

2 / Chirality

Probably we would all be as quiet as oysters if it were not for this curious organization which forces us to disrupt the barrier of pleasure or perhaps only makes us dream of forcing and disrupting this barrier.

—Jacques Lacan, “Of Structure as the Inmixing of an Otherness Prerequisite to Any Subject Whatever”¹

Sense of place

Possibly the reason that places, in that aspect known as “the sense of place,” seem to be permanently uncanny, comes from their relation to transgression. With the return home, where the map account of experience returns to the value of a former location (ABA) but the journal account (123...) must add a new page, A_3 , and the sinthome re-engineers cathexis. This investment of the psyche in the material world must now make itself felt through “part-objects,” especially those that Lacan added to Freud’s original list of breast, feces, and phallus: the gaze and the voice. Energy sent in the direction of the object like radar is now returned to the subject/observer, whose reception is staged following the conventions of the genre known in literature as “the fantastic,” since a new kind of virtuality must be imagined, a virtuality that emanates from a concealed interior. Objects and subjects, in this reversal, glow with demonic intent. Some move autonomously; they *seem to think*. The return home is thus a return in two senses: the return of the subject to a familiar place that is no longer dependably familiar, and the return of perception’s outward investment in the world in the form of a creation of an independent and resistant impossible-Real of objects and personifications.

These new part-objects follow the program of the death drive that lies behind all returns — the structural condition of A_3 , the uncanny return.² It is in the *place as place* that the envious evil eye seems to want something from us, or asks us what we want — *Ché vuoi?* Similarly, as is clear in the case of ventriloquism, A_3 allows the illusion that a voice can appear from an unexpected location. The voice of the dummy is permanently uncanny in its seeming ability to escape from its master, illustrated with particular horror by the scene played by Michael Redgrave in the 1945 thriller film, *Dead of Night*.³

In Lacan’s *matheme* for the discourse of the master,

$$\frac{S_1}{\$} \rightarrow \frac{S_2}{a}$$

¹ Jacques Lacan, “Of Structure as the Inmixing of an Otherness Prerequisite to Any Subject Whatever,” *The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man: The Structuralist Controversy*, ed. R. Macksey and E. Donato (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins

² In the uncanny return, A_3 , we have parallel evidence of Lacan’s rejection of the constructivist logical principle of $\sim\sim P = P$ (a double negation resulting in the reaffirmation of the positive. For a consideration of the consequences of Lacan’s “intuitionist” logic, see Russell Grigg, “Lacan and Badiou: Logic of the *Pas-tout*,” *Filozofski vestnik* 27, 2 (2005): 53–65. Grigg points to a consequent rejection of the negative existential, $\sim(\forall x)\Phi x \rightarrow (\exists x)\sim\Phi x$. This does not rule out Lacan’s belief in what Ernst Cassirer called the positive apprehension of the negative, as in the personifications of night, shadow, death, etc., where conditions of absence are given full symbolic status. Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, 1, *Myth*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 1953). **PAGE**

³ The ventriloquist in a Parisian night-club has “lost control” of his dummy, which is to say that a schizophrenic who hears demonic voices has found the perfect vocation, allowing him to function in society by using his dysfunction as a marketable talent! Michael Balcon, *et al.*, *Dead of Night* (Troy, MI: Anchor Bay Entertainment, 2003).

mastery begins a slide towards detail within the field it has desired, S_2 . Its cathexis has structured this glide, but it has initiated a process that will defeat its goal. Just at the point where mastery — as fetish — seems to have found what it was looking for, the basis of its quest changes the basis for calculating the balance between subjects and objects. Instead of space, which had defined a field of sequential opportunity, an S_2 where subjectivity might freely roam to inventory contents that constitute attractions and avoidances, it has found a rupture where scale, instead of sliding smoothly from the largest to the smallest, converts to a binary. Time, instead of sequence, becomes the time of cyclical return. The counting sequence of 1, 2, 3, etc., which normally promises numerical infinity, reveals its own “supersymmetry,” its own internal harmonic.

In the famous boom-shot in Hitchcock’s *Notorious*, it is necessary at this flip-point to “meet in the cellar.” Beneath the bar of Lacan’s *matheme* of mastery, which we could temporarily rename “the master’s house,” is the collection of wines that contain not the Pommard *grand cru* advertised on the label but powdered uranium, the *manna* of the film, its MacGuffin. The co-spies, Alicia and Devlin, constitute the split subject of inquiry, $\$$, in the house of the master, S_1 . They meet to find the *objet petit a* under the melancholy star of Saturn, the scandal of romance. As a couple, they are censored by Sebastian’s critical surveillance. Alicia is barred, more radically, as the wife–prisoner of Sebastian, Nazi and mama’s boy. Beneath the bar refers to two things: the cellar scene looking into the mystery of the Pommard and imprisonment in the bedroom of Sebastian’s mansion, succumbing to poisoned coffee served up by the maternal super-ego, Madam Anna.

It is interesting that the point where fetish converts to sinthome is precisely the point in the story where place containers give way to the poisons, uranium and arsenic — one to win the war, the other to kill the warrior. In the poison motif we have the lore of Asklepius, whose famous medicinal was blood drawn from the slain Medusa. This was a curious stereognostic that, taken from the left of Medusa’s body, would kill but, taken from the right, would restore life. There is no better time than now to understand the conversion of privation into prohibition, since Askepius was punished by the gods for this trespass into their privileged domain. Here, we should stick to the particulars, to the left and right of the story, to the sequential glide along the scale of space from long to short view, and the sudden encounter of a chiralistic and stereognostic open and shut sign: Alicia’s clinched–then–opened hand. Binary code.

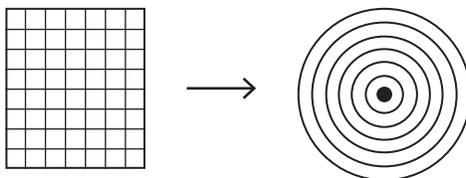


Fig. 1. The gridded mentality of the fetish gives way to the target mentality of the sinthome at the point where the deductive binary automaton reaches a tipping point of self-similarity, analogous to the “idiotic symmetry” reached by two parties to a bargain. Just as the market reveals an “emergent” stability that cannot be accounted for in its mechanical procedures or conscious concepts of its participants, the binaries of predication turn metaleptic precisely where the dialectic opposition of forces discovers its specific resonant pitch. The S_1 attempts to “master” the field, S_2 , through the logic of the inventory. At the point of the sinthome, $\$$ comes into relationship with the (empty) *objet petit a*. The spiral of the death drive, the compulsive return to the same void, reveals its “self-similarity” in the mathematics of supersymmetry.

Open or shut, left or right, was the logic of the automaton we set in motion to find the dot in the field. Rotating the field while making the identical demand created a spiral down to an indeterminate target, but this unavoidably converted the gridded space into a target. This coincidence of graphic opposites — the grid and the target — has immense significance. Compare the visual field to a collection — an attempt to

inventory everything in space that is in space. This makes the system of grids the “master,” where the automaton, as “slave,” begins its binary search. Left or right? Rotate. Left or right? Rotate Everyone knows how collectors in real life move beyond rationality for their collections and base their compulsion on fetish. The attempt to complete the collection generates incompleteness. As in Marx’s own account of the fetish, use value is easily and subtly replaced by exchange value, and in the “uselessness” of the collection comes its obsessive nature. The exchange value is pegged to a concealed economy of psychic forces. One more is never enough. Each new addition opens up new hunger, new opportunities, new disappointments.⁴ The collection conceived as a field gridded off into ideal compartments — categories — gives way to the *sinthome* when the scale of addition (1, 2, 3 ...) encounters a return (ABA) to the same state of lack: A_3 . This is the point of the cornucopia, the horn that continues to deliver, from an impossibly small space, infinite goods. This is also the synecdoche of Borges’ *aleph*, the small crystal that tunnels through ordinary (sequence scaled?) space to recover eternal memories — i.e. the basis of the famous “theaters of memory” conceived by ancient and Medieval mystics. It is also the “Brunnian link” of Lacan’s three domains of subjectivity, conceived as a Borromeo knot: three rings, each pair of which are unlinked but, because of the *presence of a third* for every pair, a third which *performs an unusual task*, the three rings are locked tight.

It is interesting to note the roles of three separate substances devoted to the “vanishing point” of the boom shot. The uranium worked as the classical Hitchcockian MacGuffin — a mixture of substance and knowledge that remains mysterious even at the end of the film but which served as a place-holder to motivate action. As an enigma, the MacGuffin compares to the Biblical food, manna, which nourished without being knowable in any conventional way. Manna’s relation to art in general was established by Leo Steinberg, in his essay “Contemporary Art and the Plight of its Public.”⁵ Like manna, the MacGuffin nourishes art and its audiences by providing what is needed without being known or knowable, although its powers depend on its sense of being knowable. Thus, it is like an “agalma,” Lacan’s model for the *objet petit a*. Comparing this to a gift that is contained in a box, the agalma is valuable *as hidden*. The box is in a paradoxical sense the “real value” of the contents, and opening it or not constitutes the function of agalma, “to get things going” without having any definitive rational relationship to those motives and actions.

This reverse predication of container for contained can be converted to a scale conversion linking the inventory mentality of the fetish to the target mentality of the *sinthome*. Raymond Roussel, in his evolution of the *procédé*, a technique to induce a Surrealist quality in the work of art, described a procedure of traveling into a small graphic representation.⁶ In the poem *La Vue*, a souvenir pen-holder is fitted with a small lens placed over a printed view that could be seen by holding the eye close to the lens. Roussel magnifies the potential of this small lens further, proposing that the viewer is able to journey into the world of the scene and partake in impossibly small details. Mark Ford elaborates: “Roussel describes not only the promenaders on the beach, but a yacht and various small craft in the offing. We learn of a fisherman who is becalmed out at sea that his jacket is tight under the arms and worn at the cuffs, that his beard is rather untidy and that his left eyebrow is lightly shaggier than his right.”

Thus, the bottle of Pommard holding the uranium is equivalent to the cellar storing the wines, which is

⁴ This point is more generally made by Todd McGowan in “Driven into the Public: The Psychic Constitution of Space,” where he notes that “Desire is dissatisfied because it attempts to overcome obstacles, but drive finds satisfaction in the obstacle” (22). Donald Kunze, David Bertolini, and Simone Brott, *Architecture Post Mortem The Diastolic Architecture of Decline, Dystopia, and Death* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2013), 15–30.

⁵ Leo Steinberg, in his essay “Contemporary Art and the Plight of its Public,” *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), originally published in *Harper’s Magazine*, 1962.

⁶ Mark Ford, *Raymond Roussel and the Republic of Dreams* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 84. Roussel gave away his secret method of composition in Roussel, Raymond, *Comment j’ai écrit certains de mes livres* (Paris: J. J. Pauvert, 1963), published in English as Raymond Roussel, John Ashbery, and Trevor Winkfield, *How I Wrote Certain of My Books* (New York: SUN, 1977).

equivalent to the point at which the boom shot seems to dip beneath the datum line of visibility, the point where fetish gives way to sinthome and where the inventory gives way to the magic spell. Could we label this point, following the tale where we are first let in on this secret, the Diana–Actæon point? In that pithy but oft-repeated story, the hunter Actæon stumbles across Diana and her attendants bathing in a spring in the forest, where tufa and pumice have formed a natural pool. In retribution, Diana splashes Actæon with spring water, and he is transformed into a stag. As his dogs witness this genesis, they frighten their master into running, and they chase him down. The simple morality-tale quality of this metamorphosis is given a twist when Ovid provides the reader with a “Roussel–*procédé* moment” of extreme detail. In the midst of the chase scene he names each of the thirty-three dogs and gives a minute account of the condition of their births and fame as hunters.

At this point, not only does cathexis shift its physics from a field-inventory approach (hunting in the forest) to a chase model (retreat from demonic pursuers), but the *detail in general* is elevated to the level of the universal in the same way traditional techniques of divination construct a field from which the most casual of accidents takes on supreme significance. This is the tipping point Vico identified in the thunder perceived by the first humans to be the word of Zeus: an “imaginative universal” where particularity as particularity achieves universality in a single stroke.⁷

Thirty-three is the number of completion that, even before it was applied to Jesus’s age at the time of crucifixion, had already achieved fame through its mathematical relation to the number nine. Three times three is of course nine, but the “sigma value” of 33 is 6, a perfect “aliquot” number ($1+2+3 = 1 \times 2 \times 3$). The numbers 3 and 11 are famous in antiquity and beyond for their cosmic roles. The number 11 should not be viewed solely within the counting sequence of the decimal system. In many ways it is 1|1, the point where the “old 1” meets a “new 1” at the turn of the year, where the eleventh month (January, following *December*) is given over to the Janus–logic of the Saturnalia, the Roman festival where slaves and masters changed places.

Diana was originally “Djana,” revealing that she was the consort of Djanus, or Janus; or, rather, that the male-female composite ruled the logic of hinges and boundaries. This helps us make more sense of the stone boundary markers, the “herms,” placed to mark the “Janusian” edges of agricultural fields, cemeteries, and domestic thresholds. The herm’s symbolic presentation was stripped down to the representation of a male head and erect phallus. This has given rise to the conception that the herm was entirely representative of the “male” Hermes, who, when combined with the “female” Hestia, respectively, stood for the exterior and interior of Greek space. As pointed out in Chapter 1, Richard Onians refuted the idea of sexual distinction of interior and exterior space based on a Hermes–Hestia rule by pointing out the relation of the head to the genitals.⁸ The head was Psyche, representative of the family gods (*manes*) worshiped at the interior hearth and presided over by Hestia, represented locally by the wife and daughters of the family. The herm *combined* Psyche and Hermes, or rather was the bi-sexual idea embodied in Hermes and the herm as a marker. Djanus/Djana, 11, constitute the duplicity of the boundary, evident more clearly in the practice of silent trade, where two parties never meet but nonetheless establish the market value of traded goods that are reputed to come from *Hades*, literally “the invisible.”

⁷ Vico: [T]he nature of the human mind leads it to attribute its own nature to the effect, and because in that state their nature was that of men all robust bodily strength, who expressed their very violent passions by shouting and grumbling, they pictured the sky to themselves as a great animated body, which in that aspect they called Jove, the first god of the so-called *gentes maiores*, who by the whistling of his bolts and the noise of his thunder was attempting to tell them something. And thus they began to exercise that natural curiosity which is the daughter of ignorance and the mother of knowledge, and which, opening the mind of man, gives birth to wonder Giambattista Vico, *The New Science of Giambattista Vico*, trans. Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 1968), §377.

⁸ Richard Broxton Onians, *The Origins of European Thought: About the Body, the Mind, the Soul, the World, Time, and Fate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951), 122.

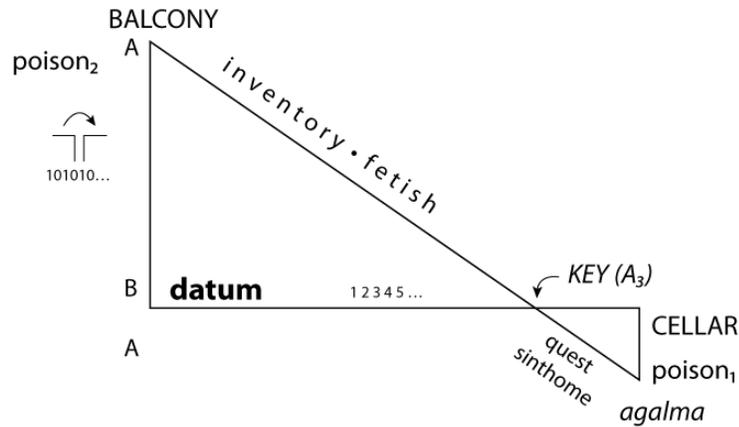


Fig. 2. The boom shot provides a model for the “uncanny return home” by showing how the field of inventory gives way to the target-like quest. The vertical in this case is binary because the map frame, an agent of predication, is “invisible” to the mapped phenomena. In the inventory temporality is sequential, but at the datum point this shifts to a logic of return, where apparent linear motion is in fact curved, directing travel outward back to its origin. This reveals a poison cast in two registers, one generic (uranium as the key to the end of the war but a horrible death for many) and one specific (Alicia will be poisoned by Madam Sebastian). The camera’s descent and increasingly tight framing constitutes an exception to its rule of detachment, epitomized from the initial balcony position. At the point where it is among the guests, the rule of visibility afforded by invisibility (1010...) is taken over by Alicia’s “signalizing” with an open–closed hand-code. Metaleptically, Alicia has taken the binary rule into the frame as a content, a sign visible only to a select audience, like a stage whisper.

Now, it is evident that the MacGuffin — and the manna, *agalma*, and *objet petit a* that are involved in its meaning — can be subsumed within the scale dysfunction created at the conversion of the fetish into the *sinthome*, the inventory into the target-shaped spiral of death drive. At the point where cathexis shifts gears, from a general charging of the spatial field to the investment in specific objects and persons, manifest as a demonic quality, an *eros*, the natural response is flight; or, more precisely, *askesis*. For the character on the stage or screen, this is the occupation of an often impossibly small space, a room, cabin, lifeboat, coach; or the parts of a house that are normally off-limits, a cellar or attic. The coupling of *askesis* with *agalma* is evident in Devlin and Alicia’s descent into the wine-cellar; but it is also characteristic of the use of single sets and public conveyances (trains, stagecoaches, airplanes, etc.) as the work of art’s natural preference for a single field of play.

In Hitchcock’s *Rear Window*, for example, the invalid photographer recovering from an accident cannot leave his New York studio apartment, so he begins an inventory of his neighbors, who share an internal open-space, an “*aula*.” Inactive characters play the parts of “part-objects” by being half of a customary pair. Miss Lonelyheart cannot find a boyfriend, a dancer is missing her perfect partner, a composer cannot work out a tune. These “empty predications” are set on edge by a jewelry salesman (Gr. *agalma*, “jewel”), who “re-predicates” himself by murdering his wife in favor of a girlfriend. In this he mirrors the photographer’s own efforts to avoid marriage with the “perfect woman,” the independently wealthy model who, in her introductory scene, turns on three lights, one for each of her names, which carry echoes of fate and free will (Elizabeth = “God’s promise”; Carol = “free man”). Hestia promises, through marriage, to restore the photographer, “Jeff” Jefferies, not yet freed from the Name of the Father.

Other famous single-set films (*Rope*, *Lifeboat*, *The Lady Vanishes*; *Gaslight*, *Twelve Angry Men*, *Dogville*, *Panic Room*; etc.) as well as films that stuff impossible contents into restricted spaces (John Ford’s *Stagecoach*, Luis Buñuel’s *Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*) aim to redefine space as inventory

to space as target, and both dialog and looks are employed to set up the new metrics. Possibly there could be no clearer case than Hitchcock's *Rear Window*, where the optics of Jefferies' cameras and binoculars, convert the catalog of human comedy into a targeted surveillance of the jewelry salesman's apartment. Lacan's reference of the *objet petit a* aspect of the gaze as having the "ambiguity of the jewel" is appropriate for the way *Rear Window*'s villain refracts and glows. The summer heat mandates window-opening and curtain-raising, but the murder's blinds and appearances at the window are one step out of synch. Against the general 1010, he is 0101. So are the newly-weds in the off-courtyard apartment to Jeff's left, but this contrasts the modesty of marital acceleration with the secrecy of marital cessation.

If anyone is a modern Actæon, it is Jeff, who has become consumed/mortified by his obsession, initiated by an involuntary discovery of a possible murder scene. He cannot stop watching, but what he sees is not visible in the way that the other residents are visible thanks to the heat wave. The murder's visibility is temporalized. Jeff sleeps through some key evidentiary scenes, and must use magnification of his powerful telephoto to pry into others. His virtuality is "detached" from the normal optical world where shadows are cast predictably and mirrors return their views. Once the shadow's negative is reified and the reflection can be delayed or tuned to a different channel, the point of view correlative to these delinquents enters the zone of fantasy, which Lacan wrote as \diamond but which can also be written as $< >$, "both less than and greater than," the point where the scale of the map-inventory breaks down and where the impossibly small can contain the impossibly large — hence, the single-set, restricted space film device.