The Ultimate Big Other Announces the End of the World

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Figure 1. The science–fiction account of a super–intelligent visitor from outer space arriving to deliver an ultimatum, "reform or be destroyed," condenses the Lacanian theme of the Big Other to its essence: a fictional formation necessary to the subject's self–subversion. But, the particulars of space visitation also show how the master signifier of this Other must construct an interpellation through the Lacanian extimate: turning space inside out by reconstructing outer space's liminality at an interior position, on the Capitol Mall in Washington, D. C.

First, a word about the meaning of "schemata." Lacan's work developed thanks to a number of them, including the famous L-schema, which I use to begin my review of the Big Other in relation to themes of extimacy and virtuality. Schemata are ancient (Corcoran 2006). We know them from sources as early as Aristotle's *Prior Analytics*. A schema is an open template where blank place–holders force ideas to transform as the schema is "applied" to different situations by different users. The schema places thought midway between the author and reader. For Lacan, schemata epitomized his idea of teaching as rhetorical. Lacan's strange language took up the style and spirit of the rebus, the sign that vacillates between visual and auditory senses. Schemata and rebus in turn create conditions of Analytic Discourse, so that the experience of learning is, at the same time, the content of learning.

The literal schemata of Lacan are famous — the L, R, and I schemata, the two schemata of Sade. These and other visual devices (the graphs of desire, the Möbius band, the cross-cap, the Borromeo knot, Lacan's algebra for metaphor and metonymy, his wheels–within–wheels design for the four discourses) create a cinematic "fourth wall" condition where the spectator takes the place previously occupied by the production apparatus. Thus, the reader can enter into a space just vacated by the "subject supposed to know," who has left behind rebus–like instructions, an ekphrasis. This instruction style puts reader and writer in the position of analysand and analyst, with key roles played by doubled codes, acousmatics, oracles, and silence (Fink 2004, 9–11). The fourth wall of schemata operated as a corrective, "orthopsychic," function. The result is that, out of the primary virtuality, V1, of the teacher and learner (who occupy the ordinary pictorial "ego–space," $a—a'$) there emerges a secondary virtuality, V2, that is transactional and self–regulating, an Efficient Cause that allows all else to be effective. The analysand/learner "gets it" (Collins 2018b), thanks to a secondary virtuality that overcomes the barrier that the primary virtuality has thrown up against it.

The secondary virtuality of Lacan's teaching thus takes the L-schema *shape* of the psychoanalytic session. Its forms, tactics, and logic, however, also relate directly to what Mladen Dolar (1991) has called the "Lacanian uncanny" — ethnographic practices historically found in folk–tales, myths, rituals, and superstitions. This ethnographic uncanny is secularized by a literalistic popular imagination that repackages it within the genre of "the fantastic" — themes of the double, travel through time, the story in the story, and contamination of reality by the dream — and modernized as spooky correspondence,

anxiety, irony, and astonishment. Thus, the uncanny is another term for primary virtuality's secondary effectiveness, where detachment, liminality, and impossibility draw an even sharper line between normative, picture–bound belief and what seems disconcertingly over–present but beyond the limit of the senses, and beyond sense itself.
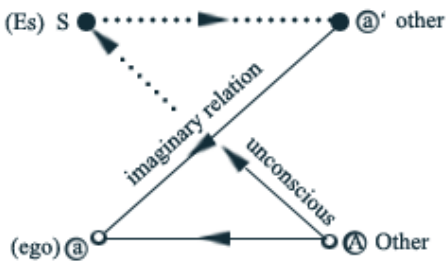
The L-Schema

Figure 2. Lacan's "L-schema" opposes the "pictorial setting" of the two egos present in analysis, the analyst (*a'*) and analysand (*a*) to the analyst's attempt to allow the Subject (S, as *Es* — the "sound" of the letter S as well as the German "it") to hear what her Unconscious has to say. The analyst's strategy is to play the role of the dummy in the game of bridge: to say something in advance (<) to provoke the analysand's into making an unguarded comment or something following (>) a slip of the tongue, a combination of "too little and too much" of language in general.

The L-schema makes the case that the situation of analysis — a speaker and a listener — serves as an instructive kit for subjectivity in general (Fink 2004, 5). The X or Z-shaped diagram forces the crisscross between two axes: (1) a normative/pictorial axis connecting the analyst and analysand in the Imaginary space of two egos engaged in conversation (*a —a'*, analyst and analysand, respectively) and (2) an axis labelled the Symbolic that is interrupted by *a—a'*. This line attempts to connect the Unconscious of the analysand and analyst (Fig. 2). The analyst must take the position of an Other (A, or *Autre*) who, in turn, develops her strategies by imitating the role of the dummy or "dead man" (*le mort*) in the card game of bridge. The analyst can anticipate the Unconscious of the analysand (S, neutered as an *Es*, or "it") by saying things with an "oracular" quality or, noting a similarly oracular quality in something the analysand has said, echo it to bring it to conscious attention. Corresponding to the way speech says either too little or too much, the analysand–as–dummy is either "too early" (<) or "too late" (>). The <…> gap creates a secondary virtuality within which, as the mysterious interior of the *poinçon* <> or ◊ of the fantasy *matheme*, $\$◊a$, forms, in this case, not a particular content but a "territory" *that ought to be traversed, a forbidden but required liminal passage*, a kind of Purgatory. The <…> is also a condition of *extimité*, possibly Lacan's most interesting and least documented concept, the topological phenomenon of the flip connecting inside to outside, as in the Möbius band's twist (Miller 2008).

This A—S vector is the Symbolic, following Lacan's insistence that the Unconscious is "structured like a language." Thus the blockade thrown up by the pictorial Imaginary *a—a'* reproduces in analysis what primary virtuality does to secondary virtuality in real life. The secondary is suppressed; so when it "appears" in the formations of the uncanny, its messages are reversed. Whatever meaning comes out of the signifying chain, $S_2...S_2$, is not an explanatory representative signifier but rather a signifying *effect*, a *signifierness*, an 'x', or rather $1/x$. Yet, *as suppressed*, it has the power to reveal the unspoken desire that has generated the $S_2...S_2$ chain. The 'x' is what is heard by the "acousmatic" ear of the analyst within the drive — the secondary virtuality — of the analysand. This is its *effect*-iveness. Acknowledging secondary virtuality's relation, as an uncanny V2, to primary virtuality's V1 pictorialism shows how virtuality belongs, as the L-schema allows us to see, both to the clinic and the ethnographic field of myth, folklore, the arts, popular culture, and (of course) architecture.

Lacan's theoretical career begins with the Mirror Stage's own staging of primary and secondary virtuality, the latter attaching to a retroactive uncanny. Through the uncanny, psychoanalysis connects to other critical vocabularies, even ones that have been seemingly indifferent or even hostile to psychoanalysis. Because the Mirror Stage creates an Imaginary gateway to the subject's future prospects within the Symbolic, the axis *a—a'* will forever dominate by creating pictures of reality. The analyst and analysand will have to play a game akin to that of double agents in a spy novel. The analysand knows something but is not aware of knowing it (*kenosis*) — the Unconscious. The analyst, positioned too early (<) and/or too late (>), must adopt a prophetic "voice of the dead" (*apophrades*), set within the time sense of the future anterior, with its built–in retroaction (*Nachträglichkeit*). My view is that this involves a symbolic recovery of the Being lost by the speaking subject from its beginning, when signs — naming — robbed things of themselves.

The relation of the minimalist <> oracle/*agalma* to the abundant, overdetermined latent content of the Unconscious requires some theory for how *detachment* works, literally, in stories, dreams, works of art, etc. as well as psychoanalytically. We might characterize this feature as "co-virtuality," in that the virtualities in ethnography (= myth, folklore, the arts, etc.) also simultaneously involve literal detachment themes, such as the hero's departure or disappearance, the miraculous existence of hidden paradises locked within ordinary space, journeys to Hades (*katabasis*), or space travel. In the uncanny of V2, ethnography is "candid" in the same way that *Gradiva* told Freud everything he needed to know about delusional dreams. As Žižek has put it, Hitchcock (or, by extension, any other artist) is able to tell us "everything we wanted to know about Lacan." The L-schema's Imaginary blockade of the Symbolic detaches the secondary virtuality of the Unconscious, with its <> strategy of the oracular sub-text, from the dominance of primary virtuality's pictures of everyday life. We cannot deflate the secondary by reversion to V1, as in the film, *Gaslight*, where everything can be explained rationally. Rather, the V2 is the *effect-iveness* of the primary, hence its ability to tell the future and resurrect the past. It is the logic of retroaction, without which the joke would not be funny nor the lesson make sense to the learner. It is the logic, as Dan Collins (2018b) has put it, of "getting it." When we "get" something, we simultaneously (1) affirm the effectiveness of what is not literally present in the picture of things but something that operates "from behind the scenes" and (2) reject the possibility of assimilating this this absence within that picture, emphasizing the role of a boundary that is constructed precisely to be violated — the essence of the crossing of the Imaginary and Symbolic vectors in the L-schema.

The Day the Earth Stood Still, "*L–schematically*"

Critical vocabularies used to describe secondary virtuality in literature, myth, visual arts, film etc. can sometimes coincide with psychoanalysis. Most notably, the four "detachment protocols" attributed to Jorge Luis Borges (the double, travel through time, the story in the story, and the contamination of reality by the dream or fiction) and the "anxiety protocols" defined by Harold Bloom to describe the poet's uncanny haunting by his/her predecessors (*dæmon/askesis*, *clinamen/tesseræ*, *apophrades/kenosis*) constitute alternative labels for Lacan's graphics. As with the case of Jensen, there is no need for interpretation; the uncanny seems to have preconditioned these critical systems so that they can be directly annexed. These "disinterested" informants reveal is that, for popular culture, the psyche leaves a trail that is all the more obvious when there is not the least concern for psychoanalysis of any kind. Low–brow entertainment seems to say "Just let your thoughts wander." The more audiences and artists avoid high–art themes and motivations, the more often they create a 1:1 match with psychoanalysis. The secondary virtuality in

general and the uncanny in specific are best found when "traversing the fantasy" amounts to "getting it" without having to leave the plane of the work's illusions.

Secondary virtuality is basis and fuel for the science fiction thriller, *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (Wise 1951). The ring–boundary separating earth from outer space has, already, a built–in function of relating knowledge ($S_2…S_2$) to the unknown (= Unconscious, a "master signifier," S_1). The known world can be imagined as signifiers chained into a circle, end answering to beginning, what Roland Barthes has called the *récit fort* — a "strong narrative" — V1 as a self–enforcing, compelling account of what reality seems to be (Collins 2018a). *Beyond* this circle of signifiers lies, generically, the outer space that has, from mythic times, been seen as the origin of "master signifiers" (S_1) in the form of constellations and seasonal movements of planets, sun, and moon. When something more modern comes from this region, the quality of the master signifier consolidates technology ("advanced civilizations") with supreme intellect. Spacemen are always both super–intelligent, with gadgets to prove it.

The film makes it clear that, in the circle of signifiers, $S_2…S_2$, the Lacanian Symbolic, there are gaps. Capitalist greed and social injustice stem from the rational "pictorialism"/V1 of economics and contractual relations set up by nations. The resulting global aggression amounts to a counterpart of subjective self–aggression. Seen from the outside, the V2 perspective of S_1, the gratuitous violence of human against human seems futile. Klaatu and his automaton *aide-de-camp* Gort land their spaceship on the Capital Mall in Washington, D. C. and are immediately surrounded by a cordon of tanks and soldiers. The outer boundary of $S_2…S_2$ excluding the S_1 of outer space is now inverted/extimated into an "inside frame" where $S_2…S_2$ forms its own circle of contradiction. Klaatu has come with magical gifts and a message of peace, but soldiers destroy the gift and shoot him, as if to show that $S_1/S_2…S_2$ must be converted, according to the popular hostility toward anything alien, to $S_2…S_2/S_1$. The formal resemblance to the metaphor's *matheme* element, $S_2…S_2/x$, is easy to recognize (Fink 2004).

Similarly, Klaatu's "oracular" message to earthlings shows how his attempt to establish communications with an earth–Unconscious (his idea that the nations can unify themselves into a single, moral audience is met with ridicule) is along an axis of the Symbolic. Its interruption by the pictorial Imaginary is even more obvious. From his former position in outer space, Klaatu held the traditional position of a metaphor, $M/S_2…S_2$. Now, imprisoned within a circle of armed signifiers, he is $S_2…S_2/x$, an "unknown quantity." Just as Lacan's *matheme* for the metaphor inverts the position of $S_2…S_2$, from denominator to numerator, the *relation* between metaphor and the unknown (= suppressed) x is created by *extimité*. This is the *form* of the blockade set up by the Imaginary (= tanks and soldiers surrounding the spaceship). Its extimity will make it a complex conditional boundary, able to admit those who know the password, "Klaatu barada nikto."

Because the chain of signifiers is also "self–negated" by this flip from outer space to the Capital Mall landing site, we look to its inner structure, as a *récit fort*. According to Collins (2018a), citing Roland Barthes (1995), this is the requirement that the end of a signifying chain or series must answer to the beginning. The moment of return, however, is characterized by a small gap. This corresponds to the gap in the heavily armed encirclement, selectively admitting/refusing passage. The metonymy of the boundary's conditionality is Gort's extromissive light-beam eye, which can destroy a weapon without harming the soldier holding it.

Boundary construction in *The Day the Earth Stood Still* reveals the role of extimity in both the L-schema and the *matheme* for metaphor. Thus, this "naive" popular culture source, like Jensen's *Gradiva*, has

the power not just to exemplify but correct psychoanalytical theory by showing how metaphor — the agent of condensation (*Verdichtung*) in dream analysis — also explains how the blockade of the Symbolic by the Imaginary in the L-schema is also a matter of relating latent quantity (a.k.a. the Unconscious) to the manifest content — "quality" — of dream recall. Because the themes of the oracle and masterful super–intelligence present accurate versions of the L-schema's functions of the dummy ($<>$) as positional strategy and the analyst's transference position as a "subject supposed to know." But, here the "naive example" has something more general and truly important to offer. The extimity of the spaceship's "quantum" passage from outer space to the Capital Mall shows how the inside frame will retain the meaning of the outer frame separating $S_2…S_2$ from the "infinite beyond" and condense its psychoanalytic meanings into boundary behaviors. In turn, these behaviors (Klaatu's escape and return, Gort's "extromissive" eye–beam, Klaatu's impromptu break–in to Professor Barnhardt's private study) are all about the Symbolic's relation to the Imaginary, in the analytical setting of the clinic, where the V1 personalities of the analyst and analysand block the secondary virtuality required for "traversing the fantasy" via the oracular statements exchanged between doctor and patient.

What does this say about secondary virtuality? This example of popular culture has, like *Gradiva*, seemed to know more than it knows — a case of Bloomian *kenosis*. This virtuality belongs to both worlds, psychoanalysis and ethnography, equally. As a result, it invites studies that begin from either side, and promotes a logic of annexation rather than interpretation. The Ultimate Big Other, the Unconscious, like Klaatu*,* offers study an ultimatum: continue within the confines of the delusional first virtuality, the Imaginary (begun with the Mirror Stage), and "die there." Or, learn the magic trick of the *récit fort* and make a ring of signifiers into an "autopoietic" boundary whose logic of *extimité* will always return to a point of *jouissance*, a gap, a moment of escape. For architecture, the implications are enormous.

Some may resist seeing how this relates to architecture. Yet, the extimity of Klaatu and Gort's spaceship entry into the primary virtuality of quotidian space on earth tells the tale of how the unconscious can play a key role in the most basic architectural conditions. We must take this claim to the origins of architecture, when humans specified extensive cosmic relationships with minimal material means, where we must look at the evidence and admit that architecture is at its maximum when building materiality is at its minimum. *This is nothing less than an architectural version of the Lacanian L-schema*, the point at which the Unconscious encounters the barrier of the pictorial V1, primary virtuality, the virtuality that can be extended but not improved by computer graphics. The Unconscious bears a message that can be coaxed over the barrier through the "$<>$" position of the dummy — who is in effect the *automaton* — by means of relocating the acousmatic voice of the Unconscious–as–Other, in a throw of the message, in an act of ventriloquism. We know these places very well, because they are the architecture of the *piazze*, courtyards, hidden passageways, staircases, ceilings, and other marginal elements that undertake the Symbolic by of maintaining a void. Because voids are not simply "empty" but oracular in their ability to create a spatial version of the *récit fort*, the closing of the circle leaves a mouth (*apophrades*) whose shape alone tells the tone. As Lacan, in his only direct reference to architecture in Seminar VII, emphasized, we will know nothing of this void unless we understand what the Unconscious is attempting to do. This is what all art and folk belief "attempts to do," to "insist" without closing down the project of desire. This is the position "between the two deaths," the position of immortality but simultaneously the place of burial and desiccation, where by means of overdetermination architecture is able to mean nothing and everything.

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