

Metalepsis Seminar • Virtual Session 21

[metalepsis seminar](#) / WAAC•PSU / 21 mai 2014

lofting, interior dimensions (of love), flying in dreams

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



Patrice Laconte's 1999 black and white film, *Girl on the Bridge* (*Fille sur Ponte*) is about love and dimension, excruciatingly played out with knives, suicide attempts, and thought experiments at the gambling table.

* lift loft light f-light ... sand dunes! 砂の女!

In Kōbō Abe's novel, *Woman in the Dunes*, the narrator explains the logic of sand. Wind blowing across the surface of the earth creates a harmonic, a turbulence that is manifest in an upward pull of any particle whose weight is less than the lifting force, but only those particles just heavy enough will be transported together as "sand." Although most of sand is silica, any particle with the right shape and weight can tag along and be deposited wherever the wind stops blowing, or where turbulence dictates. This brings Lucretius's clinamen, where time, gravity, and space conspire in a flow model where turbulence also equals an "acousmatic voice" able to "call up" material being through an echo effect. Could it also be that any (acousmatic) call, a voice in our heads, a clap of thunder, could be this turbulence.

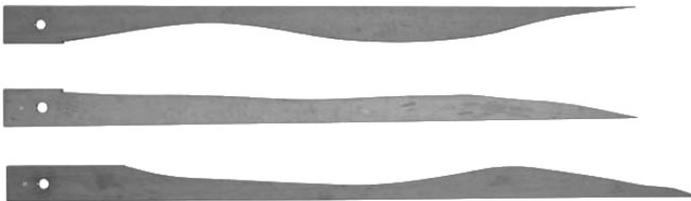
Abe's novel became a movie in 1964, a kind of Japanese *film noire* depicting the weekend excursion of a school-teacher-botonist, Junpei, who falls into a trap, sand trap, a space of exile where there is a woman the local villagers have forced into a pit to continually remove sand. This Sisyphus-like assignment becomes the couple's reality, and although Junpei is released later, he voluntarily returns. The call upward becomes a call from below. Where the issue of dimensionality is freed from Cartesian thinking, we see how it can easily and rationally get inserted into "impossible spaces," where very often, as in the case with *Woman in the Dunes*, it is a dimension of love.

Why bring this up (hah hah!)? Well, architecture is, if anything, about erection, about lifting up something so that we can live beneath it, in the shadow of some *tectum* (L. roof) that is also a *tegument* (L. cover, protection). Creating a shadow, even a protective one, has magic considerations in all culture. The shadow of the roof is an echo, a kind of super-symmetrical mirror-image of the shadows buried in the ground below, the dead who may be resurrected as this "call" pulls them out of their graves.



In [George Spencer-Brown's calculus of form](#), there are two sets of axioms, one for 2-d, another for a 2-d sphere. In the 2-sphere, a call and a call again are "nothing," but not just a nothing-nothing, i.e. an acousmatic nothing: a nobody, like Odysseus. A call to one who recognizes the call. The crossing and crossing again (two concentric forms) is equivalent to one crossing, which is like saying that a pregnant woman with a child inside gives birth to another and there are then two beings standing next to each other. On the 2-sphere, where we live, we are called by some Nobody, some "man on a train" or "girl on a bridge." and then give birth/re-birth. Does that sound right? Do the math.

The shadow cast by someone is, thanks to the "detached virtuality" by which the shadow is also the soul, open to harm. Some folklore has it that if the shadow is stabbed, the person will die. Sir James Frazer collected the story of Rumanian "shadow salesmen" who would measure the shadows of unknowing people (virgins preferred) and then sell them to contractors in need of sacrificial victims to put into the foundations of buildings to provide spiritual protection. One can only imagine the strings, with labels detailing the source, carried around in a kind of samples case. Duchamp has something like this in his box of "standard stoppages," wooden jigs preserving the shape of a 1-meter string dropped multiple times.



OK, brilliant ones, tell me how this extends the idea of the shadow-soul to the contemporary idea of loft (the strings falling through the "wind" of air, combining the idea of turbulence and gravity)? Don't we have something to add to the science of love as a dimension of pulses inside the blood, communicating the thoughts about the body hatched out entirely by the organs without the involvement of a brain? This is the "hundred headed woman" (*La femme cent têtes*), Max Ernst's 1929 fantasy whose punned meaning was the "woman without a head" (*femme sans tête*), pointing the way to the (necessary) gender of this internal dimension, where the body is able to "think through itself," i.e. through emotions, feeling — er, uh, *love*. Well, the brain *is* involved, but look closely. There is the mind, which conceives, which has a history, which thinks it knows what's happening, thanks to its intimate relationship to the signifying chains that constitute the Symbolic. The mind is there thanks to the physical existence of the brain, not so much a switch-board or computer as a continual storm of electrical events, sometimes giving the brain the illusion of control, other times not (advertising people and magicians have specific methods to control this illusion). When you get a tune stuck in your head, the brain is enjoying it — having the chemical time of its life! — while the mind is going nuts trying to forget. So, even IN the brain, there is a lag between acting and thinking. Turbulence,

blood pulse, and the heart are IN the brain already, we do not have to construct a "mind-body" paradox. The mind is already its own paradox, its own delay.



Max Ernst, *Femme Cent Têtes*, 1929. Note the large eye, like the jewel of Vico's *Donna Metafisica*.

If Ernst and Duchamp are any indication, the only way to talk about this internal dimensionalizing is through marginalized discourse of art, especially Dada, and poetry. Why? In everyday experience this pulsation of the blood, turbulence, and immediacy of action occur all the time, but convention works quickly to enamel over the inconsistencies. Eric Santer, in his book [Psychotheology of Everyday Life](#), tells the story of a scientist who wished to capture being by seizing a spinning top at "just the right moment." In addition to scaring the hell out of the children into whose midst he had jumped like a wild man, he was unable to penetrate Being. He conceived it as an impossible interval, a micro-space. Art, Dada, and poetry make the reverse assumption. Miracles are the norm, everyday words turned into love songs (*La vie en rose*):



Weirdly, I photographed this the day before driving to Ottawa to see Marco Frascari. When I arrived I was told he had had a stroke. The meaning of this image, snow melted everywhere but where the bench had cast a shadow, had the impact of a retroactive omen.

Let me introduce one other possibility, though it too emphasizes the necessity of the margin: Lacanian psychoanalysis. In his lecture on anxiety, Lacan emphasized that anxiety brings us to a margin that is like that between the audience and a stage. On stage is not a fantastic scene, but something entirely normal: *hiemlich*, he says. Within this separation, however, the *unheimlich* is an emergent property. Anxiety is about distance, he says, but not the distance that Freud used to distinguish it from fear and fright. It is internal distance. To situate this properly, think about dreams of flying, where loft has an immediate, perceivable effect. We all know the feeling. We find ourselves floating or flying or swimming, able to control our movements, and amazed that we have not exercised this power before. We have "always" known how to do this, it feels so good, what has been the problem? Beats walking! Freud and others had identified the basis of floating-flying dreams: somatic. The body uses sensations concentrated around an organ, in this

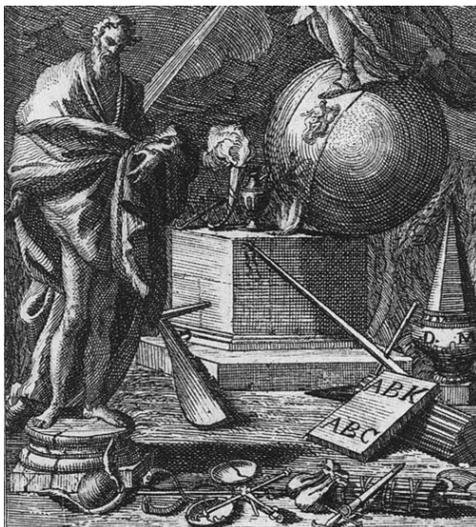
case the lungs, and "extimates" their condition. The air suspended inside the body becomes the body suspended inside air. Metalepsarians, please note the condition we call "reversed predication." AND, with reversed predication we will always have a void, a gap, which we must *interrogate!* (Thank you again, Azita Ranjibar!)

Lofting and lifting are thus about a kind of extimacy, anxiety turned into a total lack of anxiety, cashed in with a bonus of freedom from gravity, which we may compare to the particle of sand lifted up (called up, through turbulence) into a love-fest in the sky, carried off, dropped into dunes where there is ... a woman, and then a man comes to join her. The amazing thing about all this crazy talk is, despite the marginalized conditions where we find our materials, the sources have been remarkably consistent. We move from the physics of air-flow to mythology to psychoanalysis, art, and Dada with hardly any skip of logic or even terminology. A Yoruba shaman would understand what Max Ernst meant. Any "caption" however freezes a particular aspect of this ontology, and we get the particulars of magical practices, modernist art theory, or existential gender politics! The challenge is to resist freezing discourse by accepting these particular landing fields as reality. Instead, we must insist on the "unlimited predication" of polysemy and make our own signifying strings into resonant chambers, "bodies able to think without a head" — i.e. poetically.

The wind literally makes a womb (*matrix*) in the air, literally draws up "anybody" who meets the specifications and can escape gravity (= anxiety) and achieve the dream of flying. Remember particularly how the vectors of horizontality and verticality work. This is not an abstract diagram but a *true section drawing* of love. When we are in love, we are, as the cliché says, blind. Vico's image, at the opening of *The New Science*, shows how blindness works in love. What do the blind see? The question has to begin with what sight refuses to see: the things that call to us that are not heard, the birds that sing in the early morning, our unconscious ...

"The violet by the mossy stone,
Half hidden from the eye;
—Fair as a star when only one
Is shining in the sky."
[William Wordsworth, "She Dwelt among Untrodden Ways"]

What Homer sees is invisibility. He does not see the *difference* between visible and invisible, and the miracle occurs alongside of the commonplace "fetish-defined" object. This is why Vico makes it seem that Homer looks especially at the helmet of Hermes. It is the only object Vico does not describe in his lengthy inventory of all of the visible objects in the engraving, so Vico himself intentionally constructs a literary form of invisibility. A blind man seeing invisibility is love, truth in the 4th position first (in love) and the truth in the 1st position fourth (not in love). But because truth is Truth, 1=4 in some way, we return to truth, truth is return, love is a call, a call to come back. (Thanks, LB!)



Homer, the blind poet, looking at the invisible object, the helmet of Hermes

* pale fire (another blind man looking at an invisible object)

In the opening scene of Hitchcock's first version of *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, the young couple's young daughter plays a trick on her mother, who is dancing with a charming Frenchman. She takes her mother's knitting yarn and ties it around a button on the Frenchman's jacket. As the couple dance, the sweater unravels and the dancers get tangled in a web made by music — a comic version of the more frightful reality of Fate winding this playful illicit love within a death dream. Indeed, the Frenchman is shot while they dance (the theme of the opening scenes is marksmanship), because he was in fact a spy trying to deliver a message concealed in his shaving brush (the shave seems to have been too close this time). If you remember your Frazer, you will see how the yarn here worked in place of the shadow, the extimate of the soul. The dead French spy leaves a legacy, a pass-code of sorts, that is held at the expense of the kidnapping of the daughter ... you know the story.

I bring this up to introduce [Pale Fire](#), Vladimir Nabokov's most amazing novel in my view. It is the story of a poem stolen and annotated by a "crazy" Eastern European (think of a Nabokov alter ego here), whose imagined identity as the exiled king of Zembla is at first outlandish but later we begin to see what he means, and it is not at all what we have expected. The "impossible-Real" dimension inserted into the poem of the American poet, shot it seems by accident when he visits Kinbote, the visiting professor of Slavic languages, possibly because he is renting the house of a judge on sabbatical, become this internal love-dimension, this "loft," that we have been talking about. MY CLAIM is that we cannot talk about the imagination without reference to this creation of LOFT, this sand-aspect of lifting, this architecturally phallic construction of *tectum* which is also *tegument* (cover, protection, shroud). I would also add that we cannot talk about imagination in this way without also using the technique of "unlimited semiosis/predication" that takes us away from the restrictions endured by most signifying chains (i.e. discourses), which inevitably in humanistic discourse descend from the tyranny of the binary signifier and the presumption of a mediating middle term.

To give you a taste of how Nabokov manages his escape from the tyranny of the binary signifier, here are the first lines of the American poet's poem:

I was the shadow of the waxwing slain
By the false azure in the windowpane;
I was the smudge of ashen fluff — and I
Lived on, flew on, in the reflected sky.
And from the inside, too, I'd duplicate
Myself, my lamp, an apple on a plate:
Uncurtaining the night, I'd let dark glass
Hang all the furniture above the grass,
And how delightful when a fall of snow
Covered my glimpse of lawn and reached up so
As to make chair and bed exactly stand
Upon that snow, out in that crystal land!

This is a masterpiece of melancholic architecture+poetry writing, if nothing else, but it details the physics of the internal dimension, turbulence, by which our imagination, through the media of detached virtuality (Borges: story-in-story, the double, travel through time, contamination of reality by dream or fiction), connects dimensionality, love, and death (the trope for impossibility). The bird flies into the plate-glass, dies, but continues to live in the reflected image of the sky. Momentum carries the bird past the moment of literal death into the Lacanian "between the two deaths," the interval known *by all cultures* that takes the soul, the Psyche, to a point within the Symbolic, a point where a second death can release it. Think of the two deaths as portals, as frames. The double frame is the predication and the reversed predication, the middle — always portrayed as a journey within a labyrinth, in search of Truth — is the gap, and "interrogation" is the modality of travel coupled with gnosis: *stereo-gnosis* because the labyrinth is always a matter of turning left and turning right.

Nabokov also offers an early, architectural "solution" to this puzzle of death. One reverses the case, one sits inside a cozy room with a lamp, an apple on a plate. One sees the interior projected out into the landscape, suspended above the ground line — *suspended! lifted up! called up! — sand!!!* Thank you Lucretius. And, truth and mercy "kiss" ([Babette's Feast](#), [General Löwenhielm's speech](#) — pleas watch this!!!) when the snow brings the land (reality) to meet the Imaginary. EXAM QUESTION: DO YOU KNOW WHERE YOU ARE AT

THIS CRITICAL MOMENT IN THE POEM? Answer: you are at the point where Lacan says that the Borromeo knot, fallen into disrepair, must be fixed by a "fourth ring," the *sinthome*.

You are at the point where, according to the General in *Babette's Feast*, tells us that there is a time outside of time (cf. Alireza's essay on the Dirac function) where mercy and truth meet (Lacan: the position of Truth within the four-term, quadrated field of discourse, that is both first and last, the position of "impossible love," or *jouissance* as *j'ouï-sens*, *hearing Truth*), namely a point of ... père-version, of "turning to the father." Not our natural fathers, Lacan advises, but the fathers we must *construct*. Now we know from Harold Bloom that affiliation is a matter of doing just this. The young poet cannot escape the unbearable weight of his predecessor(s). He must falsify them, revise them, "misread" them (*misprision* is the technical term). Lacan uses James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* as an example, and with Joyce we have Vico in spades. Vico appears as HCE, "here comes everybody," but he is also a somebody, an anybody, a nobody (and in this last role we think of Odysseus escaping the Cyclops by re-naming himself as Nobody — i.e. it's a method for getting out of tight situations, of freeing subjectivity). In the margins of psychoanalysis, the *sinthome* offers a new way out, an escape route past the symptom and its fetish-driven inventory that has only neurosis as its best option.

The exciting bit is that the project of the *sinthome* involves art, poetry, and architecture. The poetic is about little else, in fact, and poetry's escape plan involves metalepsis and, as we shall see, catalepsis (the ability of the body to act on its own). As we attempt to free this discourse of material imagination from the strangle hold I claim phenomenology has placed on it (think of Sleeping Beauty as an analogy), we must take up a Lacanian-Vichian-Joycean- ... (fill in any artist, poet, or wild person who occupies the margins of his/her field) able to offer us a means to fill in our unlimited semiosis about loft, lift, erection, *Bauen*, birthing, bathing, babbling ...

* "your love keeps lifting me higher"

The damn thing about clichés is that they so often turn out to be true. In an earlier newsletter, the one with the impossible diagram comparing the Lacanian discourses to information theory's double-decker of conscious message above, subliminal below, we have ... sand. Discourse is something really interesting if we see that it is "called out" of a material stratum, that its signifying chain is "lifted up" and transported horizontally. We now have an architecture — not just a characterization of space but a space that has to be *built every time*. This is why architecture is primary, why buildings remind us of something primary in our psyches (souls). What is the material stratum? Desire (*jouissance*) and the Name of the Father, the distinctive bones that, integrated into the soil, make a grave different from any other piece of land. Blowing across this, the wind takes up words, arranges them in a string of predications, a chain of signifiers, all justified (retroactively) by a binary signifier and the false dream of a middle balance point, *jouissance* as impossible desire. But, within this chain we have an opportunity to return, to go back to the choice between (non-)being and speaking. We do not have to return, ashes to ashes, dust to dust. There is another option, the option of Eros and *askesis*, love and the occupation of "ruins." I use scare quotes because I do not know the meaning of this yet. It is the destructive power of Eros that nonetheless constitutes the creative energy that lifts architecture into being, out of the *ichnografia* coupled with *anorthografia/scenografia*, lifting to create shadows and secrets. This is what makes houses, the homely, permanently and radically uncanny (*unheimlich*). We lift to create the loft through which we fall — out blood falls, our life falls, we fall in love. We can't "lift into love," but pay attention to the song, "[You're love keeps lifting me higher](#) ... than I've ever been lifted before." Let's just say that love is a matter of a good section drawing! (Well, there are some other things ...)

Claudio Sgarbi sends a marvelous message about this, quoting Rainer Maria Rilke's *Duino Elegies*. His letter requires and deserves a more detailed response, but for now, these fragments clairvoyantly locate our "issue" with lifting. (The translation includes more lines.)

Second Elegy

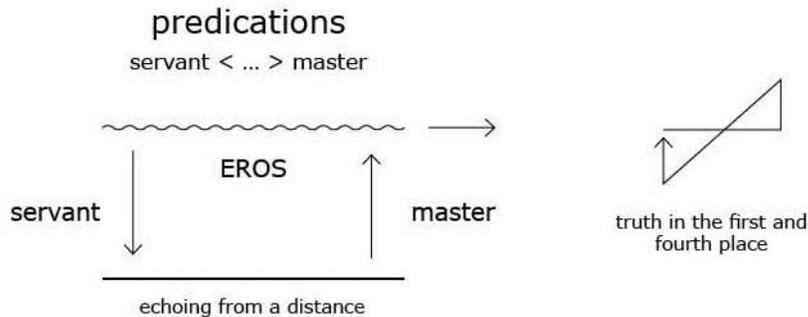
*Liebende könnten, verstünden sie's, in der Nachtluft
wunderlich reden. Denn es scheint, daß uns alles
verheimlicht. Siehe, die Bäume sind; die Häuser,
die wir bewohnen, bestehn noch. Wir nur
ziehen allem vorbei wie ein luftiger Austausch.
Und alles ist einig, uns zu verschweigen, halb als
Schande vielleicht und halb als unsägliche Hoffnung.*

*Liebende, euch, ihr in einander Genügten,
frag ich nach uns. Ihr greift euch. Habt ihr Beweise?
Seht, mir geschiehts, daß meine Hände einander ...*

Lovers, if they knew how, could speak miraculously
in the night air. But it seems that everything
keeps us secret. Look, the trees are; the houses
we live in are still standing. We alone
pass by all other things like an exchange of breath.
And all things agree to hide us away, half out of shame,
half from some wordless hope.

Tell me, lovers, you who possess each other
tell me about us. You hold each other. What is your proof?
Look, this happens to me: my hands consciously
hold each other, or my exhausted face
is comforted when held in them. This gives me some
sensitivity. Who for that alone, would dare to be?

Who, indeed?



[find your own way to correct and adopt this!
AS ALWAYS YOU MUST LEARN TO READ BETWEEN THE LINES!]

* vico's birthday

Practical matters: Giambattista Vico's birthday is coming up (June 21, John the Baptist's saint's day) and all are invited to Casa Kunze for 2-3 days of film-watching, wine-drinking, food-tasting, lawn-sitting, fire-dish reflecting, and walking about the landscape. We will not, *as per* the previous e-mail about how (not) to teach Vico, be studying Vico — not directly at least. You will be sent a Doodle questionnaire later on to see who can come so we can find accommodations. It's warmer so we may park a couple of bodies in hammocks or in barn-lofts. No themes or assignments, but two movies will be *de rigueur*: *Girl on the Bridge* and *Man on the Train*, both films of Patrice Laconte's. As a reward we will watch *La Grande Bellezza* and *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, maybe some others, for laughs. Think about transportation issues. Mary McLaughlin has some problems with her ankle and we may be cooking more or differently than expected, so lower your expectations. It may be a "make-your-own" sandwich and salad bar. Any rich metalepsarians are encouraged to find cushy hotel rooms and invite some friends.

As always, you can get past issues of the *newsletter* through this generic address: <http://art3idea.psu.edu/newsletter/14.XX.pdf>, where XX=01 through 21 and on up as the newsletters accumulate. Sorry, no index yet!