

TUCHE AND AUTOMATON

In his *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Jacques Lacan discusses accident/chance in terms of the Aristotelian division of chance into chance for subjects — *tuchē* — and chance for objects — *automaton*. Subjective chance is the “encounter with the Real,” discussed in terms of the dream. Freud recounts a patient whose son had recently died of an acute fever. The father, exhausted, slept in a room adjacent to the son, laid out for burial and attended by an aged friend. The friend fell asleep himself and did not notice that one of the candles customarily lit around the corpse of the deceased had fallen over and ignited the bed. The father, somehow able to perceive this while asleep, dreamt that his son grasped him by his arm and asked, “Father, can’t you see that I’m burning?”



The Russian philosopher-priest Pavel Florensky (*Iconostasis*, 1922) has provided us with a template for the temporal re-arrangement of such dreams. An event that awakens the dreamer is, before the sleeper actually awakes, constituted in a dream that concludes with that event. A picture hanging above the bed falls on a sleeper and the sleeper dreams of a complex series of events, seemingly taking place during the French Revolution, leading to his beheading by a guillotine. The events, which seemingly must precede the execution, must actually be constructed *after* the fall of the picture that provides the simulation of the guillotine, but they are “reconstructed” as coming before. Similarly, a sleeper whose dream concludes with the ringing of church bells starts that dream at the point of an unconscious intrusion of the actual bells.

The dream’s function, Freud reminds us, is to preserve and sustain sleep. They defend the dreamer against external intrusions by incorporating them, when necessary. The chance event, Lacan says, operates within systems constructed around both the subject, *tuchē*, and the object, *automaton*. By *automaton*, Lacan means the structure that returns us to a primal traumatic event, a Real that cannot be faced. The subject must construct a screen that prevents direct encounter — fantasy. Thus, the *matheme* for fantasy, $\$ \diamond a$, shows how this prevention is constructed in terms of alienation (adjustment within the network of symbolic relationships) and separation (the imagined death/absence of the subject). In his lecture on *tuchē* and *automaton*, Lacan explained this “screen” in terms of the dream and the “machine” of repetition that returns us to the place of the “lost/discarded object.”

In the father’s dream of the son who asks why the father does not know he is burning, the symmetries are somewhat evident. The son has died of a fever and later a fire threatens to consume his corpse — a variation on the theme of the interval “between the two deaths,” common to all cultures. The father must rest and an old friend takes his place. The friend and the father operate as twins, especially the twins designated to protect cities by a kingship that rotates in order to connect the realm of the dead with the civic space of the living — Castor and Pollux, Atreus and Thyestes, Romulus and Remus ... One stays awake (“lives”) while the other is permitted to sleep (dreams in terms of puzzles the re-arrange the significance of wishes, according to Freud). Within this set of symmetries, the father is returned to a traumatic point, the point he cannot confront in “reality” but must experience as Real, as *tuchē*. This experience is structured as a circular path that comes back to the same place, but an empty place. The Real resists assimilation by the symbolic, and thus escapes linguistic caption and (imaginary) representation. The place is empty, and the mechanism of repetition, *automaton*, constructs the circular path that “always” comes back to the same point.

The curve of this return, a self-sustaining path, can be compared to the physics of gravity, where an object in motion *aims* at a point directly ahead of it but whose *goal* is actually “itself,” in that its future location will be precisely the point it had left originally. It is the difference between goal and aim, Lacan says, that is the proof that “desire is the desire of the Other” — a problematic force-field by which the subject constructs itself within its material body. The subject wants what the Other wants it to want, but the subject does not know, and

the Other is unable to inform, what this "it" is. This is the lost object, the *objet petit a*, which Lacan designates as an object that "thinks on behalf of the subject," a "subjective object."

The automaton gets past the traditional account of stages by which the child develops, moving from oral, to anal, to phallic organization. While it is true that these apparent "steps" are based on the shifts of the issue of demand and need (the child demands nourishment — but is unaware of this — and the breast provides milk, the mother demands the child's control of his/her feces, the child must come to terms with sharing the mother's desire for the father), Lacan assures us that all of the stages revolve around the primal trauma, the fear of castration — a sexual scene. Like the dream where the event that awakens the dreamer is recast in terms of a sequence that must be constructed so that it can be read "in reverse," putting the first event last so to speak, the developmental stages are constructed in retrospect, a kind of unconscious of the subject where the adult "awakes" from childhood by confirming the role of the father, in negative terms. "Father, can't you see that I'm burning" thus returns the child as well as the father to the same empty spot — the father's inability to save his son from illness and death. The child has not killed the father literally, rather the sentence is read in the negative to produce the Oedipal formula. The agent has shifted, the son has become the father. The act has also been inverted. The father has not *not* killed his son. He was not negligent but he still feels guilt over his son's death. The son's absence has created a deeper, radically negative gap that the unconscious must return to, automatically. Thus, Schreber's "not-not" structure of intransitive agents and acts that have him fear the hatred of his analyst, Fleschig, is the inverse of *his* love for Fleschig, something that he cannot confront, as a man who must admit that he is loving a man.

The square that one can construct to play out Schreber's negations, with one boundary to cross to effect a change of agent, another to convert the act of love to hate, has been "rounded" by shifting these boundaries to the *cardus* (north-south) and *decumanus* (east-west) of the Roman *castrum* and city. Return is now a matter of the cardinal points and the natural and subjective humors that are distributed around them. They provide physical places for the two species of Real that Lacan identifies: an "internal Real," a gap or defect that one encounters amidst the smooth operation of reality; and an "external Real," whose authority resides simply in the fact that it contains all that we know "contingently" and, therefore, must be "non-contingent," in the same way that the edge of the known universe (*æcumene*) is saturated with doubt and supposition, while the realm beyond reason and the senses is, by definition, radically authoritative, i.e. not yet contaminated by our desire to know it.

The circular return to the Real, the gap, engineered by the two negations, constitute the machine of fantasy. The origin is conceived as both the same (*tuchē*) and opposite ("antipode") the goal; thus the aim perpetually results in a curved motion. Inside and outside are constructs of this circle. Pascal's description of God as an "infinite sphere whose center is everywhere and circumference nowhere" is thus a quite accurate description of the relation between the "internal Real," R_2 , and the "external Real," R_1 , and the subjects we construct from the spare parts of the uncanny: the living being with a kernel of fate at its center, driven to meet its fate at some pre-assigned Samarra; and the deceased subject who "does not know it is dead" — i.e. is unconscious, dreaming, surrounded by puzzle pieces of unrealized wishes.

It is helpful to conceive of this machine as running on a fuel of metonymy, and here we are reminded that Lacan "translated" the Structuralists' model of mind and language, based on the contrast of metaphor and metonymy, into his *matheme*, \diamond , of anxiety and separation as components in the gapped circle "completed" by the subject in fantasy. Metonymy can be the original element "dropped out" in the construction of the Other as a "barred" Other (A-cross), an Other with a void at its center. In Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, we have the "alternate reading" of the story as a death narrative begun with the fall of the policemen Scotty, during a roof-top chase. In the screen of fantasy Scotty constructs to conceal his own death, he becomes simply "a policeman," the uniformed officer who takes his place in the filmed account of the chase. We must remember that Oedipus is one who "takes the place of the father" to avoid castration, being killed by the father, something that was actually attempted at the beginning of Sophocles' tragic play. "Taking the place" means creating a place, and this place is simultaneously subjective, in the "Schreber sense" of using double negatives to account for his

original love of Fleschig, and objective, in the relation of this double negative to the *cardus* and *decumanus* of cosmic space localized by the city's *templum*. *Vertigo*, which thematically embodies this dropped out theme/explanation through the doubly negated image of the beloved, Madeleine/Judy, is reflected again in Madeleine's pretended obsession with Carlotta, a dead ancestor who seems to command Madeleine's own suicide. That this is a device to lead Scotty around to witness events as his handlers require insure that he will be a perfect witness (a former policeman with "time on his hands") by the time of the inquest into the (actual) Madeleine's death. This is the future-anterior, the "time by which" a past will have been put in place, i.e. the structure of the dream according to Florensky, Freud, and Lacan.

The dropped-out subject, Scotty as "fallen," is the dream-code that combines guilt and actual death, just as the father whose son complains that he can't see that he's burning conflates both death, sleep, neglect and absence as well as the inversion of father and son, the Oedipal exchange. Scotty doesn't fall in his fantasy, he attempts to climb a bell tower but at first cannot reach the top. This dark remainder conceals the exchange of Judy and Madeleine, in terms of the literal plot and the Lacanian reading. It is also a top that is in actuality the final trauma of death at the end of Scotty's fall, as the animated dream sequences clearly tell.