' by M, as a "virtuality of effectiveness," (2) the criss-cross "cancellation" of S' in its two positions as self-intersecting and non-orienting denominator and numerator, in the construction of a latency "register" to the left of the equals sign, (3) the resitant enclosure of s'' as a non-signifier signified, and (4) the retroactive recovery of the latent virtuality of M initiating the metaphoric process.

structures the signifying chain to produce, at the end, another Real that resists conversion into another signifier. With metaphor, the dictionary's endless replacement of signifiers with other signifiers is replaced by a self-intersecting VOID. To be clear, self-intersection is another way of saying "extimity."

The Void is not just a hole punched in reality. It is a composite that structures its own circumference. These are the lips, labias, or aureoles of the body as well as the porticos, sills, and parapets of architecture; the Forums of the city. These are the "too-early" spaces where latency comes in the form of conditional entry and interrogation. This is the "just-after" of the ancient labyrinth, architecture's logical emblem. The Void connects psychoanalysis and to customs, rituals, mythology, but it justifies our use of the new term, "Analytical Architecture."

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Analysis begins by sorting out Analysands precisely on their relation to the meaning/meaningfulness distinction. Neurotics are obsessed with meanings, psychotics and perverts swim in meaningfulness. But, because metaphor shows how latency exists for everyone, it allows us to say that architecture is simultaneously psychotic, and perverse. Metaphor's *après coup* is the foundational logic of the Death Drive, configured as non-orientation and self-intersection. These experiential aspects of projective geometry establish subjectivity not just for individual subjects but collectively, so we might regard metaphor's estimate geometry as a cultural basis for folk practices, mythologies, rituals as well as for contemporary arts, literature, and of course architecture.

I would like to suggest architecture's neurosis is simultaneously psychotic, and perverse: *psychotic* in its relation to the Death Drive in the form of the *après coup* return reference to a foundational logic, where metaphor operationalizes an autoerotic and perverse combination of operations employing non-orientation and self-intersection — the experiential aspects of projective geometry. These establish subjectivity in one of many adoptable forms, not just for the individual subject but collectively, so we might regard metaphor as a cultural basis and look for its results in folk practices, mythologies, rituals but also contemporary arts, literature, and of course architecture.

We describe meaningfulness as *non*-Euclidean, but this is a misnomer. Although Euclid comes first historically, it is not primary in logical terms. Projective geometry is foundational to Euclid, so the question is, what was projective geometry before it was discovered in 300 a.d.? What was it *logically* when it was *historically latent*? This is the *après coup* of metaphor: latency formations force a retroactive return to a “trauma” at the level of signifiers, a sudden suppression of a signifier that was replaced by a Nothing, a pure cause without any content or meaning, for the signified immediately folds in on itself to open up a void. In myth and ritual, these traumas are the form given to non-orientation and self-intersection. What does this mean?

The German philosopher Ernst Cassirer, interpreting three of Goethe’s Maxims, put the matter in a very Lacanian way. The unconscious makes what seems to be a “conscious decision” to “make itself suffer” in the *forms* of this world, or specifically to “create its own suffering” by activating perceptual consciousness in such a way that the unconscious will be “trapped” by the very decision to escape. This is a strange way to think of things, but it fits precisely within the *matheme* of metaphor and with what Lacan says so mysteriously in Seminar VII, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*. The trap is self-constructed and self-maintained. Like the story of Daphne and Apollo, where the same arrow that enflames Love in Apollo poisons Daphne with Hate is the same arrow that points up on one side of the Möbius band only to return to its starting point in a down direction. Lacan, too, calls this a surface defined by pursuit and flight a surface of pain, and employs the logic of the self-immersed 2d manifolds of projective geometry to play out the details of this immersion as the consequences of metaphor as an efficient cause.

There is a clear way to connect Cassirer’s idea of a Basis Phenomenon to the possibility of an Analytical Architecture’s *après coup* fold of the signifying chain back onto its logical origins, is its metaphoric cause. I would go so far as to say that unless this is done, there can be no further progress on the matter. From Goethe to Cassirer to Lacan to us, the Basis Phenomenon is about the continuum that joins mind and world into a what Susan Buck-Morss has shown to be a single circuit. This circuit cannot be mapped “from above.” There is no metalanguage to explain it. Instead, we have only the option of considering the Basis Phenomenon as a logical prime; and the basis for Metaphor as a second kind of virtuality.

I would expand Jacques-Alain Miller’s claim that extimity lies at the bottom of all of Lacan’s ideas to explain the difference between our “Euclidean” waking experience and our “idempotential” experience in dreams. The Gestalt analogy of the figure over the ground conceives subjectivity as autonomous and self-directing, but in the dream, this figure-across-ground logic must be reversed. The dream keeps the dreamer asleep by immobilizing it, but the dreamer continues to think Euclid. When the dream logic conflicts with Euclidean logic, phantasmagoria is deployed to save the day. This defense is like what computer programmers use to defend against “denial of service” attacks, where hackers flood a web site with simultaneous demands. Defending the sleeper from such attacks from external or internal threats to sleep is the same idea, called IDEMPOTENCY.

Idempotency is also the defensive aim of metaphor, which first suppresses a signifier by converting it into a signified, which I would characterize as “holding the head of the signifier under the water.” The second action inverts this drowning to create a latent ‘x’ as signified, with the result that the signifying process is stopped from extending into infinity of demands for new meanings. The Shroud of Turin suggests how latency and optical transfer are intimately related. Magic continually informs the study of metaphor, if only because the uncanny forever lies on the margin between the figure/ground and ground figure, as the negative of Jesus’s face shows so intriguingly. The key is of course that the face is under a curtain, where signifiers undergo the creation of a cusp that they must then endure as a fatality.

We conceive of subjectivity as autonomous and self-directing, seeking out what it desires and fleeing from fears, across a field that is fixed and stable. In the dream, this figure-across-ground logic must be reversed. The dream *must* keep the dreamer asleep by immobilizing it, but it simulates Euclid to keep the dreamer unaware that the ground is moving across the figure rather than the figure across the ground, though the effect is much the same. In some cases the production apparatus falls short of providing the required phantasmagoria. These are the points in the dream where something radically irrational happens.

Paralysis preserves sleep from external or internal bodily stimuli. This is what is called an “idempotential” function. This term, borrowed from computer science, describes the defense programmers must take to fight a “denial of service” attack, where hackers flood a server with a tsunami of demands. Idempotentiality algorithms incorporate the first of the attack but then turn it around on itself to neutralize all further attacks.



Figure 4. In Peter Wier’s *The Truman Show*, the phantasmagoria that imprisons the site’s “dupe,” Truman Burbank, occasionally cannot supply the demand for seamless ground-over-figure movement. Here, Truman finds a theatrical light come loose from its mounts and looks back to the “sky” to see what went wrong. Elsewhere, Truman imagines himself as a spaceman able to fly through such gaps in reality, always in relation to his life project of finding his lost father.

This is not so much different from metaphor, which first suppresses of a signifier by converting it into a signified, and whose second action inverts the structure to create a latent ‘x’ as signified, with the result that the signifying process is stopped from extending into infinity. Metaphor’s idempotency involves multiple deployments of latency so that a back-current moves, retroactively, with every forward movement of experience.

The dreamer dreaming continues to imagine moving around in a normal way, but the dream can continue *only* as long as this point of view is actually fixed, with the ground moving around it. The dreamer has the illusion of free will, but if the production apparatus fails, if there is some external stimulus that overwhelms the dreamer, the dream can save itself only by creating an uncanny encounter.

The best example I know of to illustrate this is the 1998 film, *The Truman Show*, where a television series is built around a single character surrounded by actors who pretend to be his neighbors and friends in the island town of Seahaven. But, Seahaven is completely covered by a weather-controlled dome which simulates seasons, day and night, and weather conditions. The show's suspense comes directly from idempotency. The suspense is to see how long Truman can be kept from realizing his position as an immobilized dreamer.

Occasionally a piece of production equipment malfunctions, which Truman interprets as uncanny. His desires are kept in line by the producer's schemes to provide a complete phantasmagoria simulating a normal life, but the uncanny breaks through enough to compel Truman to break out of his dream into something he can't imagine, a world where his fake freedom becomes real freedom. At the point where he is able to escape, the producer Christof tries to persuade him that paralysis within Seahaven is infinitely better than waking up to reality outside.⁴

A final example comes from the 1945 British thriller, *Dead of Night*. A well-to-do socialite gives her *fiancé* an antique mirror, without knowing that the mirror's first owner had been immobilized by a riding accident. When his restless wife began to cheat on him, he strangled her in a jealous rage, in front of the mirror that hung in his bedroom. The traumatic event was pulled into the mirror, which itself was idempotently fixed to the wall. The mirror had to create a latent space, a space that could *only* be returned to a viewer whose profile matched that of the original jealous husband. The new husband is gradually pulled into this secondary virtuality, at first with glimpses of a room behind him other than his own. The latent room takes over whenever the wife is away from home. He stares at it, immobilized, like the former owner, to the point where he decides to murder his wife.

This uncanny tale illustrates with remarkable economy what happens in architecture, and what makes architecture in need of analysis. Like the haunted mirror, architecture creates voids that are, in Cassirer's words, like a "conscious decision" to "make itself suffer" in the *forms* of this world, or specifically to "create its own suffering" by activating perceptual consciousness in such a way that the unconscious will be "trapped" by the very decision to escape. Here is a definition of the unconscious in a nutshell!

The wife, a good Analyst, figures out the problem and smashes the mirror. She allows the debt that created the latency to be "paid in full." In architecture, the debts are stored in vortices, and spiraling symmetries made pathological by the Baroque but are in fact the

⁴ It is interesting to consider that "Christof," as Christ-hoff, is the "Castle of Christ," represented by the control room located in a fake moon above the movie-set town, Seahaven. This array of monitors and switchboards is the neural network that extends itself into the world of Seahaven to insure that Truman does not "wake up" from his dream of life in an ordinary American small town. Christ's direction aims to preserve Truman's idempotency, by reversing the figure-ground relationship for all but Truman. The set must be maximally adjustable just beyond Truman's perceptual margins — into a virtuality that is about effectiveness rather than the fantasy that completes the visible by adding a presumed configuration of hidden sides, eclipsed views, necessary but unvisited regions.

essential psychotic ingredient of any authentic architecture. They are the poison that is simultaneously a cure.

What's confusing about Lacan's metaphor matheme can be cleared up by looking just as the operators, the graphic signs. We see the bars as all the same; we see how the drowning of the first signifier led to a resonance, then a protective enclosure. Most important, however, is the left-to-right symmetry that makes the Haunted Mirror a model for the kind of metaphor that lies at the basis of all thought, which is, fundamentally, the ethnography of architecture, an architecture that we can properly call "Analytic Architecture."

Mladen Dolar wants to extend "anamorphosis" to include the whole operations of subjectivity, and I believe that this idea of Analytic Architecture does this. In the same Seminar VII where Lacan mentions architecture directly, he also wonders what preceded anamorphosis before its sudden emergence in the 16th century. Was there nothing, or was it not the pure logic of latency, in the diverse forms of the cultural uncanny. Anamorphosis is a productive way to talk about latency, idempotency, metaphor, and projective geometry, so my suggestion is a new theoretical project to tie these ideas together with clinical and cultural evidence, to move beyond questions of meaning to those of meaningfulness, to move to a truly Analytic Architecture.