

# Notes on Metonymy

Metonymy is a signifier that permits itself to be cut in two, also to that cut included as a signifier.

When the cut is included, this is called “metalepsis,” and the reference to the cut usually signals an irony.

The cut allows the parts of the metaphor to connect to other signifiers alternately, as A/B then A/B. In parapraxis, A/B ... B/C ... C/D is possible, so the composite ABCD results.

With each turn, the cut, /, is referenced implicitly.

The trope of the monster (the assemblage without mediation) is a metonymic assemblage. The / indicates that there is no mediation, only a juxtaposition.

In the case of the temporal metonymy (the head of a lion, body of a goat, tail of a serpent; or the monster who walks on four feet, then two, then three), the / is a metalepsis of a single process, such as “year” or “human” in the two examples.

Metonymy is almost always used in conjunction the suspension of word, name, or idea, where the discovery of the missing thing allows entry, as with the case of the Sphinx and Oedipus. “Human” is concealed, while the parts are presented as a riddle, and guessing the riddle allows the stranger to enter.

All passwords are by definition metonymies of this kind, and all metonymies have something of the password function.

A riddle is a literary form that uses metonymic logic, omitting/withholding some key connection that must be guessed. Often the riddle is about withholding or conferring privilege, as in *Turandot*. In early written languages, the connectives would be known by a select group but not the uninitiated. Hieroglyphs are natural metonymies since there is no single principle of relation to a public medium (speech, as with phonetic writing).

A lingering metonymic effect in phonetic writing is that a word must be pronounced correctly, and an “accent” (such as a British, American, foreign, etc.) can identify a person as being from one group or another. Here the A/B structure converts to Written/Spoken.

Poetic scansion and rhyme extend metonymy by alternating between word sounds and written word placements. A word’s sound is a metonymic effect of its written form.

Monstrosity was originally one of the types of sign types used in divination, usually in the form of animal deformities. The omen function was retained, so metonymies can always be written as

$$\frac{S' \dots S'}{x}$$

S'...S' (the metonymic chain, since any one metonymy implies the existence of a chain)

—— (the series constitutes the “password” condition found at a boundary.

x (the unknown meaning, also the reward offered or punishment withheld if the person held motionless by the lack of the “x” can guess it.)

This expression S'...S'/x implies a simultaneous situation of surpression of the thing that is presented as the riddle, “x.”

This is:

$$\frac{S}{S'}$$

The S' is the repressed element of the first S' in the S'...S' sequence, remembering that every S' is A/B. This first S' would be the A/B and the first S' in the series would be A/B. Finding the suppressed A makes the “x” the signified of the signifying series S'...S'. Until the would-be entrant can guess the “x”, he/she is held at the gate: ——.

This formula tells you why metonymy, riddles, and conditional boundaries are always found together, along with the monsters that traditionally guard the gates, whose riddles have to do with a *spatial* version of what is essentially *temporal*.

By the way, Vico’s “big secret” about the historical stages of myth, representation, conceptualization becoming, in each “instant” of experience, an expressive function, representative function, and abstracting function (called successive+contemporary in my essay) is metonymical. So Vico himself had and used his own “password.” To get into the inner circle of “those who know his secret” you have to realize that temporality and spatiality are interchangeable.

Ricoeur, obviously, doesn’t get past the Sphinx!

Because the ——, the gate function, divides the riddle state and the insider state, metonymies are always about the insulation function in architecture. The S'...S' chains are technically “idempotency” machines, that use repetition to deepen rather than extend the insulation’s thickness, not to change it. Palindromes do this with symmetrical opposition, but the most economic palindrome is what is known as “symmetrical difference,” where there are elements missing from one set that correspond with equal and opposite elements missing from another set.

This is the O. Henry story example, where the wife gives the husband a gold chain for his watch but he has sold his watch to buy her a comb for her lovely hair ... but she has *cut and sold* her hair to afford the chain. The logic of this situation goes back to the Cretan Paradox but it’s also

graphically the overlap between two Euler circles, called “union without intersection.” I put this into my Finishing presentation, by the way. You get union without intersection by making a Villarceau cut into a torus (also in the presentation). A torus is basically a projective topology that is “waiting to be cut by a Villarceau knife,” since this cut will reveal the logical relationship between its two voids, one of which is continent (the inside of the tube), the other incontinent (the middle of the bagel).

You never have just one void, you always have two; I think this may be why you always have the hero first as one of a pair of twins, one of whom must be murdered. You give a very good account of this role of the double. It was essential in the institution of kingship to say that the king ruled both the visible and invisible domains, and to do this the king would have to have a shadow double 180° opposite his “living” position. This claim is “Hamiltonian” in that it stresses the inclusion of all forces in a single system or circuit, a 360° coverage, like Janus (whose name is really Djanus, or Dianus, consort of Diana, goddess of *hinges*).

The hinge, Diana, is the center of the torus; the woman in Lacan’s system, is the non-all, and hence “incontinent” in comparison to the man who can be fully included in the system defined by  $\emptyset$ , the phallic signifier.

Lacan’s full formula for metaphor/metonymy (my annotations):

