(in)Continent Topology of Pandemics, Screens, and Scripts

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> It is less that we are using psychoanalysis to understand the virus than we are using the virus to understand psychoanalysis.
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> ——Mladen Dolar, "What Is the virus?"[1]

> It is when the Word is incarnated that things really start going badly.
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> ——Jacques Lacan, *The Triumph of Religion*

Epidemiology defines contagion in terms of the incontinence—the difficulty of "containing" infection spread—*versus* measures such as social distancing, quarantine, and travel restrictions. Both socially and mentally, we contract as we retreat. Our subjectivity aligns itself with the continence/incontinence dynamics of disease. This is nowhere more evident than in activities of amusement, where the screen itself becomes an element of (dis-)satisfaction, *jouissance.* In the sense that art's trick is to amuse us by imposing the pains of suspense, withheld meanings, and jolts of horror, all within the pharmakon of suspended disbelief, our concerns about moving from the event structure of the movie theater's Big Screen to domestic Small Screen (streaming videos, laptops, iPhones) become questions about *jouissance* itself, and *jouissance*'s topological relation to continence and incontinence. At this level, psychoanalysis, epidemiology, and media studies all find themselves to be about the insulation of inside from outside. This essay is about understanding that insulation.

Coincidence

Occasionally, two critical systems will ghost each other without either system's intention or awareness. In the case of the Covid-19 pandemic's relation to media, particularly film–watching, it happens that Lacan's particularly elaborate theories about anxiety seem spookily condensed and refined by an unrelated study, Harold Bloom's theory of the anxiety of poets about their forerunners (*Anxiety of Influence*, 1973). Until the pandemic provoked thoughts about spatial and temporal quarantine, this connection would never have been possible.

There would seem to be no theoretical basis to argue for a relationship between Jacques Lacan, described by David Macey (1994, p. xiv) as "the most controversial psycho-analyst since Freud" and Bloom, whom *Oxford Bibliography* called "probably the most famous literary critic in the English-speaking world."[2] The psychoanalyst and literary critic were historically and intellectually distant in style, method, and subject matter. Lacan talked and wrote about anxiety extensively over the course of nearly twenty-seven seminars and other writings. In *Anxiety of Influence*, Bloom used a compact design of six Greek and Latin terms borrowed from theology, science, and literature. Creating a concordance would be out of the question, but Bloom's compact schema speaks to Lacan's algorithms dealing with inside–outside relations with themes of twinning, shadows, and couplings. His six terms, *tesseræ*, *clinamen*, *askesis*, *dæmon*, *apophrades*, and *kenosis* can be grouped into three pairs, each of which has an inside, an outside, and a collapse of the distinction between the two.[3]

Predictably, the contrast between public and private space has structured changes in consumer entertainment during the pandemic. Thanks to Lacan's ability to see the torus's combination of continence and incontinence, we can propose a "toroidal critique," simultaneously about (1) quarantine, (2) the move from the Big Screen to the Small Screen, (3) the contents naturally favored by those screens, and (4) new kinds of audiences emerging in pandemic times. We can use the economy of Bloom's six terms to pull into focus Lacan's centralizing issue of how to deal with the void.

The three pairs seem even more relevant today than they were for Bloom's poets, cowed by masterful predecessors. Let us attempt a more general diagnosis. (1) *Dæmon* is the motivating force behind *askesis*, retreat and isolation, as in "ascetic"—the basic dynamic of lock-downs and quarantines. (2) The Lucretian *clinamen* swerves to avoid a void, creating paired edges akin to the ceramic *tesseræ*, ancient ceramic tokens broken by parting friends in anticipation of reunion, when the two re-joined halves, perfectly matching along the jagged line of fracture, would authenticate love. (3) *Kenosis*, Bloom's version of the Freudian unconscious, is a "knowing without knowing," famously taught by the Essene monastics. Paired with *apophrades*, the "voice of the dead," this super-ego voice imposes itself even past the point of death, making it the principal acousmatic component of what Lacan referred to as "between the two deaths," the ethnographically universal interval between literal extinction and Symbolic judgment and resolution.[4] The voice without a body and knowledge without thinking create a pure inversion for the living subject as well, as in the case of the servant who, encountering Death in the marketplace, fled to Samarra only to find Death waiting for her there.[5] The dead person who has forgotten how to die and the living person drawn fatally to the very thing most feared are the essence of the uncanny's crisscross algebra of life and death as a single basis phenomenon, life–in–death, death–in–life. This is Ernst Jentsch's famous formula of the uncanny (1906), the basis of Freud's even more famous analysis (1919).

The three pairs, *dæmon/askesis*, *clinamen/tesseræ*, and *apophrades/kenosis*, define voids in terms of the (failed) actions taken to avoid them. Here, we can see the key to the present pandemic, where "virus" is not simply the biological agent of disease but a dual, which includes the measures we invent to escape or contain it. In these terms, not even death exempts the subject imprisoned on an unbounded projective plane, self-intersecting and non-orientable, which is both continent and incontinent.[6] Bloom did not pair his terms in the way we have suggested. He tailored each to define the mechanisms that forced young poets to misread the poems of their masters.[7] Misprisions led to the perception of laws that had not existed before the novice chose to refuse them, laws that would have seemed entirely strange to the "Masters." The younger poet, cowed by the *apophrades* of the dead Master, realized a *kenosis* that retroactively made the Master the Master. At this point, Lacan would have jumped in to add that the *nom du père* was also this *non du père*, that *kenosis* was the product of the anxiety of this super-ego *apophrades*, and that only the "non-dupes err" (*les non-dupes errent*): poets, fools, lovers are all "of a nature compact." And, as Lacan would have said, their "anxiety never lies."

Big Screen to Small Screen

For us dupes, willing to suspend disbelief in order to enjoy pleasures of the screen, there is no longer the Big Screen of public enjoyment but the Small Screen of separate domestic interiors. Retreat (*askesis*) from the *dæmon* comes to define the difference between a public "outside" (the movie theater) and private "inside" (the home). In addition, each screen type comes with its own style of narrative temporality. The Big Screen settles for the rough-average duration of 105 minutes, with the requirement of the *récit fort*— that the ending must answer to the beginning.[8] The Small Screen prefers endings that put off this duty: serialized dramas, where each episode guarantees the audience's return by imposing the sudden break-off ("cliff-hanger"). The Big Screen audience is immobilized architecturally; the easily re-positioned Small

Screen secures its audience on the installment plan. Bingeing does not change the seriality of the Small Screen's tempo setting, it simply requires each episode to end with a plot–point. The longer the series, the more plot–points, and the more vertiginous the *mise en abîme* when the ending finally arrives.

Viruses mutate. The "non-dupes" (skeptics) who refuse vaccination or other precautions become host reservoirs for unlimited recombination of RNA. Demonically, these non-dupes err by allowing the virus to "learn" how to circumvent vaccinations.[9] This is Thing–learning, Bloom's knowing without knowing, *kenosis* on the level of biology. The voice instructing the kenotic learner is dead—the virus as Thing. This is probably the reason that it is able to continue instructing us, Lacan says, after *we* are dead. This Zombie physics was invented well before the age of Big Data made possible an actual and universal exchange between little zombies and the Big Zombie.

In 1969, Lacan (2007, pp. 143–149) intuited the system by which the hand-held gadget ("lathouse"; a reformation of the *dispositif*, appliance) would connect to the Thing of the "alethosphere." Lacan was clairvoyant about how small-screen gadgets would today connect globally to create surplus data ready to be harvested, collated, and monetized or, worse, weaponized without any human intervention. You e-mail a friend, "Let's go kayaking" on Friday. Later that very afternoon you receive pop-up advertisements for deals on kayaks. On Saturday you order one from Amazon and Sunday it's delivered to your door. Bloom gives us the six-termed grammar of this consumer desire, Lacan expands its vocabulary. The *kenosis/apophrades* dyad of data mining that comes, no extra charge, with the Small Screen *dispositif* reminds us that, although we think we "use language" to express our autonomy, actually it is the Symbolic that is *enjoying us*. With technology as well as psychoanalysis, we are "worth more dead than alive." And, although we are alive when this enjoyment takes place, it is our dead part, our own interior *Ding*, that counts.[10] *Apophrades* is this agent, the spokesperson, of this death; *kenosis* (Big Data) is its Monostatos.[11]

The quarantine (*askesis*) of neurotic dupes defending themselves against the psychotic (everywhere) *dæmon* virus does away with the middle, or third term by converting it into the "/" of *askesis/dæmon*.[12] The bar specifies a void around whose bi-lateral periphery it is art's duty to circumnavigate (Lacan, 1997, pp. 116–118). Georges Perec would designate the void as a lipogram[13] and Bloom would call the two-part swerve around this periphery *clinamen*. In either case, there is something missing, and when the Imaginary Father and the Symbolic Father consult, this void is the Real Father, a pure reciprocating engine of castration/separation, or suppression, which both Lacan and Freud regarded as a structural system of twists and turns so native to fiction that our best example is the Ur-antique, *Œdipus*. The advice of the oracle is ignored, but the letter of the law comes true anyway: Word made Thing, with dignity, or rather *Ding*nity. *Also sprach die* A-letho-sphere.[14]

Our Small Screen lathouse conspires with a Faustian *dæmon*. Streaming video subscriptions employ the incontinence principle, unending entertainment, to sooth containment blues. Where the Big Screen required the ending to respond to the beginning, the Small Screen activates the unexpected ending that holds the viewer in the suspended animation of (never-)endings, plot-points. The binge, beloved by Netflix & Co., grooms the returning customer, who will return to the same place but never be satisfied. Compulsive repetition circles episodes into concentric anthologies that are both inside and outside each other, like the rings of the Borromeo knot. Because pandemic protocols, the shift in screen size, and new narratives all obey the algebra of continence/incontinence, Bloom's terms have no problem locating the Lacanian unconscious in the crossing from Big Screen to Small Screen, which echoes the crossing of S/s, signifier to signified, that makes the Subject a $ubject. We might, on this otherwise serious occasion, venture a joke: "A psychoanalyst, film-maker, and an epidemiologist walk into a /."

The Truman Show's Simultaneous Continence/Incontinence

How can we read Lacan through Bloom's accidentally relevant critical device? Is it possible, as we claim, to bundle the disparate logics of (1) the pandemic, (2) the new audience that soothes its contraction pains (*askesis*) with contracts for endlessness, (3) a merger of entertainment with the specter of an alethosphere "enjoying us" *via* our data, and (4) alteration of narrative styles imposed by the shift from the Big to the Small Screen?

Our response is to push the reset button, to look at a Big Screen film about a Small Screen long-running—really long!—TV series. Thus, the title of Peter Weir's 1998 film, *The Truman Show*, is a contronym, possibly the only film title able to claim this distinction. It is both the title of the Big Screen film of 1998 and the Small Screen series, running already for twenty-nine years. The film names two things in a concentric relation. But, which is inside, which is outside? The *Show*, as is often said, must go on— toroidally.

The film's dupe, Truman Burbank, is raised from infancy beneath the inspection of innumerable cameras and microphones. Each minute of his daily life is then re-packaged to engage a television audience that has accustomed itself to the homeostatic humdrum of the hero's daily life. The name of this serialized blah blah blah, also the name of the film about it, *The Truman Show*, engages the "/" component of continence/incontinence, making it an agent of the unconscious, which we see in Jim Carrey's portrayal of Truman as the ideal psycho-*kenotic*, both inside and outside the series.[15]

The *frisson* of watching Truman's pure "/" condition captures perfectly the esthetics of our own pandemic. Big Screens like Big Ideas; Small Screens prefer the everyday. The Small Screen tends to equalize minute-to-minute variations, favoring the trivial to the profound. The relation to psychoanalysis is interesting. The Small Screen's celebration of the *Fehlleistung*,[16] the bungled explanation or the slip of the tongue, makes it like the blah blah blah of the Analysand. Truman's TV audience was *jouissance*-d by the film's perfection of dupe-dom. Every occupant of the Florida island town, Seahaven, was an actor except the affable Truman. The sky was a variably lit dome, able to simulate rainstorms and season change.[17] The film's audience became cruel gods, taking pleasure in Truman's victimization, knowing full well that they were in fact his prison guards. The filming location of the actual Florida town of Seaside, constructed as a whole but made to look as if it had developed historically, reproduced perfectly the generic logic of film-set construction, where history is "faked" by eliminating the organic and political processes of town formation into a single de-temporalized crystal, *prête à porter*.
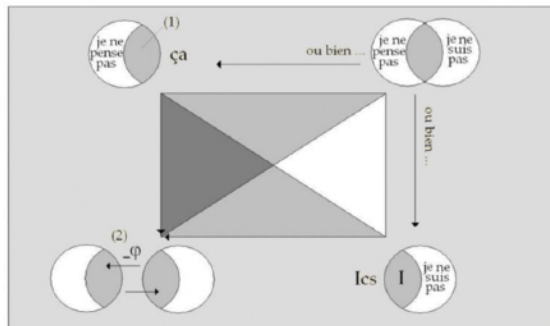

Figure 1. Lacan adopts the standard reference polygon of the torus to diagram the diagonal motion from repetition (upper right corner) to sublimation (lower left) as a dual void exchange of the –φ to establish "subjective stability" (homeostasis). The two vectors ("*ou bien*") lead to (upper left) the psychosis of the *passage à l'acte* outside the Symbolic and to (lower right) the condition of acting–out *within* the Symbolic and, hence, the unconscious (Ics.) that owes its existence to the paternal signifier. The torus thus maps the presence or absence of the paternal signifier in the narrative. Source: Lacan, 2010, p. 101.

Seahaven physically plays out the contrast between the two screen sizes. The TV town was an enclosed eco-sphere able to simulate nights and days, storms, and seasons. Truman's neighbors were hired actors. The One who was not an actor, the dupe Truman, had been raised

from his birth inside this hermetically sealed set, his every movement monitored from a control room concealed in the artificial moon, ironically rivaling NASA's moon-launch facilities.

The film and TV show construct a toroid relationship (Fig. 1), meaning that each episode's cyclic continence is charged with the incontinence of the Big Screen film's desire, requiring the (continence) principle of the *récit fort*, that the ending must respond to the beginning. The demand of the TV show could be quantified by the show's ratings. The desire of the Big Screen film emphasized the structure of the set and Truman's "/" Janus–predicament. There is an argument to be made that Truman hovered between the psychosis brought on by the lack of the paternal signifier and the neurosis of his overbearing mother. Truman was told his father had died in a sea storm when he was yet an infant, but Truman believes he may yet be alive, and spots paternal similarities in a "bum" who happens onto the set but is treated by the film directors the same way an overzealous red state police force might treat a homeless person slipping into a gated community. It is difficult to read the issue of the father. At some points he seems to be the thorn in the side of the TV show, and at other times the film's principal plot–point device. This places a hinge in the story at the point where Truman must choose between the psychosis of the TV show and the neurosis of the world beyond. Jim Carrey's artful portrayal of Truman may be due to the fact that Carrey himself has been said to be, in real life, psychotic.

The paternal mystery is the basis of Truman's dream of escaping Seahaven, fantasied as space travel. Finally, Truman overcomes his terror of water and sails through an artificial storm (stirred up to foil Truman's escape) to reach the ultimate architectural and psychoanalytical limit, the wall on which a sky is painted to meet the water in a false horizon. The problem of continence/incontinence—which is condensed in the "/" that divides the two terms—could never be more toroid than in the scene where Truman steps off his boat to walk along a gangway to reach the utility stair to the exit.

Truman has obeyed the rules of continence that are the intentional action of pandemic response. He has circled the inflated torus tube with the diurnal repetitions of episodes (the 24/7 TV show begins at morning) without being aware that its continence is grounded in his ignorance of his situation. Truman, the mortal/spiritual "one" who does not obey the phallic law that the actors obey in order to receive their wages, becomes the immortal (mechanical) "1" of the unary trait.[18] The actions Truman perceives as strictly cause–and–effect generate a surplus the director manages as Seahaven's backstage. "Questions" are converted directly to "answers" delivered in a technological package: the director's telephonic instructions sent to tiny earpieces, which accidentally interfere with Truman's car radio; stage lights that occasionally fall out of "the sky"; traffic jams engineered to slow or speed Truman on his way. Seahaven's fluid flow (*clinamen*) circulates Truman's desire within a self-constructed, self-contained Other. In-continence of the torus is, in contrast, the question of how the show will end. A surplus has built up; exaptation/emergence must release it. Truman is brought, through the technical slip-ups (encounters with his father look-alike, and unexplained details of his life) to his discovery of the structure of the Big Other and successful escape.

When Truman's boat crunches into the exterior wall of the set, his *récit fort* moment arrives, in the form of a utility stair and exit door. The director's voice comes out of a cloud to beg Truman to remain within the illusion of Seahaven on behalf of the Others–enjoying–him. The logic of fantasy is that its interior is related to its exterior by a wire that short-circuits continence with incontinence. The dissatisfaction of the one (the 1 of the one, 1/1, or "1 with a bar inside it") is the satisfaction, the enjoyment, of the Other. As a conception, *The Truman Show* is a Lacanian textbook. We don't use Lacan to understand Truman; we use Truman to understand Lacan. In *The Logic of Phantasy* (2010, p. 101) Lacan prescribes how, on the outside the Symbolic of perspectival space, where the movement of a figure across a static ground is unrestricted, we become, *episodically*, psychotic. On the inside, we are compelled to "act out." Like the Rat Man, we indulge in pure "signifierness," the babble of the meaningless insult ("You Plate!

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You lamp! You hand towel!"). The criminal or genius the Rat Man's father predicted to be the fate of his son describes perfectly the outlaw actor, who succeeds by pretending a fiction, and is accorded genius status the better this is done. The script is the blah blah blah we encounter in psychoanalysis (the Analysand's blather). The genius is the Ingenuity of the twist, the cut with the twist, that makes any blah blah blah of events into an ending that is genuinely responsive to the beginning, i. e. "toroid."

The Katagraphic Cut

If the end of Analysis can be described as a realization of the (toroid) difference between the aim and the goal of the drive, where the exaptation of (bad) aiming confounds the idea of a Euclidean goal as target, the end of the Small Screen TV version of *The Truman Show* is explicable as the bottom and top rings (Imaginary and Symbolic) of the Borromeo knot held in place by the missing third (Real) ring.[19] For Truman, the quarantined resident, this third ring is specific. It is the cut into the set wall, the steel door at the top of the utility stair. The exit is the "katagraph," an ordinary architectural detail that is, simultaneously, a cut made into a 2-d projective surface (Causse, 2013, pp. 113–114). It is a cut that "cuts both ways," what in the ancient lore of the Dædalan Labyrinth was its eponymous tool, the double–headed axe, or *labrys*.

Lacan would have loved it! This is not an illustration or analogy. It is the Real Thing. The exit from Seahaven's 2-d surface of the illusion (Imaginary) of *The Truman Show* fantasy, cuts (psychotically) to the world of the audience held in thrall by the twenty-nine-year serial comedy (Symbolic, the continent locale of "acting–out"). The Real is there from the start, although Truman discovers it only at the end. The end of narrative incontinence is the retroactive continence of the *récit fort*. It is, simultaneously, the ironic incontinence that haunts the prideful continence of Seahaven (and all other gated communities of its type) in its intention to eliminate contamination from other socio-economic groups. This penetrates down to every detail of island life, hyper-managed by the director, Christof, and his lunar control room teams.

The katagraph, the "deep cut," has an inverse function that we can see clearly by understanding its essential relation to continence/incontinence. As a connector between the two conditions, the inverse is at the root of the katagraph's functional effectiveness. What it connects, it disconnects, and vice versa. The paralysis of the audience in the Big Screen theater reciprocally enables the seemingly unconfined play-out of the fiction on stage, which must be re-secured by the terminus of the drama's conclusion. The proscenium or screen is, effectively, a katagraph.

The televised series *The Truman Show* also depends on "holding the audience in suspense" by giving what, to Truman, appears to be complete freedom within the limits of Seahaven's invisible walls. Audiences, after all, are "captured," thanks to their fascination with those who appear not to be captured, except by fate and their own *Fehlleistungen*. Our Big Screen enjoyment of *The Truman Show* takes in the Small Screen's involvement. *The Truman Show*'s show–in–a–show technique focuses on the role of the cut, which we might compare to the katagraphic mark that Lacan cites in the story of the Roman consul in Egypt, Popilius. To avoid invasion by the Syrian army, Popilius draws a circle around the Syrian king, Antiochus, to make the point that some inscriptions are also cuts, and that such cuts "cut both ways." Antiochus reads the meaning of this ridiculous gesture immediately and agrees to withdraw. The deep cut is a kind of physical contronym, but it is also, technically, a "two-dimensional subspace of a projective plane."

Lacan demonstrates in Seminar IX, *Identification* (2011), how two kinds of circles can be drawn on the surface of a torus. One kind reduces to a point, another produces the immortality of the interior-8. The depth of this katagraphic cut is a matter of its simultaneous residency in Euclidean and projective space.[20] Thus, the door at the wall of the set of Seahaven is the "/" between *The Truman Show* and *The Truman Show*, the Big Screen and the Small Screen.

How does this translate to our situation of pandemic continence, with its transition marker, the Big Screen to Small Screen? The katagraphic mark is *The Truman Show*'s Big Screen representation of a Small Screen. The incontinence logic of the TV series (keeping the audience in a suspense that is ideally perpetual) is simultaneously a logic of keeping an audience confined. The theatrical Big Screen's ideal of audience paralysis is, for the small screen, temporally dispersed. Serial dramas run in seasons; the continence goal is pursued in terms of having audiences return to a weekly event. But, *The Truman Show*'s 24/7 design has a diurnal design. The audience wakes up with Truman and goes to bed sixteen or so hours later. This is a "maximal paralysis design" that retroactively defines the audience's life as a mirror or Truman's, an unconscious that is noticed only through symptoms, when the production system breaks down, or when katagraphs break through the finished veneer of the "immersed" drama that Truman thinks is his real life.

Thanks to the film's juxtaposition of Big Screen continence–through–paralysis and Small Screen paralysis–through–incontinence, we can understand the topological role of the katagraph in stark, material terms. A theatrical light falls from the "sky" and smashes on the pavement. The director's closed-channel communications to the actors on the set interferes with Truman's car radio music. Truman's unexpected moves force the actors to pause to await new instructions. These errors *cut into* the polished surface of the Big Screen drama to reveal the Small Screen reality. The katagraph shows how the incontinent projective system serves to regulate the continent 3-d reality of the TV drama, to "glue the audience to its seats." Katagraphics is key to the paralysis of continence, in all its dupe-dom.

The Katagraphic Dupe

These transactions between the Euclidean illusion of the TV show and the projective surfaces employed by the show's producer–directors require the device of a master katagraph, the dupe. Truman must not be allowed to discover that he is the single link between what he thinks is life in a Florida island community and the television series documenting his life. Quite humorously, the Lacanian saying, that *les non-dupes errent* (punning the *nom du père*, or name of the father) is also the plot-point function of Truman's father, another katagraph who turns up as a vagrant on the set. A dupe is also a dummy thanks to the function in the card-game of bridge where the dummy is a place–holder. The dummy is the partner of the player who "declares" the final contract. An opening lead is made by the player on the left, who names the opening suit, and the dummy shows all thirteen cards, face up.

Lacan played bridge and knew precisely the katagraphic function of this show of cards. *It reveals everything without being conscious of anything.*[21] It is the reverse of the Cartesian *cogito*, which Lacan "upturns" (Fig. 1) as an intersection of two Euler circles, *je ne pense pas* and *je ne suis pas* in Seminar XIV (*The Logic of Phantasy*, p. 102). What better dummy than a non-thinking,

non-existing subject? And, who could be more non-existing than an actor in a film about filming, playing an actor who does not know he is an actor! The pandemic logic of continence/incontinence is distilled into its essence. The dummy's apophrastic speech and kenotic thoughts take ventriloquism to a new level.

In *The Logic of Phantasy*, the dummy position moves simultaneously along two orthogonal *vectors*, (1) to an "incontinent" position of the *passage à l'acte*: the psychotic caught *outside* the Symbolic and (2) to a position *contained* by the Symbolic, where the anxious subject is compelled to act out. This is the position of the Rat Man, who from inside the Symbolic was forced to call his father ridiculous insults, reducing his speech to pure performativity: "You lamp! You plate! You hand towel!" This is the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*, the signifier stripped down to zero-degree signifier-ness, as when, Lacan reminds us, children get off on saying that the cat goes bow-wow and the dog goes meow. Truman finds himself face to face with the suffocating Symbolic, where the only option is nonsense. Jim Carrey, who plays Truman, is a master of this situation, drawing a space-helmet with soap over his reflection in the mirror.

In French, "dummy" is literally *le mort*, the dead man. The one of the actors who falls in love with Truman wants to spill the beans about his hyper-surveilled life. She makes the point that Truman is "not being allowed to live." He only thinks he is living, while all of his cards are shown face up, thanks to the surreptitious televising of his every act. This is Lacan's "between the two deaths"—*le mort* who does not know he is *mort*—paired (by Ernst Jentsch) with the living subject marked by death, running in two opposite directions at the same time. Truman as a contronymic zomby is *contained/uncontained*. The architectural precedent of his imprisonment is the famous labyrinth Dædalus constructed to quarantine the (also) hybrid monster born of Pasiphaë's cursed passion, the Minotaur. The place-frozen bull-man is the flip–side of the famous twins, Castor and Pollux, forced to circulate as antipodal points on an orbit halved by earth and Hades.[22] The Minotaur's life/death is embodied as animal/human, inverse of the Cartesian cogito, cast as the labyrinth's villain; a negated being (= monster) with no speaking parts.

The labyrinth was built to imprison the Minotaur, but its continence protocol was unusual. There was no locked door. There was only one meandering pathway, not a maze of optional turns. The monster was held in place by a fractal protocol—folds that, with any single pause of motion, made it impossible for the entrapped occupant to remember correctly whether he/she had been moving in or out. This is the continence/incontinence "contronym," viewed from the side of continence.

What about the other side? Ernst Jentsch (1906) gives the example of the living person marked or haunted by death, as in the case of the servant from Samarra. Here the same spatial protocol applies. In the story of the servant who, seeing Death in the marketplace, determines to flee only to find Death waiting for her at Samarra, the motion of flight becomes the motion to the interior of the trap. *Askesis* from the *dæmon* is ⇆ , the bi-valent vector in the real projective plane, the interior-8 on the surface of a torus (D. Hilbert and S. Cohn-Vossen, 1999).

Lacan specifically cites this employment of incontinence to achieve continence in *The ethics of psychoanalysis* (1997, p. 60) where he tells the story of Apollo's love, rebuffed by Daphne's equally passionate hate. The nymph tries to flee but she is on a 2-d projective manifold that,

although it lacks any boundaries, is finite. She has no option but to morph into a laurel tree, a species known for its "eternal life," to the extent that Olympic victors are crowned with its branches as a sign of their own immortality. Lacan omitted the backstory that would have confirmed this connection to continence/incontinence. Apollo had insulted Eros, the prototype δαίμων, joking that, for a god known as an archer, his skill was notoriously defective (a case of *Fehlleistung*). People never seem to fall in love with the right others. Eros mischievously confirmed this by piercing Apollo with an arrow of love, Daphne with an arrow of hate. Possibly, it was one arrow with two points, which would perfectly define the "one-dimensional subspace" that is the building block of projective geometry's 2-d, non-oriented, self-intersecting surfaces. Along this surface, Daphne fled in vain. The laurel tree was implicit not just in her failed *askesis* but in the way her inability to flee was present, already, in her desire to flee; and how Apollo's insult figured into Eros's status, as not just a dæmon but the prototype of all demons, intermediaries—"third terms"—bridging the realm of immortals with that of mortals or, put another way, life and death. The insult and story that followed merely played out this thirdness.

The erotic arrow, $\leftrightarrows$, is the projective geometry vector and katagraphic cut. Both functions are evident in The Truman Show. Katagraphics explains the film's dystopian employment of total surveillance and, hence, the idealization of the syndic's protocols in the incidence of the plague of Vincennes (Foucault, 2020). The dupe "shows his hand" and the circuit continues. The dummy must not know (kenosis, standing here for the Unconscious). The circuit that must continue to move and contain is maintained by a second circuit operating virtually (think of the lunar control booth in The Truman Show as the small loop of the interior-8), but to distinguish this from the (Euclidean) virtual reality of the small-screen Show, we must name it, following Žižek (2012), the "reality of the virtual." It is the effectiveness of what is not present; the void required to make whatever is present work. This is the incontinent continence—or continent incontinence—so very close to what Freud tried to describe in his "Project for a Scientific Psychology" (1895) that we might dare to call it by its true name, the death drive.

Exaptation[23] of Two Virtuality Circuits

The death drive: two circuits, two virtualities, two screen sizes. Pandemics: two circuits, two virtualities, two screen sizes. To understand the continence/incontinence system however, we must make a point about exaptation, or, how the unintended surplus of any wishfully-determining aim, *especially* when it fails to achieve its goal, constitutes a hidden treasury of signifiers that are preserved at the same time they are sublimated (Lacan, 2017, p. 62). The ordinary kind of (perspectival) virtuality, dedicated to the creation of depth of field for occupants of Euclidean space, is made effective by a second kind of virtuality that is (1) the mechanism that sets up the quantum-like reciprocity of suppression and emergence; and (2) like the twists of the projective plane that define it, non-oriented and self-intersecting.

This essay itself requires a non-oriented conclusion. There are three common ways to misread Walter Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1935/1936). The first conflates mechanization with modernity to make it an index of mass consumption in the stage of Late Capitalism. The second fails to regard mechanism's primary role

in different systems of knowing and belief, including—especially—those in antiquity. The third fails to see aura as an iterative postponement of access to the work of art that enhances the ultimate value of art as incomprehensible—the function of *agalma*: the tradition of pilgrimage. Similarly, when we look at a virus we see a mechanism but also something of the contagious/ metonymic nature of spirituality.[24] Kant, for example, thought that reason, if unrestricted (incontinent), would spread freely. Freud joked that his hosts at Clarke University did not know he, Jung, and Ferenczi were "bringing them the plague" (Lacan, 2002, p. 336). It is impossible to isolate materialism from idealism; and, for Coronavirus, impossible to separate the disease from the responses to the disease. It is just as impossible to allow continence and incontinence to retreat into separate categories. We would and should be surprised if this did not also condition our film–viewing practices as well as the content of films. If it is true, as Mladen Dolar has said (2022), that the virus is the "atom of materialism," it is, thanks to its "Ding-nity" as Lacan put it (1997, pp. 43–70), split. This makes the virus's extimacy, its incontinent continence, simultaneously a mechanism and spirit. When James Joyce, in *Finnegans Wake*, defined Paradise in terms of a *clinamen* of "even atoms" (Eve and Adam's), he would split this Adam, Eve-nly, and give the virus something to swerve around, and the margin of the Real void its *tesseræ*–symmetry of authentic reunion.

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Endnotes

1 Paraphrase, Mladen Dolar [lecture], What is the virus? *2022 LACK online lecture series.* https://lackorg.com/lack-online-lecture-series/

2 This quote appears in "Harold Bloom," (2022, May 3), *Wikipedia.* https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harold_Bloom; Bloom was the Sterling Professor of Humanities at Yale University from 1955 to 2019, teaching his last class four days before his death on October 14.

3 It's possible to see that, even in his early work on the Mirror Stage, Lacan focused on (1) divisions of space that were not quite successful and, at the same time, (2) continuums that, no matter how smooth, were structured by a cut. All of Bloom's terms are about the simultaneous endurance and unreliability of division.

4 The term *voix acousmatique* is associated with Michel Chion's *Audio-vision: sound on screen* (1994). The idea was expanded by the Lacanian Mladen Dolar, *A voice and nothing more* (2006). The connection between Bloom's *apophrades* ("voice of the dead"), the cinematic voice-over, and the Lacanian super-ego and voice as a drive combine to create a spectrum linking ethnography, popular culture, and psychoanalysis. The voice is what extends the power of the rule past the end of life, to cover the interval of "between the two deaths."

5 W. Somerset Maugham made this tale from the Babylonian Talmud popular in his 1933 play, Sheppy.

6 The real projective plane is the basis of Lacan's topological interests in the Möbius band, cross-cap, torus and other figures that, when "immersed" into 3-space, produce the paradoxically opposed qualities of self-intersection (continence) and non-orientation (incontinence). Themes such as extimité, the forced choice, suppression, metaphor, and the three domains of the Real, Symbolic, and Imaginary would be incomprehensible without reference to the real projective plane's 2-d manifold, discovered by Pappus of Alexandria in 300 c.e. and formalized by Girard Desargues in the Seventeenth Century.

7 Bloom's definition of anxiety in relation to poetic "masters" could be considered in terms of the role of the paternal signifier in maintaining the poet's neurosis as preventative measure against psychosis.

8 I owe my understanding of this critical idea to Dan Collins' *Stealing money from offices* (2014), where he cites Roland Barthes (1995). The relation to Lacan's sentence–level *après coup* is clear.

9 Lacan's phrase, *les non-dupes errent*, is a well-known invitation (Seminar XXI, 1973-1974) to pun the "names of the father" (*les noms du père*) as well as the father's "no" (*les nons du père*).

10 The development of an interior void in the subject can be understood through Louis Althusser's standard–issue demonstration of interpellation, in the incident of the policeman's "Hey, you!" felt personally by multiple innocent parties who hear it yelled in the street. This guilt is lodged in a void at the subjects' interiors, a case of Lacan's *extimité*.

11 Monostatos was the arch-villain of Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, portrayed as a compulsive desire–machine.

12 Viruses don't have fathers, let alone paternal signifiers to structure neurosis! Viruses are, as Mladen Dolar has argued (2022), atoms of the spirit; we would add that this atom is split. "Pandemic" is etymologically the *dæmon*'s non-locality, creating *pandemonium*.

13 Georges Perec's novel without the letter "e," *A void* (2005) demonstrates how *clinamen* creates meaning by agitating the flow around the lipogram. The "/" is simultaneously the sign separating the terms of a dual, the bar of the Lacanian subject, and the separator in the *matheme* for the signifier's relation to the signified, a key to the function of suppression in Lacan's formula for metaphor.

[14] We would propose a slightly different etymology for "alethosphere" than the one Lacan gives (Heidegger's "un-hiddenness" of truth). The River Lethe (Λήθη) was, in mythology, fluid forgetfulness that comes closer to Bloom's *kenosis* and the Freudian unconscious. In this shift to a mechanical flow, *clinamen* defines a void (lipogram) whose twinned edges (*tesseræ*) answer to the anxiety of absence. The alethosphere therefore must be a projective plane such as the one indicated by Lacan's diagram in Seminar XIV (2010, p. 102), a "reference polygon" of the torus, where demand's project of containment constructs desire as incontinent, in what Lacan called *l'assiette subjectif*, the "subjective sampler plate."

[15] Truman's actions can be seen from the Small Screen film's point of view as "acting out" (inside the Symbolic) and from the Big Screen's point of view in relation to the *passage à l'acte* (outside the Symbolic). In Seminar XIV, *The logic of phantasy* (2010, p. 102), Lacan draws a reference polygon of the torus and shows how a single motion, beginning with an inversion of Descartes' *cogito*, transports the void of union without overlap to the opposite corner representing sublimation. In effect, the single diagonal is simultaneously the two vectors, one to a position outside the Symbolic, another to a position inside.

[16] Freud's coinage, *Fehlleistung*, was the generic blunder, a broad range of occasions where something falls short. See S. Freud (*Zur Psychopathologie des Alltagslebens*, 1901). The blunder maintains homeostasis for the neurotic in possession of a working paternal signifier and is thus a good model for the Small Screen's narrative designs.

[17] Seahaven was a fake of a fake. The architect Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk pushed the idea of the gated community to the extreme of a full-size urban "as if"—*as if* the town had developed without the *Angst* of decay or disunity and simply been discovered, given a fix–up, and occupied by upper-middle class (mostly) white people. The observation, that such artificial communities are like movie sets, is flipped. Seahaven actually *was* a movie set using the "like a movie set" to advantage.

[18] Truman works as a unary trait in the Freudian sense, the traumatic Real of whose birth condition is carried forward as a symptom expressed as a binary, a 1/1 or rather $x = 1 + 1/x$, producing a Fibonacci explanation for a serialized life comedy based on the ignorance of a dupe. Each episode, like the Fibonacci numbers (1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8 …) is the sum of the previous two, a partial resolution that leads to a new plot–point.

[19] This explains the roles of Truman's three fathers. His Imaginary father is the vagrant who shows up unexpectedly, his Symbolic father is the director Christof, but the Real father is the topology of the "/" that holds the two aspects of the film's title together, the small screen 24/7 *Truman show* and the big screen *The Truman Show* directed by Peter Weir. Truman plays both the prisoner of the Symbolic who must "act out" and the alienated serial psychotic forced, in a way that exploits the unary trait as a Golden ratio, to the *passage à l'acte*.

[20] Katagraphics is indicated but not named as such in Lacan's example of "The Injunction of Popilius." It is a term that appears elsewhere, in the instructive episode in the Biblical *Book of Matthew* 21:25, the episode of the Sanhedron's attempt to entrap Jesus in a legal matter. He is asked to sentence a woman who has been convicted of adultery; the Sanhedron suppose that he will fail to pronounce the required punishment, death by stoning. Instead of doing this, Jesus kneels and begins doodling on the ground; the Sanhedron elders suddenly depart. Apparently this was an Arabic custom, described by the poet Dhu Rumma, the act of a conjurer. The story of Popilius is told in *Livy's History of Rome*, book 45; but the key to *katagraphein* is given by Charlton T. Lewis's *An Elementary Latin Dictionary*, which notes that Popilius's staff was in fact a wand.

[21] The coincidence of the bridge dummy and the ventriloquist's dummy can be extended to the idea of an actor who speaks the lines written by another. Truman is a case of the actor as dummy who is unconscious of his status as an actor. All of these variations answer to the logic of "between the two deaths," which correspond to the two kinds of circles which one may draw on the surface of a torus.

[22] The Minotaur, paralyzed, was a *père* version. Minos had stinted on his annual sacrifice to Poseidon, selecting the next best bull instead of the best. Some traditions have it that Zeus was the offended deity. Either one or the other was the efficient cause of Pasiphaë's impregnation by the bull facilitated by Dædalus's machine.

[23] Exaptation is the official name of evolutionary emergence described by Stephen Jay Gould and Elisabeth Vrba. See "Exaptation," *Wikipedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Exaptation.

[24] Lacan's example, in Seminar V, *Formations of the unconscious* (2014, p. 54), is the metaleptic *Witz* of the woman who, told by her dancing partner that she perhaps knows that he is a count (*je suis compte*), replies simply "Ahhht!", indicating retroactively the root of *comte* to be "con," i. e. an idiot.