

# The Master's House

DONALD KUNZE

Penn State University

By a definition that may seem terse, arbitrary, and even ridiculous at this point ...

... the "master" is *whoever* has a "house," meaning an architecture that facilitates — but later explicates and undermines — mastery. The architecture of this "house" positions the master and his house with respect to space around it, both in material and ideological terms. Thus, this architecture is similar to the topology of the "houses" of planets, whose spheres align in specific ways to create variable conditions of influence based on adjacency.

On the side of materiality, the master's house is one that is frequently easy to identify on account of its prominence in the landscape, its conspicuous display of wealth or control, its symbols, its grandeur. Clichés come to mind: the castles or manor houses that are the staple of British National Trust properties filled with fawning tourists; the plantation houses of the Deep South, set like jewels in fields of agricultural wealth; the less grand contemporary McMansions set behind gates and electronic security systems; the parts any house where occupants display their status through possessions, trophies, or precious objects.

Mastery is exercised through architecture in ways that are not always obvious. Mastery is not simply quantitative superiority. It is not the "successful solution" of a functional, climatic, resource, or sustainability problem, although it can be the way rhetoric situates a building project within these anxieties. Mastery, here, is meant in three senses in addition to the usual one:

(1) the Vichian, and later Hegelian and Marxist, sense of radical historicism, in which formation of the idea of a master, and a master metaphor, is key to various economies of exchange, including the exchange of metaphors and metonymies to create autonomous "mentalities"<sup>1</sup>;

(2) The Lacanian sense of "false mastery" employed by the ego, following the mirror stage, in retroactively creating a contrasting "subject in pieces" (objective subjectivity) as well as objects that resist mastery ("partial objects," subjective objectivity); and

(3) The reconfiguration of agencies and actions to modify spaces and times into Möbius-band-like topographies creating "symptom structures" that include a variety of discourses and perceptual frameworks.

"The master's house" thus comes to stand for both the variety of architectural strategies taken to symbolize and culturally sustain the idea of mastery as well as the ideological and psychological structures that alternatively create and then undermine/explicate mastery. Because mastery involves a large range of topics in what might be called "the Freudian-

Lacanian field," the psychoanalytic framework — where linguistics, rhetoric, optics, and topology interact closely — constitutes a laboratory for positioning the role of the unconscious in the process of constructing and construing mastery. But, because the Vichian-Hegelian-Marxian projects on the subject of mastery involve the creation of stable domains of political/ideological order, this unconscious repeats the insistent conclusion of Fredric Jameson, that the unconscious is *inherently* a political matter, and that its analysis requires a Marxist analysis. I concur but promote Vico's perspective into first place over Marx's because, I would argue, Vico anticipates Marx (and Hegel; and Lacan) in anthropological and linguistically interesting ways.<sup>2</sup>

This study is, therefore, presented as a kind of thesis about what a comprehensive answer to the question, "what is the political unconscious of architecture?" might look like. Any position involving such diverse and historically-philosophically separate sources as Vico and Lacan has to construct fragile bridges over deep water. My strategy will be to disavow mastery as a goal of study and to face the potential damage of errors in advance, knowing that error will be an unavoidable component of any account. Does this mean accepting defeat in advance? Yes, in terms of the usual Positivistic standard of falsifiability. But, in the spirit of Lacan's promise, in the face of the Gödelian paradox, to choose between incompleteness over inconsistency, inconsistency is the choice of the comedian and the politician. Incompleteness offers the advantage of treating the limits of mastery in a material way — as a boundary both characterizing the object of study as well as study itself. Also, the renunciation of mastery engages the issue of double negation, a key component in the issue of mastery, particularly in its relations to Hegel's famous master-slave parable. As Iris Murdoch would call it, this aims to be a "fairly honorable defeat."<sup>3</sup>

This recursion, which is really a reciprocity between the objects and methods of study, leads in the direction of a style of inquiry famously polished by Slavoj Žižek, for whom popular culture is both a laboratory and stage-set for psychoanalysis. In particular, film, which is experienced "authentically" in all of its copies, so to speak, provides the best field for discourse. In this study, Akira Kurosawa's 1950s crime thriller, *High and Low*, provides multiple angles on the case of the master's house.<sup>4</sup> An industrialist, Kingo Gondo, is set to take over his company but negotiations are interrupted by a kidnapping. His chauffeur's son is taken by mistake (the two boys were in costume, playing "cowboys and Indians") but the industrialist is persuaded to accept full responsibility, not only ruining his chances for closing the deal but ruining him financially. The issue of double negation looms prominently, and here we can identify the relation of negation to the role played by metonymy as well as the differentiation of two types of metonymy, privation and prohibition. The background logic of *High and Low's* plot is based on a plus-minus system of "privation": the ransom equals exactly the amount of money the industrialist needed for his take-over; the chauffeur's son played the role of an "exact copy" of the industrialist's. The industrialist's prominently visible house itself is involved in a tight exchange of metonymies relating it to the low docklands of Yokohama. The house is a metonymy of the docklands in the sense that Gondo, who comes from a working class family, "stands

(up) for” the workers as well as their district of the city.<sup>5</sup> In the second part of the film, the docklands are metonymized as a “city in pieces” (the urban version of the Lacanian “subject in pieces”), where the unknown location of the kidnapper necessitates a process of interpolating synesthetic qualities of the landscape.

As a complement to the rigorous mathematics of privation, a complementary theme is created. Prohibition develops out of the “dropped-out” metonymy of wealth and its reciprocal force, the evil eye that enviously and literally hold the master’s house in its gaze. Prohibition intensifies the role played by optics, blindness, and invisibility. The kidnapper’s telescope casts a shadow that inverts the house’s interior space, forcing police assisting with negotiations to crawl beneath the sight line. The X-structure of surveillance is optical but also rational, setting up the inversion that finally brings the victim and victimizer together in a final scene where reflections on the glass separating the two men anamorphically blends their faces. At this point it may be possible to speculate about how the components of the master’s house constitute a “cipher” that combines perceptual data with the logical order of consciousness. Unlike theories of the unconscious that romanticize it as an inaccessible repository, this interactive model inverts the usual inside-outside relationship that plants the unconscious at the interior of the subject’s “point of view.” Rather, this analysis relocates the unconscious at the antipode of the point of view, the perspectival “vanishing point,” released from its obligation to sit at the horizon line to play a wider role as the subjective object, the “extimate,” the unlocatable gaze.<sup>6</sup>

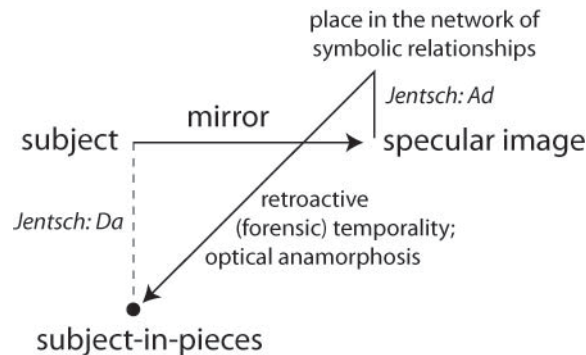


Figure 1. Lacan specifies that the young subject’s encounter with a more masterful specular image of itself quickly conceives its own actual lack and uncertain location within the network of symbolic (social) relationships. Connecting the two key metonymical motions (to the symbolic, and to the subject-in-pieces) enjoins Ernst Jentsch’s key paradigms of the uncanny: a subject, Ad, determined by a prior and external system of order, and another subject, DA, re-contextualized by the “death” of this retroactive disaggregation, a “subject-in-pieces,” a subject without a place, a wandering dead soul.

The Lacanian mirror stage provides a diagrammatic template that describes how metaphor and metonymies are circulated within a field whose "economy" includes the creation of visual fields, management of the point of view, and the use of space-time as a medium for the gnosis of the mystery-story genre. The rhetorical-semantic need to "drop a metonymy" in the process of framing a scene, as the "metonymical" kidnapper must "drop out of sight" in order to place the industrialist's house under surveillance, he takes on the role of a Lacanian "partial object" — in this case, the "acousmatic" voice — which in the mirror stage relates to the developmental role played by the proper name within the schema of the symbolic order.<sup>7</sup>

According to Lacan, the master signifier is not simply a paradigm but rather a defect in causality itself that differentiates the human concept from universals such as the "laws of physics," which play out tautological relationships without creating remainders. An example of this latter would be  $F=MA$ , or "force equals mass times acceleration", Newton's second law of motion. The terms are exchangeable according to the standard laws of algebraic equations. Force *is* mass times acceleration; acceleration is force *divided by* mass, etc. Causality, however, is defective in that the effect can retroactively determine the cause. Such is the case with obvious fallacies such as *post hoc ergo propter hoc*, a commonplace error illustrated with high comedy in *Tristram Shandy's* episode of the warm chestnut that mistakenly fell into the aperture of Phutatorious's breeches, conceived to have been a trick played by Yorick.<sup>8</sup> Alas! Lacan argues that the defect is more general. By an "impossible" topology not unrelated to the Mirror Stage's retroactive creation of the subject-in-pieces, who falls short of the mastery indicated by his/her very own spectral image in the mirror, one effect out of a contingent series can be moved out of place to become what Deleuze has labeled a "demark," a non-mark, a mark that becomes its own cause. In the Stephen Spielberg film, *Jaws*, the shark "stands out" from the order of nature to become a center of meaning, through which the greed of businessmen keen to keep the beaches open even in the face of danger, the moral degeneracy of teenagers having sex in the water, and the incursion of human activities on the domain of nature all funnel. Fredric Jameson summarizes:

[T]he vocation of the symbol —the killer shark — lies less in any single message or meaning than in its very capacity to absorb and organize all of these quite distinct anxieties together. As a symbolic vehicle, then, the shark must be understood in terms of its essentially polysemous function rather than any particular content attributable to it by this or that spectator. Yet it is precisely this polysemousness which is profoundly ideological, insofar as it allows essentially social and historical anxieties to be folded back into apparently 'natural' ones, both to express and to be recontained in what looks like a conflict with other forms of biological existence.<sup>9</sup>

The master signifier works, therefore, not as a system of mechanical idealizations of the principle of substitution (permitted cases of mistaken identity, so to speak) but as a reversal of "antonomasia," the process by which a person or thing is given a name based on an epithet or attributes ("Old Hickory" for Andrew Jackson; "The Little Corporal" for Napoleon) to the identification of a condition or situation with the qualities of a proper name. Reversed an-

tomasia gives a literal proper name or the status of a proper name to a condition of mind or experience. Hitchcock's story about the origin of the McGuffin is key:

It might be a Scottish name, taken from a story about two men in a train. One man says, "What's that package up there in the baggage rack?" And the other answers, "Oh that's a McGuffin." The first one asks, "What's a McGuffin?" "Well," the other man says, "It's an apparatus for trapping lions in the Scottish Highlands." The first man says, "But there are no lions in the Scottish Highlands," and the other one answers "Well, then that's no McGuffin!" So you see, a McGuffin is nothing at all.<sup>10</sup>

The McGuffin's emptiness and meaninglessness captures the essence of the master signifier, whose very power and pervasiveness is based on the fact that it has no logical relationship to any referent. Andrea Battistini has argued that the logic of reversed antonomasia was, in fact, what Giambattista Vico described as the "master key" to the mentality of the first humans, who perceived in a clap of thunder a "word of Jove" that meant to tell them something (but they knew not what). The key is that, in a series of signifiers, a final one is pulled out of place: a metonym "set higher" than the rest, which back-projects a point of origin that "must have been" the causal energy behind the previous series.<sup>11</sup> The connection between this "last term" and the "first term" creates a Möbius-band style topology whose meanings lie both on the lines of signification created from the backward and forward movement but also in the *poché* spaces in between, an anamorphic quality given to all terms in light of this reversal of temporal and logical directions.

My thesis is that the complex motions mediated by metonymy, anamorphosis, "de-marks," and other features of the master signifier define material spaces and relationships that map out concrete features in works of art.<sup>12</sup> Using the film *High and Low* as a laboratory to test this idea, the "master's house" is the place portrayed in the film that corresponds to a specific part of the *process* of master signification. The relation of the house to the low dock-lands is also double: a literal landscape relation but also a semantic relationship between the master's logic of reversed antonomasia and the "servant's" logic of interpolation, where the "who" of the whodunit is sought through maps that triangulate the synesthetic clues gathered by the police during the "police procedural" segment of the film.

Because the crime story focuses on the problem of *naming* the unknown perpetrator, it has a special relationship to this thesis about master signification. It is my contention that the defect of causality cited by Lacan is directly related to the phenomenon of the proper name. It is important to consider how antonomasia can be reversed in both specific and general ways. Various national leaders can be called "the George Washington" of their country; but it is also the case that a more important feature of nomination can be effective. When Lacan described how the proper name relates to other kinds of signifiers, he used a mathematical analogy. The proper name, he argued, evidenced two kinds of negation. The first was a "-x" form, a *privation* or literal conversion of a positive status to a negative one, when the proper name assumed a place that did not before exist, within a series of signifiers (other

names) that did not before have a place for it. The second kind of negation carries a quality of *prohibition*:  $1/x$  as the “sublimation” of a wish, a desire or demand denied or displaced. Combining the  $-x$  and  $1/x$  ( $-x = 1/x$ ;  $-x^2 = 1$ ;  $x^2 = -1$ ;  $x = \sqrt{-1}$ ) yields the picturesque mathematical result,  $i$ . Lacan explains this demonstration by insisting that the proper name is the “impossible-to-think” Real, correlative to effects that permanently and radically resist symbolization.

My thesis qualifies the Lacanian account with the implied convertibility ( $i$ ) of privation, absence as it occurs in the “natural world” so to speak,  $-x$ , and prohibition, a delayed symbolic version of this absence ( $1/x$ ) — taking symbolic representation as a kind of inverse of absence. This convertibility is the essence of Vico’s account of the first moment by which the thunder is conceived as the word of Jove. That it is also the *name* of Jove is significant. The impossible-Real phenomenon of thunder becomes the basis of the first rituals: sacrifice, divination, marriage, and burial. The *dimensionality* of the new human mentality combines the invisible world of space and the non-immediate forms of time, past and future, with the notion of *prohibited* knowledge — “sacred” in its original sense of *both* reviled/feared and set apart. The  $\sqrt{-1}$  quality that unites privation with prohibition in the Real of early religion appears, displaced, in the phenomena of the uncanny that are transmitted, through folk practices and superstitions, down to the present modern phenomenon of pleasure in the “pain” of suspense stories and films. In the spirit of uniting the causes of theory with materiality, I want to go further, to show how this Lacanian “Real of the name,” reversed antonomasia, can be found in the primary structures of the uncanny and the deployments of the uncanny in architecture as viewed through the lens of popular culture.

### **Components of the Unconscious of High and Low**

**The enthymeme.** At the most generalized scale, master signification resembles the enthymeme, the kind of syllogism dedicated to rhetoric. Like standard syllogisms, the enthymeme comprises a major premise, in which a first and middle term are related (“All men, B, are mortal, A,”  $A \supset B$ ), a minor premise (“Socrates, C, is a man,”  $B \supset C$ ), and a conclusion (“Socrates is mortal,”  $A \supset C$ ). The middle term, “man,” B, is silent in the enthymeme. It is a metonymic aspect of the expression “Socrates is mortal” that, by being suspended, creates a bond between the speaker and audience. In actual applications, this suspension usually plays an ideological role. In suspension, the silent middle term becomes open to a wide range of associations that the audience believes the speaker believes that the audience believes, and so on. In *The Iliad*, Agamemnon tests the will of the Argives by telling them to go home. The effect of this negative advice ( $-x$ ) is to create, silently, the response of prohibition ( $1/x$ ): the soldiers deem it cowardly to go home. Going home would be symbolic in the system of honor that requires them to stay and fight.<sup>13</sup>

The enthymeme’s silent middle term,  $B \supset B$ , converts particulars to universals to create ideological messages that appear in a quite different form from the “raw materials” of contingent experience. The self-cancellation of  $B \supset B$ , its zig-zag between container and contained, its

twist-logic, produces a curious phenomenon: a space that serves as a "domain" in a functional sense, that is both divided (into two parts) and whole. If the unconscious is thought to be a kind of function, contingent experience is "mapped on" to a domain thanks to explicit instructions of the function.  $F(x)=y$ , the general form of the mathematical function, instructs each 'x' to find its place within the new domain, 'y'. This new domain is spatially structured by the function,  $F$ , which is "invisible" unless the pattern of new locations can be discovered. The Lacanian unconscious qualifies the case of location in this way: each location is single and double at the same time — in other words, the condition of anamorphosis (appearance is based on the point of view). The *observer* is thus brought into the determination of location. This is not simply a thoughtful inclusion of intersubjectivity but a radical use of vectors relating subjectivity and objectivity.

The functional formula can be abbreviated. It is the same as that specified by Ernst Jentsch in his consolidation of the phenomena of the uncanny into two contrasting states: that of the dead thing or person that contains a kernel of life ( $DA$ ); and that of the living person or thing whose essence is controlled by something dead ( $AD$ ). They are variations on the Lacanian theme of the "partial object" — what Žižek has called, in a telling inversion of Deleuze's phrase, "an organ without a body.", The severed hand able to revenge the murder of its former owner, a concert pianist, or the eponymous red ballet shoes that dance the dancer to death in Michael Powell's 1948 film, act on behalf of but without the support of their usual bodies. As kernels of resistance or fate,  $DA$  and  $AD$  appear in the period known as "between the two deaths"; or as a drive towards death as a kind of vanishing point, particularly the kind "disassembled" by the painter Giorgio de Chirico's famous "vanishing vanishing points" ( $VP^2$ ), which articulated the process of vanishing to allow this "point" to dart around corners and hop over walls. Edward Hopper's subjects cast their melancholy gaze towards just these points.

$AD$  and  $DA$  suggest that the enthymeme's middle term ( $B \supset B$ ) turns the uncanny into a machine able to produce metonymies-on-demand that are simultaneously universal and particular. These metonymies become the portable, transferable, and highly consumable stuff of the popular imagination. In *High and Low*, the film, like the enthymeme's middle term, divided into two parts that are really one part, or *vice versa*. The criss-cross is the film's psychological midpoint, the apex of two lines of action, the first characterized by a '-x' logic of exchange (where the exact amount of money needed for the industrialist's take-over is matched by the kidnapper's demand, etc.), the second by a '1/x' logic of spatial determination (interpolation), where every clue is given in a synesthetic code (the kidnapped child's memory of the details of his ordeal — sun angles, trolley sounds, a glimpse of Mt. Fuji, etc.). Synesthesia dominates the ordering procedures of the police: maps, deductions, and traps. The theme of this second "line of action" is triangulation. The kidnapper's planning, his execution, and his flight yield three distinctive kinds of clues.

Strangely, these correspond to the three kinds of architectural considerations that Vitruvius defines as the basis for the standard drawing types of plan, elevation, and perspective/section: "ichnography," "orthography," and "scenography."<sup>14</sup> In the first case, a domain is

staked out and paced, so to speak. Then lines (or the buildings themselves) are raised orthogonally from the plan/site. Finally, the “scene” is constructed by placing the building in context, showing how sun angles create shadows in certain ways, how the building affords certain views, how qualities such as the thickness of walls and orientation of openings affect qualities of light and dark.

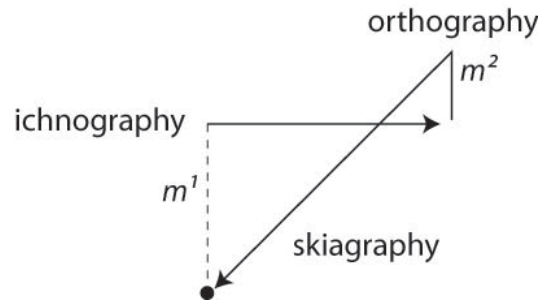


Figure 2. The Vitruvian plan, elevation, and section translate intuitively to a diagram that treats the plan as a projection of the building’s metaphoric accommodation of spatial demands, the elevations and sections as demonstrations of the building’s *firmitas*, and the casting of shadows and perspectival representation as a demonstration of *venustas*. Note that foundation rituals concentrate deploying “metonymic” items in the preparation of the site ( $m^1$ ) and setting of the keystone or ridge-poles (“topping off” —  $m^2$ ).

*High and Low* uses these Vitruvian qualities in reverse order, but in ways that require “dropping out” a metonymical feature and suspending it, secretly and silently. The kidnapper has fixed the master’s house with a telescope he has set up in his apartment down below. The metonymy of this optically enhanced variation on the evil eye is the shadow-line created by the edge of the house’s window sills. This shadow line defines a triangle of invisibility that trap the police, who must not be seen consulting with the industrialist and his family. They scuttle close to the floor, forcing the traditional posture of the servant in the presence of the master, though it is they, a ‘-x’ to the master’s positive ‘x’, who direct the master when he negotiates with the kidnapper on the phone. Orthography, the pride and wealth represented in the master’s house as a representative metonym literally raised above the docklands district, is the dimension of the Real, the line along which metonymies rise and fall. The metonymy of the kidnapper, his invisibility, is returned to the story in the form of the “acousmatic” voice over the phone. The suspension of any knowledge about the kidnapper’s location is of course the *sine qua non* of any crime story.



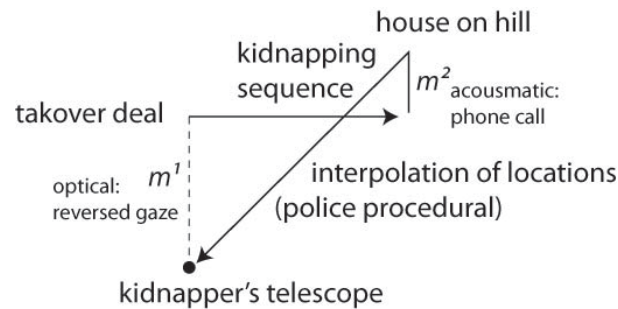


Figure 3. Metonymy serves to conceal a symmetry within the landscape by means of the “anamorphic” function of the telescope that allows the kidnapper to surveil Gondo’s house from the docklands slums below. The story’s two sections are defined by the two zones of “chiaroscuro” created by the telescope’s crossing-interruption of the takeover deal intended to establish the “house of Gondo.”

In kidnapping plots, the role of the voice is essential; so is the voice’s relation to its unlocatability. We see the elaborate dimensionality of this relation when the kidnapper directs Kingo Gondo to take a high-speed train, watch for specific marked locations, and drop the ransom money in a specific way from the train. Knowing that the police will be filming the drop, the kidnapper plans in advance the angles of view, face-shielding hats, and concealed parking places needed for a “clean transfer.” All of these details are normal for any crime procedural, but they are important clues for the critical understanding as well. They show how the “orthography” and “ichnography” must intersect using the shadow lines of “scenography.” What we also realize, as critics as well as consumers of the entertainment aspect of the film, is that the criss-cross of scenography is the  $B \supset B$ , the anamorphic  $\omega$ , the dynamic time section that affords (and structures) multiple points of view whose interpolation will achieve the pleasure of the film. In other words, the enthymeme’s silent middle,  $B \supset B$ , can be constructed into multiple material conditions,  $\omega$ , whose anamorphic quality in turn regulates the functionality of the audience’s (and representative narrative characters’) points of view. In this materialization, we see how chiaroscuro, the *encadrement* and rotational “bird’s eye view” technique create shadows-in-shadows that position the audience both outside and inside the work of art at the same time, another version of the  $A_D/D_A$  uncanny.

**Metonymy.** The orthogonal line that facilitates the elevation of the master’s house and the mirrored drop-out of the kidnapper — a medical student who has literally dropped out of his studies — should be considered as a symmetrical operation. In a sense, the two metonymies, master and servant, are a form of the  $-x$  logic: one “pays for” the other. They are the vertical dimension of the domain on to which the function of the unconscious maps the events and actors. Agencies are reversed: the servant becomes the master, the master the servant. Acts are inverted: the kidnapper’s hate must be converted to care for the child in order to get the desired ransom; the master’s love for his child is inverted because he must

pay the ransom for his chauffeur's son, not his own; and, most generally, the audience converts its anxiety, the essence of any whodunit, to the pleasure of watching.

The twinned metonymies are echoed with various devices, the most famous of which is the colored smoke that indicates, from the vantage point of the master's house, the incinerator the kidnapper has used to dispose of the ransom money suitcase. The case, specified by the kidnapper, was packed with a special powder that burned pink. Kurosawa "miraculously" shows us pink smoke in a few color frames sutured into the black-and-white film stock. At the end of the film, the industrialist's prize clock is shown with a price-tag on it. He has, in his descent from high to low, "paid the price" in an atomistic way. The drop is apparent, too, in his return to his old trade, shoe repair. In another scene, he is shown mowing his own lawn, detached, in a trance: a zombie who is now "between the two deaths."

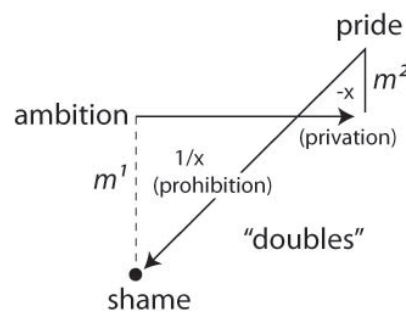


Figure 4. The relation of the space of privation ( $-x$ ) with the interpolated space of prohibition ( $1/x$ ) combine to create the "Real" of the film, the confrontation of the Gondo and the kidnapper as doubles in the final prison scene. The protective glass combines images of both men whose difference and identity have linked the industrialist's pride with the shame of poverty and, finally, execution.

The exchange economy of  $-x$  is itself shadowed by the  $1/x$  "space of prohibition" that is the police procedural portion of the film. Here, the function of mapping that is the essence of the function is portrayed literally. The police work with a wall-sized map of Yokohama, connecting the dots, so to speak, of the synesthetic/anamorphic clues they have collected. Triangulation reveals the location of the kidnapper's apartment, the house near the coast where the child was held. The smoke locates the incinerator that pulls the final geometry together. These economies, it should be noted, have their own temporal anamorphosis, or  $B \rightarrow B$ , a simultaneous relationship of past, where the clues have been left, and the future, where the kidnapper must be trapped. In the former, the gaze is centripetal: it focuses on the master's house from an unknown point of view. The acousmatics of the telephone voice and the relation of the kidnapper's gaze to the folklore of the "evil eye" that seeks to "even all scores" by redistributing concentrations of wealth, luck, or beauty focus on the objects of envy, the master and his house. In the second part of the film, the " $1/x$ " phase so to speak, this directionality reverses. The police look outward: they set up surveillances, canvas neighborhoods, look outward freely

from the master's house to the docklands below. The subtraction of the gaze and voice from perceptual space in the '-x' logic is transplanted by the inversion protocols of the '1/x' logic. Every point is a point *with respect to* the organizing framework of the hypothetical execution of the crime. The kidnapper has engineered a space within a space, intended to be invisible. The police must de-engineer this space to pull it to the plane of the map that serves as their plan of action. They are, it should be noted, the agents of 1/x, of prohibitions taken in the most recognizable form, "the Law." They are officers, but Lacan would ask, "officers of *what*?" The film allows us to give a rather perverse answer: "officers of the dead (-x) who 'make people pay' (x) for their crimes (1/x)." Gondo's status as the "dead man" is evident in his Ad-like, going-through-the-motions, zombie nature after his deal has been ruined by a case of mistaken identity. This, too, is ironic, for we may have overlooked the conversations early in the film about Gondo's presumption in "taking over the company," in appearing to be a captain of industry when in truth he began as a shoemaker. Agency is about mistaken identity. Acts, ultimately love or hate, lead us to the intransitivity and anamorphosis of the final scene where Gondo meets the soon-to-be-executed kidnapper, whose DA, "refusal to die" (not to be successful) matches perfectly with Gondo's "refusal to live" (Ad). Here, the exchange relationship between the two *systems* of exchange, privation and prohibition, kidnapping and police procedural, perform their final Möbius-band twist.

### **The Architectural (=Political) Unconscious**

The unconscious of High and Low displays many of the popular conceptions of what an unconscious should be. The themes, characterizations, and story itself create details that are overlooked, seen but not noticed, present only in a virtual sense. These constitute a "treasury of signifiers," present only under the condition that it is absent, a -x feature. They are opportunities held in reserve, a buried wealth that underwrites the film's basic story. The functional aspect of the unconscious, adds a "motive" element to these opportunities or "affordances." Like the motive of any crime story, the quality of prohibition must be present for a crime to exist: habeas corpus. Habeas, translated "We command that you have ..." is a demand for evidence, but also the call for the appearance of the accused before a judge. The corpus is not the body of the murder victim, as is often thought, but the body of the accused, which must be brought to the imaginary screen of legal representation, the process of 1/x where contingencies are matched to laws. In the defense of officers charged with the beating of Rodney King in 1991, leading to acquittals that sparked the 1992 Los Angeles riots. The defense used video footage of the beatings that seemed to show clearly a group of policemen beating a black man severely and without provocation. Slowed down to a frame-by-frame presentation, the defense argued successfully that "no crime was evident," no event shown on any single frame that could be said to portray anything not allowed by policy and law. In other words, the 1/x mapping, *when allowed to leave out the  $\emptyset$* , was able to exchange technicality for true law. The  $\emptyset$ , clearly, is related to the bonding of justice, required by common law, of the literal word of the law with the contingent circumstances of the hypothetical crime.

Word and image, logic and experience, law and order — these familiar couplings conceal a complex uncanny order. Without the materializations, afforded by the uncanny criss-cross of economies, the mirrored motions of metonymies, the creation of anamorphic conditions and partial objects, the silence of the middle term of the enthymeme, these are only polarized terms whose need for mediation, paradoxically, aims to sharpen the focus of the *necessarily blurred margin* that allows for the exchange of inside and outside that Lacan identified with *extimité*, the “extimate.” Clarity destroys the dynamics of the time-slices that Bergson used to compare experience to cinema, albeit in fits and starts; but Bergson’s genius was to compare the mechanical apparatus of cameras and projectors to the mechanical nature of the unconscious, the  $\emptyset$  as automaton.

Bruce Fink has made Lacan’s complicated numerical analogy of the unconscious somewhat understandable to non-native speakers of Lacanese. For a given sequence of, say, coin-toss results represented as 1’s and 0’s (e.g. 0010101110100101...), assigning numbers to represent the three possible conditions of contingency (Lacan used four) shows that there *must* be a consistent pattern of even and odd numbers. This rule resulting from randomness demonstrates how the unconscious “forgets nothing,” “accepts everything,” and “works without instruction.” Similarly, the physicist Stephen Wolfram has shown how “automatons” (transformation rules based on adjacency conditions) are capable of producing not only patterned relationships out of random initial sequences but structures that are fractal — i.e. structured the same *at all scales*.<sup>15</sup>

Mathematical analogies do not satisfy readers who, more intent on a phenomenological reading, inadvertently commit a conservative, “right deviation,” as Colin McCabe, the film critic and scholar of Freud and Lacan, characterized critical projects leading to a “universal mythology grounded in biology.”<sup>16</sup> The swerve to the critical right is somewhat akin to the swerve to the political right: a Jungian reading that finds an “inner nature” to ground appearances, a unity behind diversity. The complementary left deviation, represented by Alfred Adler’s project of locating Freud’s workings of the psyche in social relations, shows how politics is, inevitably, a condition of “locating” the unconscious. The middle line, the Lacanian-uncanny line, is not politically neutral. Rather, it is radically political. Vico, in his idea of the *universale fantastico*, the “imaginative universal” that converts the contingent syllables of the thunder into the laws of Jove, the  $-x$  of metonymies that drop out all conventionalizable meanings from the word that James Joyce quoted as “bababadalgharaghtakamminarronkonnbronnton-nerronntuonnthunntrovarrhounawnskawntoohooordenenthurnuk,” converts to the prohibitions of law by being *both* the name of Jove and the logic-of-the-name, the antonomasia that materializes the connection of privation and prohibition in the  $\sqrt{-1}$  (unsymbolizable) Real.

The thunder happens in ways that are radically historical, radically political, because they are in effect the enthymemic basis of the ideology that distinguishes the stages of history, taken at the scale of cultures, groups, individuals, or even particular experiences. There is, so to speak, *always* a master’s house, *always* an architecture of invisible-visible dimen-

sions, *always* a ichnography and orthography linked by an anamorphic scenography. This is the meaning of the master and his house: the *politically* architectural unconscious.

---

1. The complex subject of radical historicism is abbreviated here to a miniscule reference. Yet, the reason behind this grouping is critical. Vico, Hegel, and Marx dealt, radically, with the role of contingency; each portrayed contingency's role in different terms: Vico as phenomenal; Hegel as philosophical; Marx as political-economic. Lacan linked contingency to the unconscious as an automaton that forgot nothing and transformed everything — perhaps the most radical model of contingency ever produced but also seemingly a-historical. To merge and not simply compare Lacan to his "predecessors" requires a comparison of the key term, "conscience." As Rabelais famously advised, "science without conscience is (nothing but) the ruin of the soul" ("*Science sans conscience n'est que ruine de l'ame*"); Vico contrasted his transcendent *new science* with the moralizing perceptual *coscienza*, "consciousness," of everyday experience; *coscienza* was radically exposed to the contingencies of geography and history. When Lacan used contingency to configure his idea of the unconscious, it was to discover the mechanisms that would make the "something" of conscious thought out of the "anything" of the subject's being-in-the-world. Despite the apparent large gaps between the terms conscience/*coscienza*/consciousness there is the stable idea of the open, radical contingency of experience coupled with the invariant ("automatic") but unconscious operation of the mind that is the subject of any science of the mind ("*scienza*"). Rabelais' warning is double-edged: the mind that studies the mind in order to discover a "science" is subject to the same contingencies and automatisms that structure its object: conscience or *coscienza*. Critically, no science of the mind can avoid the Gödelian ultimatum: completeness or consistency (but not both). Lacan, and later especially Slavoj Žižek, used popular culture, history, jokes, etc. to adjust and correct the "pure science" of reflection. Lacan, following Freud, insisted on the evidence of the clinic. But, Lacan himself was forced to choose consistency, forcing his speech into a version of the ventriloquist's, a *mi-dire* or half-speech that, like Vico's often criticized circular writing, left the important conclusions to the reader. This returns the science-conscience formula to the realm of ethics, via the rhetorical strategies employed to hold open the spaces between ideas that, like the famous  $\emptyset$  phenomenon in psychology, otherwise create smooth continuities out of disparate static "slices" (Bergson's film analogy). Like the Scottish artist Douglas Gordon's slow-down of Alfred Hitchcock's 1960 film *Psycho* ("*24 Psycho*," 1993), it is the stretched openness that makes room for a "science" of experience, a science that is both Other and, as an ethic, true to the material that lies so close to hand.
2. Giambattista Vico's *New Science*, according to some scholars, constitutes a prototype for Hegel's and, later, Marx's economic analyses. Because Vico involved the configuration of metaphor and metonymy in acts of perception and collective memory, he is also a qualified forerunner of, to some extent, Freud and, to a greater extent, Lacan. Giambattista Vico, *The New Science of Giambattista Vico*, trans. Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984). Since the phrase "political unconscious" originates from Fredric Jameson's ground-breaking study of 1981, it seems only fair to make some specific adjustments to the question of architecture's political unconscious. Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 1981). For an insider's early take on this work, see Mark Poster, "Review, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* by Fredric Jameson," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (September 1981): 252-256.

- 
3. Iris Murdoch, *A Fairly Honorable Defeat* (New York: Penguin Books, 2001). The matter of double negation is a key component of Lacan's account of the unconscious and, curiously, a complex function that varies considerably from language to language. Where, in English, the double negative is ungrammatical ("I don't want no advice"), other languages require it. Cases of triple and even quadruple negations suggest that this is a case where language meets the unconscious directly.
  4. Akira Kurosawa, *High and Low* (film), 1963. The title is a translation of "Tengoku to jigoku," literally "Heaven and Hell." The story was based on *King's Ransom*, a police-procedural novel by Ed McBain (pen-name of Evan Hunter).
  5. The industrialist, Kingo Gondo, began his career as a shoe-maker, a low profession because of the necessity to handle leather. In pre-modern, mostly vegetarian, Japanese society (1600-1868), leather crafts, along with grave digging) were the work of outcasts because of the necessity of handling the skin of dead animals.
  6. The phrase "unconscious of architecture" can be read "the role of the unconscious played by architecture." Architecture plays the role of one of the primary terms identified by Ernst Jentsch as a component of the uncanny: the dead thing that nonetheless contains an element of life, an element that resists pure objectivity, DA. Ernst Jentsch, "Zur Psychologie des Unheimlichen," *Psychiatrisch-Neurologische Wochenschrift* 8, 22(1908): 195-98 and 8, 23: 203-05. Translated 1995, R. Sellars, *Angelaki*, 2, 1. The corresponding subjective term is the "Ab," the living subject who is haunted by a surviving element of the dead, a zombie, or (more conventionally) the subject and her unconscious, an automaton lodged in the center of the subject's being. The connection between Ab and DA is structural but also metaphoric: the two poles define a circulation of metonymies along a Möbius-band style circuit analogous to the linguistic trope of the anacoluthon: a temporal series that is (re)defined by an "ungrammatical" concluding term that retroactively redefines the sequence of significations chiastically and anamorphically.
  7. Jane Gallop, "Lacan's 'Mirror Stage': Where to Begin?," *SubStance* 11, 4, Issue 37-38, A Special Issue from the Center for Twentieth Century Studies, 1983: 118-128. Extensive use will be made of the role played by metonymy in ways that cannot be fully argued in this essay. Lacan relates the proper name to two kinds of negation, one based on privation (the proper name appears as a new addition to the pre-existing set of signifiers, and hence does not have a place) and prohibition (the name, a symbol, has an ambiguous, quasi-magic control over the subject, simply by taking the place of the subject). The relationship of privation and prohibition constitute the Real, in Lacan's "algebraic" combination of  $-x$  with  $1/x$  to create  $i$ ,  $\sqrt{-1}$ . This essay expands this comparison by means of the literary form of the mystery story because of the dominance of the "whodunit" issue. The "whodunit" must be identified by a proper, not a generic name, and identification is tied to the geographical issue of how to find and trap the whodunit. Involvement of the landscape, optics, acousmatics, and other "architectural" issues suggests the context of the uncanny, principally in the themes cited by Ernst Jentsch, Sigmund Freud, and Jacques Lacan.
  8. Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, ed. Ian Campbell Ross (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press).
  9. Fredric Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible* (New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 26-27.

- 
10. Sidney Gottlieb, *Framing Hitchcock: Selected Essays from the Hitchcock Annual* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press), p. 48.
  11. Andrea Battistini, "Antonomasia e universale fantastico," in *Retorica e critica letteraria*, ed. Lea Ritter Santini, Ezio Raimondi (Bologna: Società Editrice Il Mulino, 1978), pp. 105-121. Vico accounted for the origin of human culture and mind in terms of a metaphor about thunder. The first humans perhaps already vocalized and used symbolic gestures, but the impact of thunder pushed them to conceive that the universe itself constituted a symbolic order, where the dimensions of time and space colluded to construct an intricate network of meanings deemed "divine" because access to them were based on rituals of divination. The sequence of a "push" on top of an already-in-place symbolic system was the same that Helen Keller reported when her teacher, Ann Sullivan, held her hand under a water pump while signing the word, "water." Keller reported that, although she had previously used signs to relate to the people and things around her, it had never occurred to her that the objects were transformed by their relation to signs, a kind of reverse causality that generated signifieds out of signifiers. Helen Keller, *The Story of my Life* (London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1914).
  12. The reverse is also an interesting effect of master signification: the use of art to specify the "ideal contents" of thought and language. In effect, the reciprocity suggests a dialectical method, where theoretical processes and material artifacts interact and suggest gradual adjustments, either to the theory of signification or to the ways the artwork is characterized.
  13. Soldier speech constitutes an especially ideological type of discourse for ancient Roman and Greek thought. Without the silent component, which "criss-crosses" between the universals of morality and the immediacies of martial conflict, no soldier would find a way to attach the contingent particulars of his own thoughts and experience to the "larger cause" of the personified city-state. Scenes of battle are framed "anamorphically," that is to say, they are not simply static time-sections of an armed encounter but the Bergsonian "dynamic time sections" that provide a topologically continuous space ( $\emptyset$ ) that creates the stories of heroism, victory, and defeat. This  $\emptyset$  is counterpart to the iconic trophy, the stack of weapons, valuables, standards, and other devices of heroic uniform that, like the stack of stones (herms) used in silent trade, mediate without specifying particulars. Like the mechanical linkage of photographic images in film, the  $\emptyset$  "opens up" the static, infinitely divisible space to the imaginative engagement of the audience, who "complete" the film with their own unconscious contribution through the  $\emptyset/\beta$  function. Nadejda Vladimir Popov, "Soldier Speech Acts in Greek and Roman Literature and Society," Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 2008, iii-iv.
  14. Vitruvius Pollo, *On Architecture*, trans. Frank Granger (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), pp. 25-27. "Scenography" comes from *skiagrafia*, the "casting of shadows" and, hence, relates to the more mysterious practices of foundation rites where representations of human shadows could be substituted for the flesh-and-blood victim to secure the spiritual safety of the building and its inhabitants. See Sir James George Frazer, *Taboo and the Perils of the Soul, Part 2, the Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1955), pp. 89-90. Also, the *skia* was originally a tent or screen set up for the projection of shadows made by puppets or live actors. In Elizabethan England, the standard slang term for actor was "shadow." See Donald Kunze, "Skiagraphy and the *Ipsium* of Architecture," *VIA 11, Architecture and Shadow*, ed. David Murray, Journal of the Graduate School of Fine Arts, University of Pennsylvania (1990): 62-75.

- 
15. Stephen Wolfram, *A New Kind of Science* (Champaign IL: Wolfram Media, Inc., 2002). See especially, Chapter 6, "Starting from Randomness," pp. 223-296
  16. Colin McCabe, "Introduction," in Sigmund Freud, *The Schreber Case*, trans. Andrew Webber (London and New York: Penguin, 2003), p. xi.