

Metalepsis Seminar • Virtual Session 9

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THE ZAIRJA, IDEOLOGY, (RADICAL) THEORY AS RESISTANCE

METALEPSIS SEMINARIANS, 9-ERS, AND AUXILIARY MEMBERS

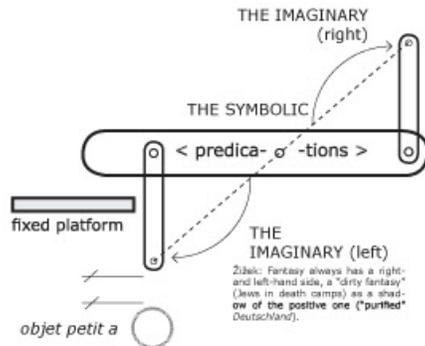


Fig. 1. Zairja for metaleptic investigations: you can build this at home! The main body of the zairja, a nose (see below), is the Symbolic, which pushes into a "field" (inventory) in the process of cathexis (interest). Resistance is met in the form of the death drive, the gap or delay that has structured the other drives — oral, anal, phallic; gaze and voice. The movement from fetish cathexis, investment in the inventory (tuche — a system of affordances) to sinthome (the voice of the unconscious, automaton) is signaled by the opening of the two coordinated "arms," pointing into the bi-valent vertical space that has been obscured by the horizontality of the fetish-driven inventory.

* the truth is out there

The zairja is like taking a bet on reality. If the truth is really "out there," then it will come to get us when we are ready. We have to be active, though. It is not enough to wait. There are two "readiness" activities that are effective: work and love. Freud identified these as the main sources of human satisfaction, but the reason for this identification comes through their relation to readiness. When we are having a spate of interesting dreams, we know that writing them down as soon as we can after waking stimulates the dream-function to be more respectful of our desire to know. Dreams can become more intelligible, more memorable, more "helpful" if we keep journals. This shows rather clearly that the unconscious *wishes* to communicate, *wishes* to clarify itself. Yet, it is unable to speak in the mode of the Symbolic. It is strictly within the (Lacanian) Imaginary. Why is this important? Isn't it the case that when we want to know something we go to the library, or the laboratory, or the study site? Aren't we all empiricists at our core? As a result, shouldn't what we find try to fit in with what has already been found? Why should we attend to the erratic and enigmatic half-clues from the unconscious or intuition?

The harsh judgment I bring to this question is based on the lesson of history. Those who have decided not to trust intuition or cultivate conversations with their unconscious are in continual debt to the Other. This debt is written in the contractual terms of ideology, convention, and tradition, where the phallic rule obliges one to exchange all value for those given as symbolic trappings. If you earn a Ph.D., do you want to identify with what you have learned doing a dissertation, or do you not just want to be called "doctor"? Unfortunately, universities have become what the discourse of the University (S2/S1— a/\$) said they were all along: corrupt services that, for a considerable amount of money, certify those who pay while minimizing and trivializing the usual requirements in between. Knowledge is substituted by the test and, as we know, there is a lot of cheating. Real education has become an annoying barrier to certification, and faculty who insist on its value are regarded as nuisances. Many have forgotten that learning is the aim of teaching, and teaching is the aim of knowledge but not the obligation (some things are learnable but not teachable).

The zairja runs contrary to the university's "certification" function, since **it promotes an active and determinative role of the knower**. As a computer whose aim is to de-laminate reality, it hacks into convention. As a communications device, it regards the party on the other end of the line not as an equal but as a divine being who has lost the powers of speech. In this regard, true intellectual experiment resembles prayer or meditation. It begins by confirming an "impossibility," and *giving precedence to that impossibility* — the ultimate reversed predication! Is this justifiable? The case must be made on the basis of precedents: those who, having put trust in the impossible-Real of reversed predication (that the unknown has a content *per se* that is trying to communicate with them, outside of the usual religious trappings of this idea), have done pretty much the same thing but in different ways. They have accessed the modality of subjectivity by which, as in meditation, the body and mind take on a different configuration. As is often said, the body contains a pharmacy with every medication necessary to effect a cure, but the problem is how to activate this reserve. The mind, thanks to the permanent reservoir of memory and imagination, has the same power, but the lock, as Lacan clearly identified, is the discourse that channels thought into conventional causal structures. Yet, within discourse, the Möbius-band structure of Truth, in both a "fourth" and "first" position, offers discourse a back door escape. Like the stage exit in the film *Truman*, it is always unlocked.

But, this access door requires the labors of either love or work; it is not a matter of believing in such a fantastic inner reserve that is paradoxically an "out there," but in cultivating sensitivity to its signals, in getting it to "say something." The difference between those who have done this and those who haven't is clearly marked in history. We have Plato, Rabelais, Cervantes, Shakespeare ... then Mozart, Beethoven, Mahler ... then Dickenson, Joyce, Nabokov, Perec, Calvino ... and then all the others. The lists are not just my favorites; you may add your own, following the rule that within works called "works of genius" there is an expanse, a landscape, that is missing elsewhere. We don't wake up using language and ideas invented 2000 years ago if the inventor had been simply promoting a point of view. These clairvoyants discovered a world beyond the conventional one and trusted in their means of accessing this world. This world did not require belief for its existence. Like the magic show, it works only when we renounce the role of belief and embrace the role of clarification.

The zairja is thus a "disbelief machine," and in this it is the **ideal scientific instrument**. The scientific method is based on skepticism; in fact it requires that we use a "null hypothesis" — fail to prove that something is not the case and you have won your case! The Hegelian-Lacanian style of double negation should not be ignored! By refusing to believe, however, we throw the classic reliance on "authoritative sources" into the waste-bin. We question why we should not question and rely on the de-contextualized findings of others. Because of their randomness and susceptibility to accident at all levels, zairjas institute the scientific principle of the random sample. They do not pre-value their sources. They are not like philosophical schools who rule out paradigms from the beginning in order to solidify their views as a "club." **If you want to join a club, join the club of those who have invented and used zairjas!**

Finally, zairjas discredit interpretation and hermeneutics as modes of captioning reality, if only because these re-admit untested authorities, allowing them to set up shop again after once being thrown out of the temple. Interpretation requires a context, a set of assumptions, but it is rarely required to explain or validate these assumptions. What makes a good or bad interpretation/characterization is not its relation to truth but rather its efficiency in connecting to the shared values grounding the assumptions: the identification with the social collective able to confer status and identity. This secondary goal is the difference between geniuses (e.g. Marx) and followers (e.g. Marxists). In the phenomenon of the "follower," it is impossible to distinguish the desire to know from the desire to belong. The followers obey the phallic law! They are "all in," thanks to the One Who Is Not In. In this sense, the zairja is feminine in its "not-all" mechanism. It is neither a method nor a content, rational or fantastic. It is a communications tool in the most idiotic sense.

For the latest updates on zairja thinking related to the metalepsis seminar, see the always-being-revised:

- [zairja instructions](#) (this explains how this particular zairja is based on metalepsis and the dysfunctional frame idea)
- [calculus short course](#) (this connects the zairja demonstration with the idea of metalepsis)
- [calculus hand-out](#) (a really abbreviated "explanation" of the idea of the dysfunctional frame as nose, abîme, and "sartire")

These are intended for the Zizek Conference workshop, Friday, April 4. Thanks to Carolina Dayer, co-conspirator of the workshop, for suggesting the zairja idea.

* what is radical about radical theory?

It is difficult, in the discourse of the university, to remember what theory is for. The ideology of the university mandates the exclusion of theory, which is by definition nothing more than resistance to ideology, a survival strategy. History is proving us true on this point. Even architecture programs have done their best to exchange theory for history and then history-theory for more "compelling" interests in sustainability, smart environments, parametrics, and simulated virtualities. Without critical theory, however, one could ask, can architecture be known as such?

For the most part, the kind of theory that is getting kicked out of programs was cultivated to be just the kind of thing that should be kicked out: a non-theory theory, a theory that has its own clubs and reading lists, a theory that does not allow inquiry but, rather, establishes its own bastion of ideology as a defense against the other topics. The united face behind theory-as-ideology allies with the imagination as a cause, which in fact requires theories of the imagination to be drawn from their opposite: British (mostly) empiricism and American pragmatism. British empiricism treats imagination as a playful child, free thanks to immaturity to invent and wander, to ignore the rules of reality. "Imaginary beings" become "imaginary landscapes" and "imaginary buildings," and we should defend their right to exist alongside the ones we are paid as architects to build for our clients. What is wrong here is that the imagination, in this construction, is required to be an antipode to rationality, and thus isolated it cannot fail but be the weaker twin, the dark and untrusted function that, at best, can be admitted in controlled experiments (Surrealism, Pataphysics, Dada, etc.) but when time comes for the bills to be paid, they must be paid in the currency of science — usually cognitive neuro-science.

Look carefully at those who rely on neural explanations for the imagination. **DO NOT LET THEM OFF THE HOOK!** They must first internalize imagination within the physical brain before, in contrast with rational functioning, it may be described in terms of exception or sympathy. No matter how nice neural theory is to the imagination, it is always contrasted with the "normative" functioning of rationality — the sane person *versus* the delusional poet/artist model. Lacan's insistence on the exteriority of the mind did not ignore neural structure, rather it treated it like the black box it was, on account of the inaccessibility of the real function of chemical pathways, electrical exchanges, etc. The irony is that even early pioneers in neurology — Gelb and Goldstein for example — realized in their study of aphasia that it was a "world" that was engaged in the efforts of brain-damaged patients to recover. Despite their odd substitutions (Oliver Sachs' *The Man Who Mistook*

His Wife for a Hat), they did not perceive a problem. They functioned "normally" by working around their catastrophic loss of either contiguity functions or semblance functions. Even without a hand to unify four fingers and a thumb, there is still a world, a subjectivity!

The explanation of the physical cause of such trauma is certainly neurological, but the *sinthome* is always extimate, always a "world." Lacan famously remarked, during an autopsy of a brain, that he saw no ideas there. Neither do contemporary defenders of the imagination who talk about pictures in the head, but they nonetheless hold out the belief that such pictures exist there, in some "neural" form. They dispossess us from the things we create and use (e.g. pictures and ideas) by claiming that there is a more authentic form of them locked inside neural structures, the access to which is not yet to be had by neuro-scientists but only *promised* in the vague future. The question of possession is key. We both "have" and "fail to possess" things such as ideas, pictures, maps, etc. BECAUSE OUR POSSESSION IS BASED ON CONSTRUCTS INVOLVING THE OTHER. I can't say this loudly enough. Failure to know ourselves is not a failure to be able to open up our brains. It is a failure designed to be failure, to **provide space for the Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real**. It is a space that is open because of the concealed assignment of an Other as a subject-supposed-to-know, an Other who is able to maintain phallic rule by being the exception to that rule, but also an Other who is not-all. Subjectivity is rife with remainders and surpluses that resist the Symbolic. This does not mean that the remainders and surpluses are held in trust by neural structures.

Surprisingly, this makes us even more interested in neural pathways and chemical processes, but in this we should pay attention to stochosis and the role of noise. We should not forget Lacan's idea of *mi-dire*, or silence, or the idea of the unconscious "signalizing" through ciphers. **The neural brain does not "contain" ideas in the form of pictures or mental maps, it affords them, just as it affords the idea of a mind located in the head.** The 180° difference is that our mind is not uniquely in our head. Our bodies form a continuum with the external world, with which we are in constant exchange: nutritionally, perceptually, behaviorally, ecologically, chemically, etc. A Lacanian is even more of an advocate of neurology than so-called neuro-cognitivists! But, instead of pictures and maps, inside the head we see what is also in the world: exchanges, substitutions, disguises. Our theory of subjectivity, which is a theory that MUST resist the ideological takeover of subjectivity, is precisely about exchanges, substitutions, and disguises. The argument of the metalepsis seminar is that metalepsis offers a good means of access to processes that are simultaneously subjective and objective, in other words, "based in reality," and hence scientific in the original sense of "aiming to know the truth." **Without songs, there are no birds.** Do not forget reversed predication — the basis of metalepsis and, by extension, radical theory's ability to critique the "content models" of subjectivity. It is your mother and father, your *manna*.



* from frame to picture to mirror

It would be possible to circumstantially relate the frame, picture, and mirror through anecdotes and references to literature on each, but the key lies in looking to the dysfunctions of each. (1) The Nose, where some part of the representer leaks into the representational field; (2) the Abîme, where this leak leads logically to the consequences of the bad infinity, the *mise en abîme*; and (3) the so-called "Sartire" (a blend of "satire" with Sartre's story in *Being and Nothingness* of the voyeur who hears a step on the stair behind him just as he is stealing a view through a keyhole); reveal not just the breakdowns of each of the three primary cases, frame, picture, and mirror, but a pattern in dysfunction. This is more easily discovered through graphic notation, where the "nose" is simply continued to the point where the *point of absurdity* realizes that the inside has become the outside and *vice versa*.

No Nobel Prizes in this, but the series suggests that, in the nose, there is an *implicit* extimacy, and this point opens up the case for metalepsis — i.e. that it is a "vertical" intrusion into a "horizontal" order of predications, that its most economical expression is to be found in the gap between reversed predications, and that, in the intrusion, we have a \emptyset/\emptyset condition that relates to film theory, demonization (hence religion), and the *askesis* behind the nose and the reciprocal contraction of the subject behind the frame, even as it extends itself through olfaction. Once metalepsis is involved in the case, there are many options to pursue, but the key is that metalepsis allows you to shift gears well beyond the initial choice. This shifting gears optimizes your chances of making original and unexpected connection that, because they are grounded in metalepsis, can always be demonstrated. Once freed from the ideology of the linear approach, writing becomes experimental and productive. It becomes a means of thinking.

Nose, abîme, and "sartire" seem to be arbitrary abbreviations, but once they reveal their metaleptic heritage, they open discourse — did we say *discourse*? *Of course there is a relation to the university, hysteria, mastery, and analysis!* — that is available only to Lacanians, thanks to the key ideas of extimacy and the related Freudian ideas of cathexis and the death drive. And, because the frame is the modality of the inventory, where cathexis uses the logic of *tuchê* (affordance) to "find all there is to find," the next stop is Aristotle's other form of natural cause, *automaton*. In case you missed that lecture, *automaton* is the key term in exploring the relations of the unconscious and its attempts to communicate to the first/fourth term in discourse, Truth — and not just "truth" but Truth-as-Emergence. "Build your own labyrinth!" seems to be

the slogan of metalepsis, but it will be *your* labyrinth, you will be the Dædalus (or, rather, the Perdix, the real inventor).

You wouldn't want to miss out on the connections of Sartire to satire's Satyrs (fools and their plays), would you?

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- 1—[january 1](#)
- 2—[january 8](#)
- 3—[january 15](#)
- 4—[january 22](#)
- 5—[january 29](#)
- 6—[february 5](#)
- 7—[february 12](#)
- 7.5—[february 14](#) (special Valentine's Day edition, dated February 15 in error!)
- 8—[february 17](#)



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