

Last Acts: Dying Once Is Not Enough

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If you think you have finishing problems, consider the dead soul inside what is known in literary and psychoanalytic circles as “between the two deaths.”¹ There are two versions of this — a literal death followed by a symbolic one or a symbolic death anticipating the real thing — but let me start with the former case. Due to the trauma of accidental death, the deceased “has forgotten that he/she is dead.” No visits to the doctor, no gloomy predictions of “months rather than years,” no deathbed scenes. In Vladimir Nabokov’s *The Eye* the narrator’s suicide attempt seems not to have been fatal; he seems to take it in his

stride. But, later on it becomes apparent that he really did die and that the story is really his death dream taking place in the last moments before his brain fully quits. The genius of the death dream device is that it works whether or not the reader or narrator takes it seriously. Two paths diverge in the wood, and in literature they often correlate in a crisscross way, with the life option as the main line and the death option running alongside as a shadow, an arrangement Jacques Lacan noted was the root of the word “purloined.”

Ted Kooser has the all-time best description of the two paths of the death- and life-options of “between the two deaths.”

The pigeon flies to her resting place on a window ledge above the traffic, and her shadow, which cannot fly, climbs swiftly over the bricks to meet her there.²

Here is sure evidence that death not only has a finality problem, but also a geometry, for pigeons, at least, a jagged, irregular, and tortured topography of buildings, alleys, ramparts, roofs, and random strewn objects. W. F. Jackson Knight proposed a universality common to all such secondary paths.³ From Europe to

the New Hebrides, something like a Thesean Labyrinth idea pervades. The newly-deceased, arriving at the gates of death, is presented a plan drawing but before he or she can take it in, the attending ghost erases



The part of the labyrinth the ghost shows to the newly deceased ...



The part of the plan the newly deceased really needs to know.

Figure 1. The two maps, upper and lower halves of the Thesean Labyrinth. Drawing by author.

¹ In psychoanalysis, this is more often taken as the anticipation of actual death by a symbolic death, as in the case of Antigone, who is undead until Creon agrees to bury her brother, as the gods require. Her brother, Polyneices, is between the two deaths in the more ethnographically common order, where literally death who must undertake a series of trials before reaching a symbolic death, a sequence formalized in the myth of Cupid and Psyche. See, for the former, Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, Seminar VII, 1959–1960, trans. Dennis Porter (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Co., 1992), 243–256. For the latter, enjoy Apuleius’s Late Latin novel, *The Golden Ass of Apuleius*, trans. Robert Graves (New York: Pocket Books, 1952).

² Ted Kooser, “Five P. M.,” in *Sure Signs: New and Selected Poems* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh : University of Pittsburgh Press, 1980).

³ W. F. Jackson Knight, *Cumæan Gates, A Reference of the Sixth Aeneid to the Initiation Pattern* (Oxford, UK: B. Blackwell, 1936).

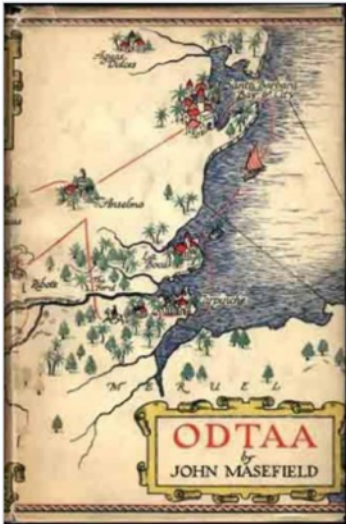


Figure 2. Masefield's novel exploits the base-line assumption, that fiction should involve more form than the raw materials of life, unordered, random, and hence absurdly meaningless.

half of it (Fig. 1). Pessimists will note that this is the half with all the twisty parts the deceased will need to know to complete the journey. Why? Funerary myths require the dead to show up to the exam well-prepared. The design is something one should learn, through dances, songs, rituals, and architectural designs. It is the “true connectivity” of the passageways that appear to be, in the upper half of the labyrinth plan, well-ordered but are not. This is a Lesson of Life. What appears to be normal is actually held together by a mesh of twists and folds, just as Kooser's pigeon flies straight but requires its shadow to endure an obstacle course of walls, roofs, and ground traffic.

Considering that “between the two deaths” is about not just the finish of life but the finish of all the finishes that gave that life form and meaning, it could be considered as an Ur-plan itself, a mother of all finishes as (1) the outer surface of something, (2) the conclusion of something, or (3) the match between an end with its beginning. Number 3 seems to be really a 2-sub-a but things can end without the perfect landing implied by what Roland Barthes called the *récit fort*, the obligation of poems and stories for the ending to answer to the beginning.⁴ This implies a symmetry that is

allowed to be missing when a finish is just termination. “Answering to” means that there has been a tension all along, a knowledge that a finish is coming, and it will round off a sequence, making it different than O.D.T.A.A. — “one damn thing after another” (Fig. 2). As a category, 2 is probably 3-sub-a. Symmetry had been there all along but gone unnoticed, unheeded. Hence, Nabokov's suicidal narrator doesn't know that he has died, has no anticipation of the moment that the Real will soon dawn on his ho-hum, blah blah blah reality. The *récit fort* condition is really a poetic, or even theological assumption, that life should have symmetry, that death should “round it off with a sleep,” as Shakespeare put it.

The picture here is of a circle whose completion or failure to complete constitutes an existential issue. We take aim at the goal but often the goal moves as the arrow is in flight (again, Kooser's “Pigeon Effect”). This is not a complicated idea, but something that is happening now, as the reader is reading this: the Coriolis force, the fact that beneath all of our feet the earth is rotating, and that all of the fluids unhitched from this turn appear to be turning in the opposite direction (Fig. 3). By the time the arrow reaches the target, the target has packed up and moved on. The arrow, with a sneaking suspicion this might be happening, has taken precautions, but possibly the target, too, knows this and has factored in the arrow's doubt. Now, we are really into the theology!

The target either “knows the arrow is coming” (animism) or doesn't care (mechanism). This either/or requires a philosophy based on the game of Morra (odds and evens). Odds: the target doesn't care. Evens: the target anticipates the standard ending, and plans accordingly, *dæmonically*. This is the spooky correspondence, known since mythic times, of the creation of the trap as soon as the need to flee arises. In

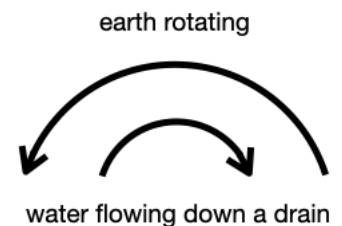


Figure 3. The Coriolis effect water to flow in a clockwise direction in the Northern Hemisphere, counter-clockwise in the Southern.

⁴ Roland Barthes, “Deux Femmes,” in Éric Marty, ed. *Œuvres Complètes 3* (Paris: Editions Du Seuil, 1995), 1052–1054.



Figure 4. René Magritte, *Not to Be Reproduced*, 1937. Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam. Note Magritte's inclusion of Edgar Allan Poe's 1838 chiasmic novel, *Les aventures d'Arthur Gordon Pym*.

the story of Daphne and Apollo, Eros has shot the sun god with love, but Daphne is hit with a dart of hate.⁵ This crisscross is translated into the space in which Daphne seeks to flee her would-be lover, a space created by her desire to escape. It's a 2-d manifold, self-intersecting and non-oriented, i. e. a projective surface that, like the Möbius band or cross-cap, issues every traveler a round-trip ticket when they only asked for one-way. They will arrive back like Magritte's young man standing before a mirror (Fig. 4) that refuses to work correction (*Not to Be Reproduced*, 1937). This leaves Daphne between the two deaths permanently, so her form mutates into a laurel tree, an ever-green, which has "forgotten how to die," like Nabokov's narrator in *The Eye*.

"Forgetting you are dead" is not exclusively a poetic or theological problem. It is the stuff of dreams, as in the famous "Scipio's Dream" (Cicero, *De re publica*, Book VI, 54–51 b.c.e.). The famous uncle of the younger Scipio visits him in a dream and invites him to his spa-like residence in Eternity, where the two look down on earth in pity of those who don't know they are actually dead. The uncle explains that the life of the body is death for the soul and vice versa. Hence, those souls walking

around in heaven look healthy and happy compared to the tortured ones below, whose bodies do not realize their bad condition. Plato (*The Republic*), following evidence from the soldier, Er, who woke ten days after his apparent death on the battlefield with lucid memories of visiting Eternity but being returned, proposed that all knowledge was a form of memory, anamnesis, of things forgot, at rebirth, from one's last encounter with death. Here, the "Lethe injection" marks the divide between consciousness and unconsciousness. Anamnesis recalls what is "known without being known" (*kenosis*), making Plato the first philosopher of the unconscious. Er's *kenosis* injection didn't work. He gave a full account of the judgment of souls, the soul-sorting procedure, the distribution of rewards and punishments, and the exit of those re-assigned to new carnal destinies.

In this ancient recycling program, there is nothing that is not between the two deaths. At any given moment we may think we are alive, but we aren't. *Anamnesis* is there to remind us that we have repressed our dead self, but that this shadow is waiting to meet us at the prescribed final moment. This is a finish in two, possibly three senses. First, it is the end of the life we thought we were living, but, second, the end of the death we didn't know our soul was enduring, but was signaling to us through ominous ciphers and persistent symptoms. These could come in dreams, omens, or simply things that stand out as "mini-epiphanies." The news is not all bad. Coming to terms with one's full self aims at a reset, a homeostasis, a Nirvana. This was the meaning of Freud's unfortunately named Death Drive, which was not a drive to death per se but instead the sum total of efforts made to resist death, *conatus*. *Conatus* is the ancient

⁵ Lacan tells the story of Apollo and Daphne (probably reading Ovid's *Metamorphoses*) but leaves out the important fore-story, where Apollo has insulted Eros for his poor archery skills (making all the wrong people fall in love) and, in revenge, the boy-god takes his revenge by fashioning an arrow of love and arrow of hate, possibly the same arrow with two points, to inflame Apollo with ardor and Daphne with disgust. Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, Seminar VII, 1959–1960, trans. Dennis Porter (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Co., 1992). Appropriately, Lacan calls the space of that traps Daphne, forcing her to transmute into a laurel tree, a "surface of pain," which he christens architecture.

configuration of the principle of homeostasis, beginning with the Stoics and Peripatetics around 300 b.c.e., peaking with Hobbes, Spinoza, and Leibniz, given an unusual twist by Giambattista Vico, and finished off by Freud (the Death Drive) and Bergson (*élan vital*).⁶

Conatus, or *plus ça change ...*

We should not overlook the complication lying behind conatus, especially since it holds key clues about the idea of finishing's simultaneous material and ideal aspects. This is, generally, addressed in the French sentiment *plus ça change plus c'est la même chose*. "The more (↑) ... the more (↓)" is the key.⁷ Change and stasis are not opposed but, rather the same thing, just non-oriented.⁸ Vico explained that the difference is that things in nature appear to be moving but in fact they are still, thanks to a divine element. This is Vico's clear reference to a second kind of virtuality latent within the primary Euclidean virtuality of perspectival experience. Like Kooser's pigeon shadow, the agility assumed by the shadow actually comes by thinking of the uneven surfaces across which the shadow seems to dance crazily, not as obstacles but, rather, facilitators. The shadow's apparent frantic motion is really a stasis, a *conatus*, so that when the shadow finally comes to rest when it joins its pigeon body mate on the window ledge above the traffic, we reach a kind of vanishing point brought within conceptual and actual reach. The pigeon lands, and two forms of virtuality, one of illusion, the other of truth, reconcile. Compare (1) the upper part of the labyrinth that the newly deceased is shown by the guardian ghost to (2) the part the newly deceased really needs to know and you will have a good idea of the meaning of *conatus*. Motion itself has been conceived as two-part, one aspect that appears to be in motion, another that is really at rest, or at least a symmetrical counter-poise. Which is which on the diagram (Fig. 1)? I prefer to refer to Scipio's dream, where the upper part of the Labyrinth pictorially corresponds to the celestial spheres. The lower part, Kooser's troubled streets and alleys, requires the shadow to perform elaborate acrobatics to keep up with the flying pigeon. In *conatus* terms, this is the appearance of motion as frantic, choice as contingent, events as random. Because the Labyrinth is really a building that combines order and chaos, makes each "virtual with respect to the other," it is a picture of *conatus*'s crisscross aspect, just as the Minotaur was a virtual crisscross being ... just as we all are virtual crisscross beings. The Labyrinth is a self-portrait of Everyone.

⁶ See Tommaso Parducci, "Sul concetto di conatus nella filosofia di Vico," Laboratorio dell'ISPF (Istituto per la Storia del Pensiero Filosofico e Scientifico Moderno XV (2018). DOI: 10.12862/Lab18PRT. Linking *conatus* to the death drive has the advantage of pointing out the need for the existence of *two circuits* required to resolve the problem of insulating a system, neural or otherwise, from external disturbance. Conatus is many things to many thinkers, but with Vico conatus, which saw it as a single function of staying the same that had two aspects, movement in nature and divine (Platonic?) stillness, was both the two aspects and the *linkage* between the two aspects. This allowed Vico to take conatus as a principle of inertia (of stillness and movement) into law, where he finds a way to reconcile free will and fate.

⁷ This familiar French saying actually invokes the Theorem of Pappus of Alexandria, ca. 300 a. c. e., where two sets of three points on two lines, placed in any position, with the lines, L, L', at any angle, determine the position of a third line thanks to their crosscross intersection, AB'/A'B, AC'/A'C, BC'/B'C. See "Pappus' Hexagon Theorem," *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pappus%27s_hexagon_theorem

⁸ The non-orientation of change and stasis as conatus completes itself (self-intersection) is justification for comparing conatus to the two features of projective geometry's 2-d topologies. Inside projective space, there are no cuts, barriers, or twists. From the perspective of Euclidean space, however, these are clearly seen as the distinguishing feature of all projective forms, such as the Möbius band, Klien bottle, cross-cap, and Boys Surface. In the torus, which seems to be an ordinary Euclidean form, the key is to note that it is possible to draw both reducible and irreducible circles on it.

To maintain our *conatus*, to be the same person when we wake up each morning, we must assume this hybrid mode of being but suppress its consequences. Suppression is not a simple matter. It requires its own hybrid formation, and in this sense it is a metonymy that cuts meaning into a hydrophilic and hydrophobic part, like soap. This analogy means that the hydrophobic side of metonymy is able to pick up the dirt, the random, uncontrolled, seemingly meaningless details (that are generated with any enunciation) and hitch them to the intention to designate a single meaning. In suppression, there is first a necessary renunciation of this intentionality to claim that dirt is objective, reducing it to mute nonsense. “The useless” is the prelude required before throwing anything away. The specific qualities of something have to be reduced to zero before it is sent to the trash-heap.

The heap as such retains the particularity of each object, but it is first and foremost a heap. The Labyrinth is, first and foremost, a heap, a pile of passageways. The confusion imposed on the wanderer in this trash-heap prison (which is both “all walls” and “without walls”) is the mental correlate to the essence of trash, its zero-degree quality. Wandering, also a zero-degree in that movement is nullified by the subtraction of intention in getting from X to Y (which makes travel no more than an errand) must re-set itself so that it can start over, to generate the form of true travel out of this zero-degree basis.⁹ The shadow of the pigeon has a zero-degree relation to the surfaces it seems to race across without effort. It seems to be frantic but in fact it is at rest, and it will confirm this fact when the pigeon lands on the window-ledge.

The issue with *conatus* is that we have difficulty recognizing its value amidst the turns and twists given to it by 2500 years of philosophical thought. *Conatus* itself flies smoothly across the city, but we only see the shadow racing up the sides of buildings at record-breaking speeds. Its meaning tonalities are jerked in all directions by thinkers who, wishing to appropriate it, engage in a tug-of-war that tears it limb from limb. This is the problem with philosophical thinking, not of *conatus* itself, which glides from X to Y untroubled by what’s happening below.

Vico understands this when he applies *conatus* to the Law, as opposed to physics. In the opposition of motion and rest, the problem seems unsolvable. When it is the medium out of which human acts and intentions come to be judged, the case becomes clear. Guilt is justification for punishment, and only when the criminal can be shown to have intended to commit a crime are we fully justified in punishing him, although we reserve the right to punish negligence. This implies that we are always responsible for the danger we may generate as an unintended by-product. We operate a saw that might break loose of its pins, we practice hitting a ball that might crack the skull of an unseen by-stander. We are held responsible for unintended consequences, as a kind of negative image of intentional acts, some of which might be criminal. In other words, the pigeon can be prosecuted for the agitations of its shadow. The police could be waiting at the window ledge to put the pigeon into a cage.

⁹ Fine-tuning the relations of travel to intentionality, chance, and necessity, Henry W. Johnstone, Jr., has analyzed the conditions that make or break travel’s authenticity. “Odysseus as Traveler: A Categorical Study,” in Henry W. Johnstone, Jr., ed. *Categories: A Colloquium* (University Park PA: Department of Philosophy, The Pennsylvania State University, 1978), pp. 103-120.

Unintended consequences are a surplus, just like trash; the value has been reduced to near-zero. The pile increases, and is a matter of the so-called “sorites paradox.”¹⁰ At what point did the pile become a pile? An experiment ensues. One object is removed, the pile is still a pile. Another object, then another. The pile is still a pile. We reach the absurd point, the point at which the “pile” contains only one object. Then, we say — ahah! — the pile is a pile because of what we suppressed before we tossed the useless object away and made it the site of accumulation. Our devaluing came first, but we were not conscious of this librating thought, the thought that “I no longer need this.”

Need is not the same thing as demand, clearly. Ernst Kris makes a fatal error when he moves from his analysis of the “aggressive” demand for love to a “passive” need, because demand and need do not divide passivity and aggressiveness but rather the consciousness from the unconscious.¹¹ The cut comes first, what is claimed as territory falling to either side of the cut comes second. The pigeon takes flight before the flight and the shadow separate. The shadow is there “from necessity,” the flight is made from intention, from the demand to cross from X to Y. Kris is correct to say that the shadow of love is a passive need for love, but the result is to reify need in relation to demand. What he should have done was tarry with the negation that separated intention from non-intention. The cut he accepts too quickly in his rush to absolve his client from responsibility has not seen that his client is “guilty before having committed the crime.” Need is *already a demand*.

This can be illustrated simply by an example Slavoj Žižek used to give in his lectures.¹² Admiring the “survival knife” beloved by his son, he noted how each of its specialized blades and tools materialized not only the intention to neutralize some dangerous threat (up to and including the evisceration of crocodiles, in his son’s version of what the knife could do) that was imagined to be menacing the neighborhoods of Ljubljana, but it materialized the threat itself in an act of double negation. His son had unknowingly re-invented the Hitchcockian key to the successful criminal thriller movie, the MacGuffin. Hitchcock was fond of telling the story of the origins of this term.

It might be a Scottish name, taken from a story about two men on a train. One man says, “What’s that package up there in the baggage rack?” And the other answers, “Oh, that’s a MacGuffin.” The first one asks, “What’s a MacGuffin?” “Well,” the other man says, “it’s an apparatus for trapping lions in the Scottish Highlands.” The first man says, “But there are no lions in the Scottish

¹⁰ Trash is created when a metonym’s two components are separated and their connection no longer makes sense. The “tenor” of the metonym, the head of the cow used to count the heard for example, becomes useless when the cow-vehicle wanders off and becomes parts of other meaning units, the cow that jumps over the moon or the cow that becomes a hamburger. The head, a “partial object,” joins other tenors (points of arguments, hands on stage, feet on the ground, etc.) as they mix promiscuously: the head (tenor) of a cow and the body (vehicle) of the Department of Sociology. Lewis Carroll constructed puzzles of this type in which tenors and vehicles were randomly mixed to create statements where each unit was repeated once as a tenor, again as a vehicle, and there were two single elements left over that, when combined, provided the “monster answer.” Lewis Carroll, *Symbolic Logic*, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/28696/28696-h/28696-h.htm>, Chapter 2, “Problems in Sorites,” 87.

¹¹ Ernst Kris, “Ego Psychology and Interpretation in Psychoanalytic Therapy,” *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 20, 1 (1951): 15–30. See the analysis in Jacques Lacan, *The Logic of Phantasy*, Seminar XIV (1966–1967); <http://www.lacanireland.com/web/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/14-Logic-of-Phantasy-Complete.pdf>, 151–152, 155.

¹² This reference is preserved in Slavoj Žižek, “Repeating Lenin,” *Lacan.com*. “When my son was a small boy, his most cherished personal possession was a special large “survival knife” whose handle contained a compass, a sack of powder to disinfect water, a fishing hook and line, and other similar items — totally useless in our social reality, but perfectly fitting the survivalist fantasy of finding oneself alone in wild nature.” I have added the crocodile.

Highlands,” and the other one answers, “Well then, that’s no MacGuffin!” So you see that a MacGuffin is actually nothing at all.¹³

This double negation would seem to be “nothing at all,” but in fact it is a “something nothing” that is key to the effectiveness of a story. Although there is no justification for this “nothing,” no basis for its existence, it is what *allows a story to be finished*. The MacGuffin is not important to the audience, but it is meaningful to the characters.¹⁴ The value is to the Other, constructed in the *act* of imputing meaning that, at the same time, the one who imputes has no access to. Lacan would write this as $S(\bar{A})$, the “signifier of the lack of the Other,” what Kris has missed in his attempt to absolve his analysand from guilt following any aggressive demand for love.

This transfer from aggressive demand to passive need has absolved the analysand, just as the Swiss Army knife has absolved the boy who carries it in his pocket for his intention to kill the first crocodile he sees. This is the self-defense argument used by police who empty the clips of their guns into the unarmed innocent who flees from them (because he knows that in all likelihood he is going to be killed). They are absolved because the “gun that did not exist” was a double not a single negation — a MacGuffin. Their readiness converted any aggressive Demand into passive, innocent Need. The pigeon lands, innocently, and is immediately trapped and taken down to the station. Or, shot on the spot.

Thus is born the unconscious and its relation to the need to be recognized by the Other, the need, ultimately, for love. For, what is love other than the acknowledgement of a mutual lack, the one for the other, in light of each’s lack. In the O. Henry story, “The Gift,” the wife cuts her long brown hair to sell so that she can afford to give her husband a gold chain for his watch, so that at work he will be admired. However, he has sold his watch to buy her a jeweled comb for her beautiful hair. The symmetry of these losses is what is touching about this story, because the motive for the sacrifice was a MacGuffin of the first water. Without this fiction, nothing can happen, nothing can be finished. *Ex falso quodlibet sequitur*.¹⁵ Without the MacGuffin there is no story because there is no symmetry between the beginning and the end.

We are at an important pivot in the idea of *conatus*. Between the nothing of need and the double nothing of demand, there is the idea of symmetry. This is not a symmetry of X to X but X to Y , the symmetry of something with something that is not only “not it,” but the opposite of it, $X \cdot Y = X/X$ and $Y/Y = 1$. So, the “1” has two versions. The first is difficult to grasp, it is the function of the number 1 in being able to compare the symmetry of anything with its opposite. This is an important issue because it holds the secret of the double negation of the MacGuffin, the way the “nothing” is needed to allow the story to be a *récit fort*, for the ending to answer to the beginning, Y to X . The other aspect of the “1” is very architectural, because it is about the insulation of any space, system, or action from disturbance, in the same way Ernst Kris wishes to *insulate* his analysand from blame by saying he *needs* love, he is not

¹³ Alfred Hitchcock, Lecture, Columbia University, 1939; quoted from “MacGuffin,” *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia*; <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MacGuffin>

¹⁴ “What is a MacGuffin? The KEY Points and KEY Examples,” *Industrial Scripts*; <https://industrialscripts.com/macguffin/>

¹⁵ “In classical logic, intuitionistic logic and similar logical systems, the principle of explosion (Latin: *ex falso [sequitur] quodlibet*, “from falsehood, anything [follows]”; or *ex contradictione [sequitur] quodlibet*, “from contradiction, anything [follows]”), or the principle of Pseudo-Scotus, is the law according to which any statement can be proven from a contradiction. That is, once a contradiction has been asserted, any proposition (including their negations) can be inferred from it; this is known as deductive explosion.” “Principle of Explosion,” *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia*; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Principle_of_explosion



Figure 5. “Vincent Van Gogh Action Figure,” *Today Is Art Day*, Kickstarter Campaign Video, 2014. The Lacanian principle of the part–object explains how castration, $-o$, applies to any organ that is subject to alienation from the body, whatever “sticks out” that can be jettisoned to survive, as the chameleon is able to shed its tail when under attack.

demanding it, aggressively, intentionally. Innocence and insulation appear together in many ideas, customs, rituals, and representations. Virgins, after all, need to be kept away from would-be lovers (Thisbe from *Pyramus*; Juliet from *Romeo*). The threat is always there. Crocodiles are wandering all over Ljubljana. But, we have our Swiss Army knives! They absolve us of criminal prosecution, just in case we decide there is someone unarmed but in need of being shot sixty times, or a pigeon who has loosed his shadow on the innocent pavement below.

Insulation can be physical (the Little Pigs must, as innocent victims, insulate themselves from the Big Bad Wolf) or metaphysical (the idea of defining an idea means to distinguish it from other ideas).¹⁶ Ideas about good and evil cannot be kept out of this. The Pigs “go to prison” although they only sought refuge (*askesis*). The large Bad Wolf, *dæmon* amply personified, is innocent in this conversion. He is neither god nor devil (*aut deus aut dæmon*). The BBW is the instrumental cause, the passive pavement that makes the shadow seem to work so hard, i. e. *conatus*. The difficulty with Vico’s “legal” definition of *conatus* is his juxtaposition of motion and rest. We cannot fully grasp the meaning of how divine rest is implicit, or virtual, within apparent motion. We can somewhat transpose this to works of art where salient agitation (the obstacle plot of a romance, the lively

exertions of dancers, the atonality of a 12-tone composition) leads “magically” to a resolution, a closure. In Wim Wenders’ *Pina*, Pina Bauch’s choreography is expanded to cover the idiosyncratic territories of “theater, or (maybe just) life” make the pigeon’s shadow romp across an innocent topography, active *illegality* across an innocent body.



Figure 6. The part of the Labyrinth that contains the Guilt of Sacrifice, the turns that are non-oriented, murderous, in order that the evenly folded passageways layered above may be innocent (the X to Y flight of the pigeon above the demented pavement and buildings below).

Nothing could be more innocent than the real projective plane, a 2-d manifold that is self-intersecting (closing) and non-oriented (“guilty”). This is the space of sacrifice of the victim to protect the building (and builders), so architecture theory must take note of it. In finishing the building, foundation ritual requires this death of someone who is completely innocent, someone who needs something but demands nothing, like the woman/man couple in the O. Henry story who sacrifice/lack *precisely* what is intentionally presented to satisfy the perceived lack — “giving what you don’t have to someone who doesn’t want it.” The “what” in this expression is the need; the husband no longer needs a chain for the watch he no longer has, but it is precisely this need that he gives to his wife, who doesn’t want it because she desires to give her husband the gold chain. Taken to the level of metonymy, it is the watch that needs

(lacks) the chain (ensemble) and the hair that needs the comb. The hair does not demand the comb in this

¹⁶ I am indebted to Claudio Sgarbi for noting that the Pigs, intending to insulate themselves from attack, convert refuge to prison and thereby re-convict themselves of guilt — who else goes to prison? — where they had initially sought the defense of innocence.

lack, *which must be perceived — recognized — by the Other*. Both husband and wife have absolved themselves in the guilt of imposing the lack on to the Other. This is the gift taken to the situation of the foundation ritual. The victim must be free of blame, i. e. unconscious. The unconscious, unintended surplus of any and every intention, must absorb all guilt: the devil within, as iconography universally attests.



Figure 7. Tim Noble and Sue Webster: *Self-Imposed Misery*, 2010, a sculpture in which a two-dimensional human silhouette emerges from the projection of a more complicated three-dimensional array. Analogously, according to Jim Holt and others, the mystery of quantum non-locality suggests that the three-dimensional space we experience might be a projection of a *lower*-dimensional reality in which the concept of distance is radically different.

Coda

A building is finished when the innocent victim is interred, usually prematurely, into the corner of the foundation.¹⁷ The finish of the building's surfaces, the patina of weathering, is finished when the chemicals constituting it form a resistant barrier insulating it from further deterioration. A work of art is finished when the ending is called to answer to the beginning, a point we may have missed since it usually occurs before we take notice, but once it is re-established, this retroactive restoration makes sense. Making sense is not an interpretation, but the intention to interpret sets up the proper charged field of play within which the "project of sense" submits itself to senselessness in order to be restored, not to any 1:1 playbook of captions annotating our original ignorance, but to the flight that soothes its troubled shadow, because it did not intend this natural byproduct. The contingent (tortured) shadow is comforted to become a "perfect shadow" as it answers to the agency that causes it, the beginning of its story.

The three senses of finishing can and must be reconciled. Finishing as patina (weathering, seeking a state of material homeostasis); finishing as the surface polish bringing the "natural material" to a state of cultural precision (seeking a state of Symbolic homeostasis — the "last word" of even performative arts); and dynamic finishing (seeking a state of closure, ending answering to beginning, in fiction or rational thought, as *idea*). In all cases, we have the principles of projective topology, self-intersection under the voluntary submission to the plight of non-orientation (e. g. the willing suspension of disbelief). When the forms of projective geometry are "immersed" into 3-space, we *see* the twist of the Möbius band, the *insertion* of the Klein bottle, the *pinch* of the cross-cap, but in reality of projectivity's 2-d space, these twists, insertions, and pinches do not actually exist. They are our brain's work-around, needed because we *think* inside Euclidean perspectivalism but *act* in the 2-d manifold of projectivity. Thus our acts — from archaic rituals on to our modern tics and symptoms — are "guilty" because we do them but "innocent" because we don't know our intentions. Humans are naturally self-sacrificing beings in a general sense, as much as the victim interred to insulate the foundation from damaging change.

Perhaps, like the pigeon who reaches the window-ledge, there will be a ledger of stories to build a metonymic staircase of nonsense, like Babel, to connect the demon to the divine. This is the meaning of *conatus*, the innocence of the victim required to secure the idempotency of the building, its ability to resist disturbance, attack, and invasion. This is the goal of continence, architecture's promise of shelter against the incontinence of external threat. To restore the idea of finishing, we should attend to its multiplicity, its proper three-fold nature.

¹⁷ Fraser describes a "Kooser work-around," where Romanian "shadow salesmen" of the 18c. would offer contractors different lengths of string to substitute for a living sacrifice. Each string had measured the shadow of some suitable victim (unawares) and would, after internment, be the cause of some gradual unexpected sickness and eventual death.