

Architecture and Its Doubles: Real Travel, Enthymeme, and Antonomasia in the Sutured Topography of *Mulholland Drive* and *North by Northwest*

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The landscape phenomenon is most often translated as the “visible landscape,” privileging sight’s ability to take in vast ranges of data and compress them into visual signatures summarizing ways of life, physical and geological resources, and historical processes. The Berkeley geographer Carl Sauer (1889-1975) compared vision’s powers of quick synthesis to the landscape’s complex amalgamation of diverse factors, nearly sealing the pact between visibility and landscape. “Topography,” however, creates a small but significant proviso that, like a hidden clause in a contract, threatens to unravel this sweet deal between landscape and visibility. Although topography supports the ways in which the landscape can be seen, by opening or closing up vistas, creating countless occasions for “scenes,” topography is a surface, a form, that ultimately yields more to touch than to sight. The case for landscape’s tangibility is not about materiality *per se* but rather argues for the “synesthetic” potential of movement across the landscape’s surface as a humanistic rather than a mechanical motion. Real travel is balanced between the totalizing intentionality of an errand, which ignores the landscape and cannot even stop to ask for directions, and the failure of intentionality that leads to idle wandering or getting lost or stuck.

The philosopher Henry Johnstone (1920-2000) described this golden mean through a set of nine “categories of travel” drawn anecdotally from the travels of the Homeric Odysseus.¹ For example, the category of “Saturation” describes how the circumstances of travel can overwhelm the traveler. “Accumulation” develops the intellectual grasp of the travel experience as a whole. “Solitude,” “Guide,” “Home,” and some four other categories steer a course between two vectors that, if allowed to dominate singly, would destroy the possibility of travel. One vector describes the instrumentality that refuses any true encounter with the landscape (“running an errand”). The other vector quantifies the randomness, contingency, and allure of locale that can stall movement indefinitely. These vectors are not unique to the travel situation. For example, Iris Murdoch’s novels pose characters between the good intentions that become rigid plans and the accidents that unravel them, leading to what she characterized as a “fairly honorable defeat.” Crime fiction is set within the mutual need for both the universality of motive and the particularity of opportunity. Even the geographic ideas of “site” and “situation,” the twinned categories of location theory, seek middle ground between strategic intentionality and the contingency of physical-cultural locale.

A probable ancestor of this design is the anthropological condition known as “between the two deaths” — the journey of the dead soul from natural death to a hoped-for spiritual rest. This interval was given special meaning by the psychologist Jacques Lacan. As the subject is overwhelmed by the demands of symbolic roles (“symbolic castration” — the castration of the subject by the symbols that define his/her roles), “escape” is through fantasy projection supported by fictive identities and objects that serve as a-symbolic, “impossible-Real” stand-ins for the failures and excesses of symbolic networks themselves. Often a magic device permits the rupture of ordinary space and time. The traditional descent theme of literature and myth, the *katabasis*, is just such a death-narrative, involving materialized “objects of desire” with broad applicability in everyday life.

—Why go into this? Regional identity and most other aspects of the famous phrase “sense of place” depend on the imaginary creation of a “face” that exteriorizes complex internal associations of geography, culture, and history. Just as the human face is said to communicate emotional states, thoughts, etc. through a certain enigmatic absence, the regional face also reveals by concealing. It would be wrong to think of this face as symbolic, a kind of public relations packaging. The complexity of both the human and regional face lies in its ability to create meaning from the topology of the “suture,” the relation of the external view of the Other to the “inmost” vulnerable center of the subject — the original meaning of “hegemony.” Lacan points to the operation of this suture in the phenomenon of the “gaze of the Other,” the counter-gaze that objectivizes the subject through a negative, imagined presence, such as the “evil eye.” The “face” that serves as the source of this gaze is actually an internal break, a gap, an irreducible central surplus or lack. The face divides a part from the whole but endows the part with qualities of a newly defined whole (“synecdoche”).

To consider topography as a way of knowing through touch (= “stereognosis,” originally a medical term) requires a principle of movement and encounter. Instead of abstract shape, landscape and regions acquire their “face” through narratives structured by this movement and encounter. Several aspects of stereognosis are useful in non-clinical applications. First, touch’s left-right nature creates a unique spatial logic focusing on the role of the face, whose identity is based on a radical rupture and reversal of handedness in the act of perception. These are not accidents of optics but, rather, keys to the understanding of “suture” the means by which subjective qualities are projected on to external nature. Lacan suggests the Möbius band, Borromeo knot and other devices that illustrate self-reference topographically. Where works of art involve both an “impossible-Real” topography (*Mulholland Drive*) and the “hysterical” reversal of the gaze (*North by Northwest*) we can see clearly how terrain, regional “face,” and narrative dynamics expose the psyche’s “symptomatic” adaptation to the world it creates. Vision, usually dominant in any discussion of architecture, landscape, or region, gives way to a “synesthetic”

account of mind-as-topography. Can we test the proposition that “vectors” derived from Johnstone’s categories of travel allow us to build a theory of how landscapes are known through the “touch” of travel? The best place to begin is perhaps with a case where synesthesia figures prominently.

In the story of the Cyclops, the conversion of sight-logic to touch-logic is prerequisite. The one-eyed monster of course is already an ophthalmologic anomaly. The episode steers between the “Johnstonean” categories of Curiosity and Suffering with the help of Solitude and Accumulation. But, the story is uniquely central to the issue of travel generally. The Homeric tribe of Cyclopes was known for their lack of travel hospitality. Their name is the anthropological adjective for societies living in isolation, who treated strangers as enemies or food and followed only the severe laws of their gods of the hearth.² Odysseus wished to find out if the Cyclops Polyphemus could be persuaded to offer the Greeks the traditional host’s gifts. Polyphemus refuted this thesis by imprisoning the Greeks inside his labyrinthine cave so that he might devour them at his leisure. The episode is structured by the witty tricks (*ingenia*) Odysseus used to

all A are B
all B are C

all A are C

$\overline{A} B$
 $\overline{B} C$

 $\overline{A} C$

$\overline{A} \cancel{B} \overline{B} C$
silencing
the middle
term

1. standard

2. boolean

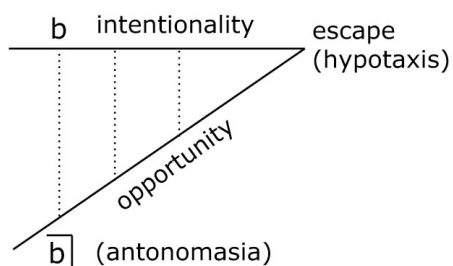
3. condensed

escape this cave prison. First, Odysseus blinded the one-eyed giant, effective because the Cyclops had only one eye. Second, Odysseus presciently gave the Cyclops a fake name, telling him never to forget that “Nohbdy” had blinded him. The literal-minded Cyclops accepted this pronoun as a “particular” proper name (antonomasia), but his later use of it would be heard as a pronoun by his

Cyclopean neighbors. The third trick was a parody of hypotaxis, or subordination. The Cyclops counted his sheep by touch carefully as they were released each day to pasture, but the Greeks hung beneath the sheep. The sheep-men subverted the “transitive order” of the cave by creating an “monstrous” double the Cyclops could not detect.

“Topography” here involves not just the cave’s transitive space in contrast to an “intransitive” escape but the common logic behind the tricks that form a tight sequence, a necessary order. Is there a connection linking these tricks and their common structure to travel space? The key lies in the “internal mirror effect” that can be described best through the so-called “rhetorical syllogism,” the “enthymeme.” Each trick makes use of this structure. Two terms, a universal and particular, are linked through the device of a “silent” middle term that, relating to each, is itself a self-referring term. Hypotaxis is broadened into the general principle of the “flip” of meaning afforded by a self-canceling middle term. It is the two vectors of travel, intentionality and locale, interpolated into a middle, an internal face, a witty encounter.

The tricks were initiated with the shift from a visual to a tactile basis, the blinding of the Cyclops. As a thoroughgoing literalist, the Cyclops had only one “track” (= hearth or “eye”), just as his cave had only one entrance and channel. This was the “intentionality vector” of movement, what defines an errand but not authentic travel. The Cyclops’ monologic was vulnerable to the sophistication of hypotaxis (subordination) in contrast to parataxis (one thing after another — the line of sheep). The opposite vector of stasis (locale) was the entrapment of the cave, foiled by hypotaxis. The relation of the two vectors defining the travel ideal was condensed in the “middle term” of concealment, the antonomasia of “Nohbdy.” The meaning of “Nohbdy” as a pronoun “lay beneath” its use as a proper name, and so the antonomasia was “silent” to the single-minded giant. Nohbdy marked the beginning and end of the escape plan and sets up the logic that creates a middle vector (opportunity) by linking the opposed interests of intentionality and locale.



Another famous nobody is *North by Northwest's* Walter O.

Thornhill (Cary Grant), a New York advertising executive kidnapped by KGB agents who think he is really the CIA agent “Kaplan.” But, Kaplan is a really only a fictive identity created to lead the KGB in a wild-goose chase. Set up for the murder of a UN official, the fugitive Thornhill finds sympathy and shelter with Eve Kendall (Eva Marie Saint), an attractive woman on a train to Chicago. She conceals him inside her Pullman sleeping

compartment and then helps him escape at the station, disguised as a red-cap porter — another Nohbdy trick.

Is Hitchcock in on this ancient joke? At dinner on the train, Eve sees Thornhill’s initials, WOT, on a matchbook cover. “What does the ‘O’ stand for?”; “—Nothing,” he replies, like any Odysseus. Later, these initials and the matchbook will help Eve and Thornhill escape the “Cyclopean” KGB agents. The name as well as the situation inscribe this spy thriller into Zeno’s paradoxes of desire, where action always returns to an empty gap, an *impasse* of “incommensurable” conflicts. Thornhill cannot clear himself because Kaplan “does not exist,” but of course Kaplan “does exist” in an ectoplasmic sense. “Suture” is the inside-out logic of spy identities that contaminates the plot and its settings. Thornhill navigates within the *moiré* set up by interference fields. When the KGB pins a murder on him, he must escape two “Big Others.” As he hides from the panoptical gaze of the police, he is hounded by the *other of the Other*, the KGB. As a nobody, Thornhill/Kaplan/Odysseus directs the traffic of these criss-crossed Others across a landscape whose reversed gaze is activated in the famous homicidal crop-duster scene and brought to apotheosis

across the presidential stone faces, the “somebodies” of Mt. Rushmore. Nowhere is the idea that topography is a face in the middle more clearly expressed than by this Midwestern monument.

Thornhill fulfills the specifications of Johnstonean travel by steering a middle course between intention and contingency with the “golden bough” of the silent middle term. It’s not just the “O” in his name; it’s his relation to the impossible gap in the logic of the two Others — a gap that cannot be filled except with the impossible-Real evidence of a Kaplan that Thornhill continually “returns” to its central location in the wishes of the KGB. The more he runs away, the more he finds himself in the center of the Other’s desire — a situation emblemized by the cornfield scene. The crop-duster is “dusting where there are no crops,” just as Thornhill is the spy who does not exist. Just as Hitchcock’s signature device is the “MacGuffin” — a gratuitous fact that nonetheless is capable of sustaining the audience’s fantasy — the plot hinges around “silence” (unheard explanations, as in the CIA head’s briefing at the airport) and “invisibility” (Thornhill is spotted only when the KGB housekeeper sees his anamorphic reflection in a television screen — where else for an actor to appear?). Blindness motifs include Thornhill’s attempt to hide behind sun-glasses as well as the stunning conceit of the blind eyes of the famous Big Others at Rushmore. Blind giants — sound familiar?

The blindness and silence of the middle term figures prominently in another, very different kind of film, David Lynch’s *Mulholland Drive*. A slow-moving limousine climbing Mulholland Drive pulls over; its richly dressed brunette passenger seems to be the intended victim of an assassination. Before the shot can be fired, the limo is hit by the speeding car of joy-riding teenagers. The assassins are killed but the would-be victim survives, stunned. She stumbles down the hill and slips into an apartment whose resident is packing up for a trip out-of-town. The next scene switches to LAX to introduce us to “Betty,” the departed resident’s niece who will house-sit and audition in hopes of becoming a Hollywood film star. Betty discovers the still-dazed brunette, who cannot remember her real identity. A “Nohbody” in literal terms, she steals a temporary name from a poster featuring Rita Hayworth. Drawn together by their mutual outsider status, the two pursue both Rita’s lost identity and warm to romance. Gradually, the audience becomes aware that this narrative is really a death dream of Diane Selwyn, who in “real life” was the spurned Lesbian lover of Rita as “Camilla Rhodes” (played by two actresses, Laura Elena Herring and Melissa George). Camilla/Rita is a successful actress who must ditch Diane before she marries the successful producer Adam Kesher. The Camilla played by Melissa George is the *protégé* of the Castigliane brothers, Mafia bosses who report to a shadowy “Mr. Roque,” who phones orders from a glass plated “control room.” An even weirder emissary, “the Cowboy,” delivers an ultimatum to Kesher — hire Camilla or lose everything.

None of this is clearly delineated. The “death narrative” continually crosses with the “reality narrative,” although the crossings are disguised by Lynch’s own antonomasia of two actors playing one role and one actor playing two roles. This “nobody” ploy is in itself a suture construction, but other fantastic sutures complicate this name-play. A bum behind Winkies restaurant seems to be the voodoo operative of the weird elderly couple who meet Diane on the plane to LAX; the dwarfish Mr. Roque seems to preside over some fourth-dimensional Hell. The most direct suture device, however, is the blue key that opens a blue box Diane and Rita discover at the “Club Silencio.” Is this not a literal insider reference to the silent middle term? After a performance and subsequent collapse of Rebekah del Rio (playing herself lip-synching *her own* Spanish version of “Crying” — egad!), the couple returns to the apartment to see what’s in the box. The blue box is a reverse of Pandora’s; Rita vanishes “into it” at the point where Betty’s fantasy can no longer be sustained.

Presumably this is the final breath taken by Diane Selwyn as she succumbs to her suicide, assisted in her death delirium by the elderly couple, shrunken to insect scale. Film theory uses “suture” as an intellectual idea of how the imagination of the audience finds itself represented by an object or character inside the film, such as the wheelchair photographer in *Rear Window* playing a “cameraman” inside the space of the story. The blue box is more basic. The film’s two story lines create a Möbius-band of intersecting characters and plots; the blue box is where we finally confront the “twist.” Here, the vectors of intentionality and locale create a literal “opportunity” for escape. Betty/Diane gets her own limo ride up Mulholland Drive and disembarks at the same point of the attempted murder of Camilla/Rita. This time she’s led by Camilla up a “shortcut” path to Adam Kesher’s house, where she’s late to an engagement reception. We see characters we have encountered previously, some under other names. Camilla’s double, who auditioned in the “Betty” sequence, kisses her namesake and whispers in her ear. The Cowboy moves like a shadow in the background. The chummy concierge at her aunt’s apartment, Coco, is now Adam’s glacial mother, still named Coco. If Diane calls out a name, there is Nobody to know exactly whom she means.

The superficial similarity between *Mulholland Drive* and *North by Northwest* is virtually nil, but the films’ structural debts to stereognosis, suture, and the middle term of the enthymeme are equal and equally central. The “internal gap” created as the “face” that is the encounter of travel can serve as a unifying principle. But, why limit this kind of universality to the case of regional identity? Isn’t the issue really about the synesthetic understanding of place as architecture and landscape combined? The revision of the travel idea as an “interpolation” made “between the two deaths” (of intentionality and contingency) promises to open architectural and geographical imagination to the resources of popular

culture. Such “real topographical models” as *Mulholland Drive* and *North by Northwest* provide specific evidence of stereognosis, of topology as a way of interrelating the qualities of lived space at all scales.

Notes

1. Henry W. Johnstone, Jr., “Odysseus as Traveler: A Categorical Study,” in *Categories: A Colloquium*, ed. Henry W. Johnstone, Jr. (University Park, PA: Department of Philosophy, Penn State University, 1978), 103-20.

2. The devotion to the family altar is probably the origin of the idea that the Cyclops were monoptical. The first altars were “eyes” or swidden openings in forests, cleared to see the sky and bury the dead. Combining rituals of divination, marriage, and burial with cuisine and the sciences evolved from poetry, the first humans conflated the geometry of the clearing and its correlate horizons with cosmography and theology. The “single eye” refers to the origin of religion in the worship and reciprocal protection of the ancestral dead (*manes*), centered on the family hearth. Each family had its own religion, mutually exclusive from those of other families. Cities, to be founded by families acting in common, had to overcome this Cyclopean prejudice and did so by generalizing the idea of ancestral dead in the “heroes” (= “the dead”) who sacrificed themselves or were sacrificed ritually to establish a fabular narrative to serve as the city’s foundation myth. See Giambattista Vico, *The New Science of Giambattista Vico*, trans. Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 1961), pars. 31-35.