

# The Section Idea: Orthography and Idempotency

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1. Architecture is so many things to many people. However, there are some critical elements that are so commonly embedded in daily uses of the term architecture that we've stopped paying attention to them. The one I'd like to focus on is the section idea, a way of non-perspectival drawing that is used to make plans, elevations, and of course sections. Orthographic means that lines of construction are parallel, and the drawing is more of a rubbing, a surface that comes into contact with a material cut made into the architectural work or viewing space. I want to connect this to a very unusual and rarely heard of idea, "idempotency." This has to do with the way a dream preserves sleep and defends itself from external disturbances. In the dream, the dreamer imagines moving around, a figure on a ground, but in reality the sleeper is paralyzed, unable to move. The ground must move over the figure, in the same way a viewer watching a movie sits still while the action moves across the screen.
2. In the Jacques Tati movie, *Mon Oncle*, an eccentric bachelor, M. Hulot, lives in an apartment building that is set up to look like its own section. And, true to the idea of a section cutting through solid material, we can see Hulot circulating through it. Only in this case a comic video artist shows us multiple Hulots parading along this cut simultaneously. An orthographic drawing has a special relation to the truth. It makes consistent graphic relations that can be transferred to the building. Everything on the surface of the drawing is at the same scale. But, also true to the idea of "orthos," meaning something correct, the section drawing corrects our Euclidean perspectival view by flattening things and cutting into their interior to show how they work. Joan Copjec has even talked about an orthopsychic idea, taking from Gaston Bachelard the idea that thought is self-corrective, precisely along the plane that architects identify as the section.

3. Idempotency is critical to describing the way that the dream allows the sleeper to dream in Euclid while the paralysis of the sleeper's body takes place in a projective geometry, able to fend off external disturbances. The dreamer dreams of him or herself as a figure moving across a field or ground, but to maintain this illusion, the field must move across the dreamer. The interface between the dreamer and the dream thus corresponds to an idempotent and orthographic surface, where every external disturbance is met with an defensive response to keep the dreamer dreaming and the dreamer's body paralyzed. Idempotency, literally the power to stay the same, keeps the dreamer dreaming and the body motionless, but the dreamer must continue to dream in Euclid, reversing his figure-ground situation. This is the orthography of the section cut, the "truth" that stimulus and response must meet each other equally on every part of the surface.
  
4. Monsieur Hulot illustrates this when he appears everywhere along the exposed surface of his apartment house, multiple Hulots doing the same thing at every point within the thin sandwich of space that traps him. We demand him to appear, and the truth of the surface, its ortho-psychic answer to the orthographic geometry of appearance, is that he is the same Hulot. Our demand is a kind of interrogation about Hulot's identity, but the need to model this as a thin trap connects to the ethnographically universal belief in a space between two deaths, the literal death that is witnessed, and the imaginary journey to a second, Symbolic death where the soul, after numerous trials, is allowed to escape. This connects to the historically significant fear of premature burial, commonplace in the 19c. when tuberculosis and catalepsy were common. But, more fundamentally, the soul's journey between the two deaths is the counterpart of the obverse uncanny condition, the living person's unconscious construction of a trap that leads directly toward, not away from, an object of fear. Orthography aims to test the soul in the first case, while it neutralizes the body in the second case. We all have had experiences of trying to run in dreams but being held back by some mysterious force. Idempotency and its counterpart

orthopsychism are not abstract. They are fundamentally physical and neurological, although we experience them as if we were in Euclidean space. Orthography breaks from Euclid's perspectivalism just as orthopsychism breaks from consciousness.

5. Hulot's apartment building materializes idempotency to the point that we can understand the role of the circuit that must exist for the physical organism as well as the psychic one. Life requires the alternation between being awake and asleep. Sleep requires the circuit connecting motion and immobility. Visual experience requires an economy between visibility and invisibility. On one side of the circuit is a demand, on the other side a supply. If these are not held in place through an exchange device, the idempotency of both body and mind will fail to "keep" the living subject living, the sleeping subject sleeping, or the sighted subject seeing by incorporating his necessary blindness. The model of the figure-ground helps us sort out these idempotency economies in terms of a binary that is always threatening to reverse itself, and by reversing, throwing into question our ability to structure anxiety in relation to depth.
6. Lacan's concept of the lathouse and alethosphere is that of a gadget or gimmick that dupes us, puts us in a Hulot sandwich so to speak. We are trapped by our own wish to use something, like an iPhone or tape-recorder. Although the gadget seems to be a tool that we use, it is more the case that the gadget uses us, or that the gimmick is working to entrap us in a larger scheme we're unaware of. This is particularly the case with using the internet to buy something.
7. Our search behavior generates profiles that are collected, analyzed, and shared broadly along networks of those who will try their best to exploit us by offering other opportunities to consume things that fit our consumer profile. We have attempted to draw something out of cyberspace, to buy it, to have fun with it; but at the same time it is we who are being drawn out, we

who are being sketched, profiled. But, even more perniciously, our gadgets demand us to behave in specific ways. They refuse us if we do not comply. They perplex and confound us. It is the gadget to whom we put the question, “Che vuoi?” WHAT DO YOU WANT OF ME? The gadget is the ultimate uncanny other because it is not just a construct of our desire, it is our desire run amuck; our desire working rhizomously within our Euclidean consciousness, inserting bots, scans, and bugs.

8. Here we find that Lacan’s distinction between the truth and the “truth of truth” is particularly relevant. We do a google search to find out about truths, but at the same time google is compiling data on us that becomes a truth about these truths. The alethosphere of this reverse-predicating data is doubly negative, as Heidegger presupposed, but as against Heidegger’s sanctified idea of truth, the truth of truth is truly “out there,” in a very Lacanian, very material way. So, when we read the words he penned in the 1960s about this truth being a sphere, we have to accept the political and ideological downside of this truth of truth. But, I propose that we also see an upside, a relation of this sphere to a special kind of sphericity that, unlike the atmosphere and stratosphere, allows us to talk about particles *no matter where they are*. This is the principle, in projective geometry, of the family of parallel lines that, no matter how widely they are distributed, are all to be collected at a single vanishing point, a point with an antipodal point that could be called an appearing point, both of which are geometrically equivalent to the point taken up by a viewer in the middle who happens to find a lighthouse, or in other words, a dupe who decides not to err, who falls in the trap of a space whose center is everywhere and circumference nowhere.
9. Lacan’s writing style and choice of odd words and odd examples encourages too many of us not to look elsewhere. Sometimes these outreach attempts are ersatz speculations, but sometimes they uncover parallel situations where the Lacanian phenomenon can be found running with fewer moving parts. Such I think might be the case with a comparison of another reference to parallel

lines, Lucretius's famous physics of atoms moving in parallel, where whatever physically happens in the world is really just a function of turbulence, a disturbance in the field. This would seem to rival Lacan in concept opacity were it not for Georges Perec's wonderfully clever demonstration of just how real it can get if we simply follow the instructions and omit, from the parallel flows of signifiers, a single element that forces the flow to treat it as an empty space without our noticing. By removing the letter "e," Perec nonetheless was able to write a whole novel without some readers realizing the loss. Certain customary expressions had to be changed, certain oddities emerged. The out-of-synch feeling that arises in reading the novel doesn't point to anything in particular, because the effect is in the alethosphere. It's a gimmick, a gadget, that relates to a field rather than an isolated point. This is reversible. Any isolatable point, such as an iPhone, immediately relates to a field, a place where the truth of truth is an ongoing project interpellating us by its radical otherness.

10. So, in this way, I feel it's necessary to go back to some appropriations of the idea of the orthographic membrane, such as the *dispositif* of Gaston Bachelard, re-adjusted by Agamben, and ask for our money back. Agamben produced something that was compatible with Foucault's radical historicism, and as such, incompatible with Lacan's non-historicist operating system. This may be a polemical point on my part, but I would rather universalize the idea of orthography and orthopsychics and their relation to idempotency that singularize and historicize it. In a sense, these belong to the human subject as such, not to a historically specific episteme. I would personally prefer to be able to see lathouses, as Lacan advised, everywhere and not just in the practices of "the usual suspects."

11. [no text]

12. The lathouse involves a kind of *jouissance* that is painful rather than pleasurable, because the subject has willingly submitted to the enjoyment of

the other. You might say that the subject who suffers voluntarily in this way is precisely the subject of psychoanalysis, where free will is only apparent. This situation of the subject willingly submitting to the Other is well-documented. There is the appearance of choice, but it's only an appearance. It's a choice that is forced. The forced choice is another way of saying "idempotency." Like the elevator button that is on after the first push and doesn't get more "on" no matter how many times you push it, the forced choice seems to offer a button to push but the value will always be the same. A look at the truth table situation of the forced choice tells the story. The robber's demand, "Your money or your life" is about the loss of enjoyment altogether, although there is the appearance that you will have something if you make the right choice. But, because money is synonymous with enjoyment of life, the circularity insures that the victim will always lose.

Lacan is very specific about this, and Bruce Fink provides an insight into the forced choice by showing how it produces a void in terms of the VEL intersection of the two choices. This void forces a circulation around the options of TF and FT in the truth table. As in the void created by something missing, a third option, we have a lipogram that creates a vibration, a turbulence, in the alethosphere.

This takes us back to the root definition of architecture in Seminar VII, where the void is related to a surface of no escape that is called into being simply by the wish to escape.

13. I have my own gimmick to connect this to the logic of capitalism, specifically to the idea of surplus value. Surplus value is the money that seems to come out of nowhere. This is the gap in the capitalist's deal with the worker to produce something and be compensated. In Marx's example, the worker has already worked enough to replenish himself and his family in the first four hours, but the capitalist requires an additional four hours. This goes beyond the contracted value called necessary value to create a surplus out of

nowhere, but this is not linear. Rather, it's embedded in the idea of exploitation from the very beginning of the work day. The line is a circle to begin with. The gap of this circle, the void out of which money appears to appear magically and enter into the joyful sphere of investment, as akin to the *jouissance* of the lathouse, which comes out of nowhere and forms a part of this global anywhere–everywhere lamella. Unless the lathouse can be located within the economy of the actual economy, we would not see it so well financed and promoted. Put another way, were investment not principally in the gadgets and gimmicks that populate the market with lathouses, capitalism would not exist. The gadget and gimmick are the essence of capitalism, and the lathouse and the alethosphere are the topography of that essence.

14. Remember, the capital surplus is idempotent or self–negating in that the capitalist does not enjoy the surplus, the surplus enjoys him or her. Production happens in a secondary virtuality. The labor that does not benefit the laborer and is not necessary for production. It's out of a void, a nowhere. Wealth comes magically, "out of this nowhere." But, the nowhere is transferable, portable. It is the everywhere that involves us in the welfare, or rather the "poor-fare," of Chinese workers who produce our laptops and cellphones, the things "in our pocket" (*poché*) that make us "ordinary psychotics." The alethosphere is not an abstraction, it's the way the real global economy works to present real subjects with real forced choices.

[I would like to bring in the subject of the gimmick or gadget in that they seem to be what Lacan has in mind when he talks about lathouses and the alethosphere. The truth that the gadget tells us is about our own role as dupes in a process that stretches far beyond the immediate sites of our use. A gimmick is similarly local, with global consequences, in that it engages networks that must have already been in place before the gimmick works in a particular instance. Because we are being used by a gimmick or a gadget, and because our passivity is voluntary, we are being "enjoyed by a system,"

which goes to the heart of Jacques Ellul's and Siegfried Geideon's critiques of technology. We are interpellated by what we make, and this makes every human act of making into a self-alienating process. It seems to me that only psychoanalysis is equipped to say anything about this.]

15. I am interested in Andrew Payne's equation of the boundary between the speakable and the unspeakable and that separating the visible from the invisible, but from another angle. The speakable / unspeakable boundary has to do with the Real and the Symbolic, where the Real resists absorption by the Symbolic but has a spooky presence within the Symbolic, in the form of disruptions, turbulences, gaps, and defects. That is, the Real seems to play out its own resistance in Symbolic terms, but *as* resistance. In contrast, the visible and invisible have two very different relationships, one under the Euclidean domain of what is considered to be reality, and hence a part of the Symbolic order, and another that seems to belong to the Real but can be readily symbolized or at least choreographed, as we can see in Mythic thought's conflation of the invisible to darkness, night, sleep, and death. To find a way to operate on this analogy, I would model the visible and invisible using a figure-ground comparison, where the viewer as figure generates the distinction in the field between visible and invisible, but that it can move about the ground to convert one to the other.
16. Mythic thought, like the dream, allows the condensation of signifiers for the invisible and visible, into such things as the distinction between day and night, life and death, waking and sleeping, etc. Thanks to condensation, the rule of distinction, the excluded middle, can be violated in metaphor, where the subject can imagine that he / she is "visiting" the invisible in the experience of the dream, or trance, or simulated death experience. The horizon is not a function of looking, as it is forced to be in Euclidean circumstances, so looking is not negated when the line is forced to be idempotent, that is "fixed," as the subject moves. This is a figure-ground reversal akin to the sleeper's status as paralyzed during the dream



experience. The field must move around the figure instead of the figure moving across the ground. In this reversal, the dreamer is allowed to see dead people and travel in time. But, we have to remember that the dreamer is not dreaming the dream, the dream is dreaming the sleeper, just as the capitalist is being enjoyed by his surplus money. The experience of the surplus here, the experience of the invisible as such, comes with its own form of *jouissance*, the reverse predication of enjoyment that is the essence of the forced choice, which in turn is the essence of the circuit that Freud seeks in his essay of 1895. The circuit is precisely this cross-inscription of contronymic conditions.

17. Myth's conflation of the invisible with darkness, sleep, death, and so on materializes an abstract relation, with the result that the visible and invisible become independent, self-determining operational entities. They have a permanence and independence. Yet, they retain a binary debt they pay to each other. Like Castor and Pollux, they are not fully independent. They are defined in relation to an opposite. Their independent motility means that they can be separated, but they retain a spooky quantum correspondence, even at extreme distances. The term tessera derives from the ceramic tokens used by parting friends to promise their reunion, when the broken edges of the token will again be matched together perfectly. This brings authenticity to bear on the two antipodal terms, which lie on a horizon, whose effect can be felt at the center, the point of division. So, this seems to be a center that can be anywhere, everywhere, because authenticity of the lathouse is also anywhere and everywhere. The circumference of the horizon is a nowhere, that is, it is where the parallel but wavy lines of a Lucretian kind of clinamen, the alethosphere, merge at two opposite points, one correlated to the viewer's vision, the 180° of subjectivity that is tuned into visibility, and another point related to the viewer's simultaneous blindness, also 180°. Call one consciousness, the other the unconscious, and you have a pretty good model of subjectivity based on clinamen and tesserae.

18. The subjective condition, in these terms, is spherical but radically divided, and the division is a mark of its authenticity placed within a fundamental lack. As in projective geometry, the center and periphery are essentially the same thing, and the vanishing points are simultaneously points of epiphany or re-emergence.
19. We have come from the distinction between visibility and invisibility to a planetary system, a gravitational field, or an atom whose nucleus is bound together with the palindrome of loss and the desire of promised return. The antipodal vanishing points are electrons that open up the possibility of exchange, from one 360° rotational system to another.
20. Let's go a step further to think of the binary conditions of sleeping and waking, that are repeated inside the sleeping subject as a binary of a paralyzed body dreaming that it is an autonomous subject freely moving across a stable field or ground. The situation requires us to double the atom or, rather, disclose the secret that the atom was double to begin with. We can trace all this back to the figure-ground reversal of the dream, which has the dream pitched in the key of Euclid while the dreamer is precisely the reverse, a field across which the dream must rotate to simulate motion and keep the dreamer asleep.
21. Lacan has already given us the idea of extimacy to suggest the topology of these two circuits is precisely that of a non-orientable relationship between inside and outside. Like the Möbius band and Klein bottle (AND the Borromeo knot, cross-cap, and other children of the idempotent night), non-orientation, the lack of any stable distinction between inside and outside, are also where the subject intersects itself. The interior  $\mathbb{S}^1$  topologizes this self-intersection so that we can imagine that escape is actually entrapment, and vice versa. Only the non-dupes are in error, Lacan claims. Only those who resist being trapped miss the emancipatory option of escape, since it is the

escape from the binary condition itself.

22. The idempotency of the figure-ground in dreams is that, even though the sleeper is immobilized and the field is moving over it, the dream illusion preserves the Euclidean illusion of the moving figure. This “power of the same” means that the observer in the  $360^\circ$  idealized route around the object to “see all there is to see” is also the center of that route. Although only  $180^\circ$  is visible at any one time, complete rotation counts for another  $360^\circ$ . The idempotency means that these two circuits are added together but that the result is a single circuit, albeit with a center that is a dual, an Argus facing in two directions at the same time, one toward waking and Euclidean space, the other toward dreaming and its Euclidean illusion.  $720^\circ$  really means that this is a space that folds over on itself, a self-intersection as illustrated by the Möbius band that attaches to itself with a twist.

1. I am holding out for popular-culture options, that in effect proclaim the multiplicity and commonality of lathouses within an alethosphere, the thin membrane covering the world of the subject with what Žižek has compared to a lamella, a surface between life and death, a zombie membrane, neither dead nor alive, but, rather “between the two deaths,” the Imaginary death and the Symbolic death, in which we find the Real as a simultaneous extinction and resurrection. The idea of a sphere of truth cuts both ways. It is the way the truth of truth is connective and global, but is also the way that truth relates<sup>112</sup> directly to the non-orientation and self-intersection of projective geometry. I propose a way of thematizing this without having to immerse thought so quickly in the mathematics of projective geometry. The thaumatrope is a gimmick that quickly illustrates the main ideas of non-orientation and self-intersection.

23. The thaumatrope is a simple play-toy, a gadget, a trick, a lathouse, although with fewer moving parts than an iPhone. Yet, the principle is the same. The thaumatrope has two images, one on each side, with two holes for strings

that allow the disk to be spun around so that the images merge.

Thaumatrope have been found in Magdalenian caves, however. The ancient ones had only one hole, in the middle, and the hole itself was made to play a role in the combination of two images into one.

24. The merger is not just an overlap or confusion, because the images are correlated. The bird is out of its cage in the first version, and the spinning puts it back in the cage, but now it has incorporated the dynamic idea of spinning. You may know of Kafka's story, "Der Kreisel," about the man obsessed with the idea that a spinning top embodied the essence of life. He tried to capture the life by seizing the top suddenly, so that the top "would not realize he was seizing it," but of course this failed. Eric Santner has pointed out that we should not jump to the conclusion that Kafka's character is an idiot. Rather, we should see what it is that he is attempting to capture, that is, not the top but the pure spinning, the pure exchange between the figure and ground that places the cage in the bird at the same time it returns the bird to the cage. The idiot only wants to get past the binary.
  
25. In Alfred Hitchcock's mysterious film *Vertigo*, the binary becomes the actress who plays a wife who is to be murdered. The actress is to attract the close attention of a detective who follows her because he thinks she is drawn to commit suicide on account of her fascination with a dead ancestor who was betrayed by her husband. In fact the real wife is actually being betrayed by her husband, but the detective is feminized in this gimmick, turned into a witness whose testimony will clear the murderous husband. But, of course the detective has actually been blind. We have a lot of binaries and a lot of idempotency going on, lots of birds and lots of cages, being spun so quickly that we cannot escape the trap of the gimmick. I propose that we use the idea of the thaumatrope to explain the otherwise complicated exchanges between the dead ancestor Carlotta, the two versions of the wife Madeleine, and the two versions of the actress including the fatal one once the detective has discovered her walking in the street after his nervous breakdown. Spinning is

something that we can't talk about without referring to the topology of projective geometry, where the periphery and the center are the same, and where space has to fold over on itself to produce self-intersecting and non-orientation. But, Lacan's idea of the lathouse suggests that we can find examples everywhere, which is what I propose. The idea of the thaumatrope might make it a bit easier to find them and talk about their peculiar geometry and their implications for the psychoanalytical subject, who after all, is a bird in a self-constructed cage.

26. These are a few of my favorite things, ideas that have brought us from the architectural section drawing and its ethnographic relation to the Lacanian interval between the two deaths, to the simulation of death in dreams to serve the function of idempotency, to the topological foundations of non-orientation and self-intersection, to the multiplicity of localities we find in culture, human behavior, popular culture, and political economy that take us finally to Lacan's seemingly obscure references to the lathouse and alethosphere. These are not fully synonomous, but they engage again and again the themes that are central to psychoanalysis: the forced choice, the desire of the Other, the lamella. These ideas have been out on loan in other forms: the lipogram, the dispositif or apparatus, orthopsychics, and surplus value. But, when they are returned to psychoanalysis, the unity is apparent. We have the chance to relate them through the common rules of projective geometry, through the basic function of figure-ground reversal, and through the foundational relations to the visible and the invisible. The point is to not lose sight of the collectivity or the singularity of the human subject, not to become lost in historicity. Psychoanalysis is, in the last analysis, a science in the most elementary form, the conjecture, which is experimental, projective, and willing to suffer defeat. This attitude replaces the imposture of positivism with the curiosity of definitive inquiry.