

Poché: *Encadrement* as Enclosure



The dominant sense of framing is that of a border around a work of visual art. However, the same functional relationships can be found in the material mediations of entering, enclosing, etc., where the relation of inside and outside is dynamic and transformative and where the alternation between conditions of containing and being contained are used to signify. For example, in a theater, the stage frames content while the viewing space is darkened. Viewers are made temporarily "blind" to themselves and each other. In other spaces structured by an audience function, such as the art museum, there may be no literal darkening of the viewing space, but the idea is that while the work of art "speaks," the audience is silent, at least symbolically. This "negation" of the viewer is paralleled by less obvious cases of moving from an outside to an inside: when passengers board a train, ship, or plane, when people "disappear" into a building, or when a body is buried. One agent or space becomes active while the other falls silent. As when an object is put into a box to make it a gift, certain transformations take place that make unwrapping a gift something more than simply unpacking it. This transformation may be evident only when entrance and exit are made more significant by the nature of some special event. Compare, in this regard, going to and from work in an office building to and arriving at and departing from a wedding ceremony. In the former, enclosure is simply a matter of convenience, decorum, and safety considerations. In the latter, enclosure is *encadrement* — a dynamic transformation of both space and space's contents.

In most acts of everyday containment we might overlook the role of the frame, but where the function of transformation is more obvious, *encadrement* stands for the combination of two kinds of negation: linear or subtractive negation ($-x$) and inversion ($1/x$). These components are twinned in the charged situations of art and, some would say, the primal psychology that constructs the foundations of all space. Inversion ($1/x$) is about the reversal that takes place when the container is itself contained. Subtractive negation is about the appearance and disappearance of subjects as they move from one space to another. Architectural portals are special cases of a generic condition of enclosure. The portal that is at first contained by the view from a distance becomes the frame that swallows up the entrant. At the same time, the portal effects a "cancellation" of the entrants who pass through it. The doorway that serves as a frame of enclosure acts as an organ: a mouth, with digestion as the most informative metaphor; or, better, an "eye" in both the sense of an opening as well as of an optical organ that gazes back at the subject. This mouth leads to a digestive tract, most vividly represented as the labyrinth of small intestines. The $-x$ of subtractive negation is functionally linked to inversion as digestive incorporation ($1/x$).

The connection of these two kinds of negation by the frame-as-enclosure is most obvious in the case of "between the two deaths," the interval during which the soul is delayed from its final rest by a journey punctuated by trials or tests. Most cultures assign this as the period of mourning. Between the first, literal death and a final, symbolic death, the soul is weighed, judged, instructed, made to remember. In most cultures the first death is associated with ingestion, as in the obvious Roman case of internment in a "sarcophagus," whose name literally means "eater of flesh." Funeral fires were intended to hasten the process of removing moist flesh from dry bone. At the end of cremation, it was the eldest son's duty to search for the deceased's bones from among the ashes and declare, "He is a god!" This was not a heretical elevation of the deceased to the status of an all-powerful spiritual being but, rather, a recognition that the deceased had reached the end of the process of uncertainty and judgment.¹



The universality of the logic of *encadrement* is evident by comparing the supposedly specific aspects of the process of between-the-two-deaths to more ordinary acts of enclosure. The link between subtractive negation, $-x$, and inversion, $1/x$, constitutes a kind of translation device. In inversion as a literal "sublation" of x , the soul is subordinated to a rule of law and held accountable. In the negation of death, this rule is brought to bear as the soul is judged. The end of the process is punishment or reward. But, consider the more mundane act of wrapping a gift. A gift involves more than simply putting an object into a container and removing it later. An object is concealed ($-x$) beneath fancy decorative wrappings ($1/x$) and opened the recipient. If the gift is received with pleasure, the result is comparable to the soul successfully passing judgment in the underworld. The soul cleared of previous sin isn't returned to life but rather received into a new state. Similarly, the wrapping/unwrapping sequence does not return the object to its original owner ($+x$); rather the process ends with a transfer of ownership. Inversion (concealment/disguise) is not "complemented" by negation of giving. Rather, it is the concealment that allows the transfer to be accomplished as a gift and not simply a purchase or loan.



Consider the complex Euripides play, *Alceste*. In return for his hospitality to the exiled god Hermes, King Admetus is given immortality under the *proviso* that he find someone willing to die in his place. He can find no one to do this except his wife, Alceste. The famous hero, Hercules, arrives at just the moment when Alceste is being treated to her funeral, and Admetus, ever one to pander after celebrities, is keen to host the hero but conceals the fact that his wife has died, lest his guest be put off. Hercules, however, discovers the identity of the deceased and the story of her sacrifice. Feeling the injustice of this "bargain," Hercules uses his heroic prerogative to travel to Hades and return alive in order to demand that the gods of the underworld return the self-sacrificing Alceste. They agree with him and allow Alceste to return to the realm of the living. To punish Admetus for his selfishness, Hercules plans a joke, however. He leads Alceste under a veil, telling Admetus that he has brought the king a young bride to replace his deceased wife. Admetus at first resists, mindful of the promise he had made to Alceste — her only condition — that he would not remarry. The weak-willed Admetus quickly discards this promise, only to be shocked when Hercules reveals that his gift is in fact the wife whose death Admetus had so recently mourned.

The theme of the gift shows how *Alceste* embodies the logic of double negation. Admetus cannot *remarry*, but of course Alceste is not the gift of a new wife that Hercules at first suggests. She is a "bride" in a way that confirms the metaphor of death as a marriage of the deceased and death, a theme reversed in marriage ceremonies of living couples, where the bride is literally enshrouded. The custom lying behind these crisscross customs and costumes has to do with the wife's role as a priestess of Hestia, goddess of the hearth (and, hence, all household cooking). The hearth was the mouth mediating the relationships of the family with the deceased ancestors (the *manes*, later better known as the Lares and Penates). The daughters of a family were also dedicated to the flame of the hearth, and in a formal sense married to it, just as Vestals, the "public brides of Rome," were married to the civic flame representing the collective ancestors of the city. When a daughter was given in marriage, a ruse had to be invented to avoid retribution by her family's *manes*. The ruse was death. The bride feigned death by her veil and passivity — leading to the symbolic mime of forced abduction, the survivor of which is the custom of carrying the bride across the threshold of her husband's house.

Just as the gift must be concealed before it is given, the bride must be "negated" by feigning death/abduction (death is also regarded as a form of abduction — cf. the myth of Persephone) in order to be presented as a gift. In the case of *Alceste*, the ambiguity between a gift and Admetus's deceased wife, whom he "already possessed," is the basis of this farce. While it was natural to conceal a bride-as-gift, it was also doubly customary to use the veil as the obliga-

tory sign of death. The logic was reversed to create the comedy: instead of disguising the gift as "dead," or "coming from the domain of all valuable goods, Hades, this actual *émigré* from Hades is disguised as a gift. The re-inscription of gift-as-dead-as-gift embodies the logic of Lacan's *poinçon* (\diamond , $B > B$) by highlighting the paradox of identity.

Poché, the pocket or, more generally, the pocket-space *logic* that applies to all framed, enclosed objects, thus employs the $-x$ nature of subtractive negation and $1/x$ quality of inversion to create "spaces within spaces" that are, essentially, sites of transformation. The pocket is a force-field, which manifests a space-time version of the Lacanian "partial object," a piece of the external real beyond the limits of the senses that has been imported into the center of reality, an "extimate" island of the Real, whose *circumnavigation* involves the contradictory experience of "dispossessed possession," "visible invisibility," and "the presence of absence."

-
1. It was not uncommon to assert that some mortals could achieve the spiritual perfection attained by most only after death, "becoming gods" without the necessity of dying. The late Latin author Macrobius tells of how this status was given to the Emperor Augustus (with some justification) and proclaimed by other emperors (famously, Caligula) who were simply motivated by megalomania.