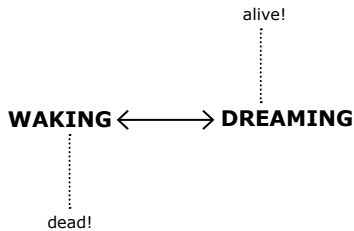
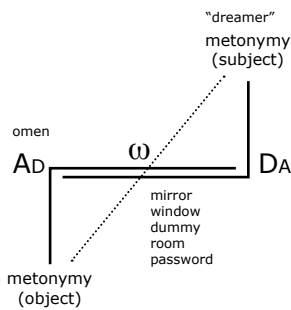


# DEAD OF NIGHT: fantasy as fantastic

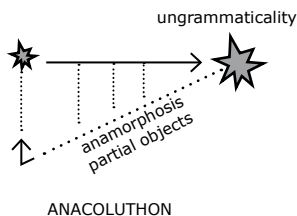
Cavalcanti's *Dead of Night* (1945) is a "portmanteau" work, an anthology of five tales by almost as many directors (Charles Crichton, Basil Deardon, and Robert Hamer as well as Cavalcanti). In the spirit of Gingsrich tales told at Christmas time, a group of British country-folk are gathered in a parlor when a stranger, Walter Craig, arrives, an architect engaged to refurbish the farmstead. He has a "flashback" or *déjà vu* experience that he has met everyone before and that the happy gathering will come to a horrible ending. As the guests defend Craig's vision against the guest-psychiatrist's skepticism, each tells a tale in turn, and even the psychiatrist contributes a scary tale of his own. The anthology structure is a part of the magic, since all stories involve one form or other of a "defective representation": a mirror that replays its past reflections, a window that predicts the future, a room that shelters a 200-year-old crime, and a dummy that dominates his master. Anthology, as a story-in-a-story, is the basis of the exposition function, where the experience of the work of art is turned at a right angle to consider its own validity. This "chiaroscuro" (rotation type) allows the narrative to fold, swirl, pivot, and re-infect itself from the inside out — a pure case of Lacanian *extimité*.



In dreams, we see dead "who don't know they are dead." Craig's waking (?) expositional life is haunted by the *déjà vu* feeling and, like causality, we see how the waking/dreaming relationship has a gap, a malfunction.



Metonymical objects are easy to spot: magic mirrors, rooms with dead boys. The metonymical subject is Craig himself, who stands before his representational dream like the fiancé with the naughty mirror.



Craig's ungrammaticality is his discovery that he recognizes the guests at the house-party; and the subsequent stories the guests tell fall into the zone of anamorphosis: partial objects such as haunted windows and rooms that disobey their normal architectural functions.

**Mi-Dire.** Science is like a narrator that we command to tell "the whole truth and nothing but the truth." But, what if science would be better if, precisely, it told (1) half the truth and (2) mixed truth with falsehoods? This is the brilliant insight that Vico and Lacan brought quietly to the human sciences. Vico introduced the idea of the unreliable narrator — until then simply a literary/poetic technique, and Lacan later deployed *mi-dire*, "half-speech," a technique borrowing from Gödel's idea that you can either tell all the truth and be inconsistent or half the truth and maintain continuity. The "half" of *mi-dire*, however, is carefully calculated to fall at a geometrically significant point: at a position defined by rhetoric to balance between chance and necessity. One might think of this as a balance point, and in some ways Lacan uses his own glyph, the *pointon* ( $\diamond$  or  $\langle \rangle$ ), "both lesser and greater than, a version of the extimate), to suggest that such a "no place" is also a unique, singular place, an "*Eigenvalue*," in matrix math terms (Eigen = "unnate"), also an example of a special kind of voice known as the *voix acousmatique*. This is the point of the object-cause of desire, the suture line of the partial object, the "impossible-Real" moment when inside and outside change places.

This would be quite confusing if *Dead of Night* did not present us with five straightforward popular culture examples taken from the traditions of the folkloric uncanny. When Vico discovered and developed his version of the "defective narrator," he used his *Autobiography* to cultivate an image of the mad genius, *aut deus aut dæmon*, both melancholy and choleric (the "dry line" in terms of the four humors). In *Dead of Night*, the defective narrator is given various forms: a window with a view of the future, a mirror that remembers the past, a room that captures an 18c. inhabitant, a puppet that reverses the causal direction of speech. Each of these objects, a case of  $D_A$ , or the automaton-Golem version of the partial object, comes from a tradition of uncanny openings/enclosures, known in some version to all cultures and protected by spells, practices, and rituals, many of them connected to seasonal anxiety-points. Significantly, we also have the wiring diagram that connects  $D_A/AD$  with the two types of chiaroscuro: the "frontal" version that delays direct projection of cause from representation to reception, and the "rotated" version that views its own process "from the side," in a *mise-en-abîme* position. The "hole in front and hole in back" of Picasso's "Desmoiselles d'Avignon" and Velázquez's "Las Meninas" can also be found in the uncanny's chiaroscuro of  $\langle \rangle$ , where these conditions of the outer boundary are applied to the central point where dimensions collapse at a moment of discovery, Aristotle's *anagnorisis*, the thin space separating the false frame from the "real one" is akin to the boundary between death and life in antiquity, the River Styx. As if to resolve the debate between Newton and Leibnitz about the infinity or finitude of the universe, souls actually never leave this river. It is the site of their death dream, their Lacanian "between the two deaths." There is no space of reception (Paradisio), but this non-existence is like the -i, the  $\sqrt{-1}$ . It is like a proper name, what Vico deployed in the form of "reversed antinomasia." Chiaroscuro<sub>1</sub> is, therefore, a case of  $D_A$ . Chiaroscuro<sub>2</sub> is implied by the circularity of this river-boundary. The  $AD$  version of these linked versions of chiaroscuro can be found in the *Dead of Night* sequence of the ventriloquist whose puppet gets the upper hand. Here, the human performer, 'A' is haunted by an internal  $D$ , the puppet who finds the sweet spot in his master's psyche, his fear of being abandoned by his own creation, his own voice. The voice he creates for his wooden dummy attains autonomy and threatens to leave, courting another ventriloquist they happen to meet in a night club.

The position of the anthology, the commonplace literary means of telling other stories inside another story or "covering device," is both a case of *mise-en-abîme* — and therefore a mild case of the uncanny in itself — and a model for all forms of the uncanny. It creates a boundary between reception and representation that disobeys the rules of projective reality by allowing time to reverse, space to hop, and characters to escape their creators. An Eigenvalue is an innate vector in the case of the production of a shadow in the sense that only the object that creates the shadow has the point of view (POV) from which the shadow may be perceived in its exact size and shape, despite the terrain onto which it's projected. Any other POV is oblique and, like projections of the earth, must sacrifice either shape or size in order to create a flat map. Here we must also think of the boundary as a depiction of the "innate dysfunction of causality itself." Cause is really a function, a set of rules for transforming prior conditions to subsequent states. Portrayed as a line, the function is a metonymic opera-

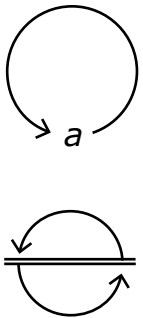


tor crossed by vectors that relocate one set of values into another domain. Causality is defective cause because metonymy does not remain neutral. It is a line that contaminates its metaphoric function, representation, by "rotating" into the dimension of its own crossing. It should have been dead and concealed (the Freudian version of the uncanny), but it contains an element of life: DA. This is also Lacan's notion of the unconscious, an "automaton" that is like a machine that omits nothing (e.g. a mirror that cannot refuse any scene put before it) but "goes rogue" by adding its own combinatorial rules, as when the Chippendale mirror in the second story in *Dead of Night* re-displays a scene it "remembered" from a previous owner's bedroom. This is the unconscious, put into the folklore of the uncanny. In DA we find the counterpart to waking life, AD, the subject haunted by the omen of the dream or the unconscious anxiety. The phenomenon of the proper name shows us how metalepsis and analepsis work in the anacoluthon to use the  $\sqrt{-1}$  as a model of the Real. The proper name is the "call" of George Spencer-Brown's non-numerical calculus, which in a curved space becomes the voice from nowhere (" $> = .$ ", the inverse of the usual axiom, " $>> = >$ "). Spencer-Brown's other axiom, " $>> = .$ " (a cross and cross again are equivalent to no cross) becomes " $>> = >$ ", the uncanny residual, the trap of the souls who would cross the Styx

but find themselves in a circular purgatory that returns to the object-cause of desire. In a flat space, the axioms work in the usual way, but it is always uncertain whether or not to count the edge of the representational surface — the literal paper on which the formulas are written! The edge of the canvas is a big issue in painting, where it is the model for the chiaroscuro employed formally when the frame is depicted inside the space of representation. In the calculus, it means that any expression can be either "marked or unmarked," 1 or 0. This is the condition of extreme anamorphosis,  $\omega$ , where it is impossible to decide between reality and the dream, the DA or the AD condition. Of course, this is also the specification of the partial object, whose metonymic structure does not allow it to merge smoothly with its surroundings. It is an Eigenvalue, whose location collapses/destroys dimensionality and opens up space through "worm-holes" connecting to other times and other places.

Windows, mirrors, doors, haunted rooms, etc. show how closely architecture is involved with the discovery of "Eigenpositions" that, like the sweet-spot of sound or visual projections, re-create the POV requirement of the traditional anamorphic image, that the viewer stand in one spot that allows the graphic construction of intelligible form. All recognition is, in some way, a version of anamorphic Eigenposition. It may involve a spatial location only or, as is more usual, a specific temporal sequence. The labyrinth is a model for this positioning and was, in Iron-Age hill fortresses, used to allow admission to the protected interior only after an elongated process of testing and questioning, where visitors rode in a trench while being supervised (and provoked) by armed guards standing on the tops of the ramparts.

No less do the jokes known as tongue-twisters demand the (usually drunken) initiate to repeat a complicated series of hard-to-pronounce syllables. POV and anagnorisis are idealized in the image known as the *mons delectus*, where a labyrinth is surmounted by a temple. This is the model of all architecture: a secular forum in front of a forbidden sacred space. The secular forum in *Dead of Night* is the parlor, a harmless domestic space filled with friends happily anticipating a yummy dinner after an afternoon spent telling ghost stories. Craig, the architect, has another version in mind, a version with a sacrifice; a forum with a temple, THE temple. The Bible tells us of the secret construction of the Temple of Solomon, involving joints, ratios, and other construction techniques that were themselves a text, a sacred speech. In order for Hiram (هاريح, פריח, "high born") to build the Temple, he must, according to a Masonic play, employ a secret password. He is killed when he fails to reveal this password to three ruffians who have captured him. Here we have a connection to the Lacanian idea of the password, a word that is taken out of the sequence of signifiers ( $S_2$ ) and given a special, unique function. This is the reverse of the proper name, which comes in to the sequence of signifiers as a negative value (not having existed before, but subsequently serving as a "call"). Both the password and the proper name have the quality of  $\sqrt{-1}$ , and both have a relation to architecture as a remainder that is both inside and outside ( $<>$ ) the symbolic network that gives it meaning. ONLY the relation to architecture explains what this means, because in the construction of the so-called Golden Rectangle, the function of  $\emptyset$  is as a remainder that returns the value of the whole to the center of the expression ( $\emptyset = 1 + 1/\emptyset$ ). The importance of this rectangle, the ubiquity of it in natural patterns, and the ultimate relation of  $\emptyset$  to the phenomenon of fractals shows how the DA/AD relationship, also written as  $<>$ , is primarily architectural.



Both the gapped circle and the rotation of doubles describe the central logic of the stories in the film, and in turn these relate such Gingrich tales back to the primary foundation rites that used the theme of the murdered twin to talk about the relation between the "incommensurables," death/life, waking/dreaming, etc.

If architectural, is it also a part of the "four architectures" that Lacan describes in terms of primary discourses? The key here is the relation of the film *Dead of Night* to the discourse of analysis. In this form of discourse, the subject is bound ( $\$$ ) by a fate and forced to watch his own dream unfold. Craig wants to wake up from the nightmare, but he cannot completely see the whole of it. He is both the spectator of others fantasies (a) and the director of the film's exposition content where the master signifier creates versions of the DA/AD relationship through uncanny devices such as windows that see the future, mirrors that reflect the past, etc. The key,  $S_2$ , is knowledge, just as the password in the case of Hiram or the travelers in the enfilades of the labyrinth-forts needed only to be known to be used successfully: that is, knowledge here is not "knowing something" but, paradoxically, "being known by something." One doesn't have memories, memories have one; perceptions are not projected outward in a Cartesian way but, rather, projected towards the subject. This weird reversal has been known since antiquity and employed in projects that leave no doubt that the consequences of reversal are understood completely, as in the case of the "Theater of Memory" devised by Giulio Camillo, where the audience of one occupies a small stage and the "actors" look on from what seem to be the seats of an auditorium — "auditorium" in a deep sense, because it is the acoustic-acousmatic nature, the voice-quality, that is the key to the password-as-knowledge. The final tale, told by the psychiatrist (!), shows how this reversal takes place. Pay attention!