

## between the two frames

The double nature of negation — i.e. the presence of *two types of negation* in any instance of negation — is a radical idea. It means, fundamentally, that for every binary signifier, the process of occultation is a given. In other words, there is no binary without the sublation of one term in relation to the other, in a process of concealment that foreshadows a future revelation in the form of a “return” to a position of origination, Lacan’s idea that “the letter always reaches its destination.” Negation has, thus, a left hand and right hand; it is chiralistic. Its symmetry is a “supersymmetry” — parts that add up to both more than and less than a whole, where surplus is equal to gap/loss.

This process of binary division, sublation, foreshadowing, and return is modeled by the rhetorical figure of *metalepsis*, a type of metonymy that is simultaneously open to unlimited “extended meanings” (open semiosis) while at the same time it is intensely self-referential, forming a monad-style closed system of significations. *Metalepsis* constructs what could be called an “internal theater of meaning,” where showing and watching take place inside the work of art as a kind of parody to the “show” of the work to an external audience. In this theater, *catalepsis* affects two “competing” poles alternately — *palintropos*. One part of the *metalepsis* system must be silent while the other is active. At the same time — and as a consequence of this temporal alternation — a cross-inscription takes place to plant each pole of the binary into the heart of its opposite. This process takes place between the frames that divide the two polar domains, frames with space between that functions as a semantic passageway where, like the labyrinth of Theseus, revelation takes on a “monstrous” form.

Negation’s two modalities, binary opposition/occultation and cross-inscription, constitute a “machine” that, discovered by every culture, becomes the basis for the development of institutions of all kinds (i.e. not just the arts and religion but practical and scientific activities) that, like human organs, must regulate transactions that cross over from an outside to an inside and back again. A naïve map of this “organic” transaction would draw a bounded space with portals where guards check the credentials of all who would enter and inspect the baggage of those who would leave. Instead, double negation means that traffic across this boundary involves perpetual contraband. Žižek retells the story of the retired factory guard and worker who meet after retirement. The guard always suspected the worker of smuggling, but he never found anything in the wheelbarrow the worker pushed home. “Now that we’re both retired,” the guard asks, “what was it that you were smuggling all those years?” The worker finally admits: “Wheelbarrows.”

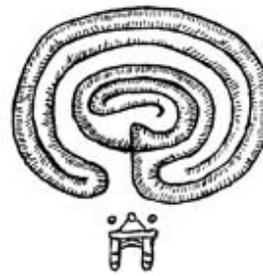
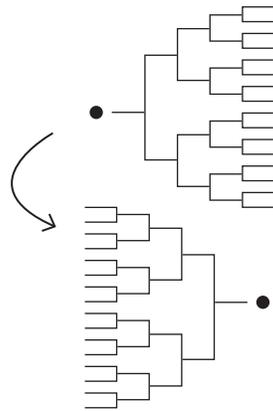
The point is not that the worker plays a trick on a guard who presumes too quickly, but that the medium is also the message, that its apparent “silence” in the transmission of meanings is a *catalepsis*, a sleep, that allows a secondary negational process, in which, so to speak, cross-inscription smuggles meanings by making the contained the container itself. This second form of negation possesses the key to the first form’s use of occultation. The two forms taken together constitute a “master key” to cultural formations, institutions that are, like “organs,” means of defining cultural life by creating systems of distinctions. This process goes past the usual resources of (Western) philosophy, which traditionally focuses on the inadequacy of appearances in relation to truth. In the double negation model, truth flashes suddenly and briefly within the fragile instances of appearance, whose falsity and ephemerality are essential to truth’s evanescent flashes. Within the structure of passing moments, truth appears and disappears — its loss and impermanence are essential to its relation to Being.

Only occasionally do philosophers realize the problem: Heraclitus, Zeno, Plato, Vico, Hegel ... the list is short.<sup>1</sup> In all cases paradox plays the key role; the thinker must face a special kind of difficulty, one that engages the identity of the thinker him/herself — and ties that identity to the very act of thought that engages it. On the other hand, the fragility of this truth is the basis of cultures’ most durable and most universal formations. Any account of this *metalepsis/catalepsis* of double negation works as a Rosetta Stone able to see, in any culture, the operation of “culture itself,” independent of the particular geographical or historical circumstances of a specific culture’s development. Thus it is important to create an *open model* that allows for multiple, varied readings. There is no single argument or thought pathway; the issue of double negation must be continually thought and re-thought. Analogies should be cooked and quickly eaten, like confections that will spoil if left for a day. Like the cultural products of double negation, the critical theory of double negation cannot state for once and for all how things work; it must repeatedly travel across the terrain like a band of itinerant actors, opening the caravan wagon for a comedy here, a tragedy there, a farce somewhere else.

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<sup>1</sup> Present day thinkers can be measured in relation to how they relate to this “original” issue of double negation. Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Lacan get top marks, Deleuze (not Guattari) turns in good work and passes the course, Foucault fails to show for the final exam. Key pages are missing from Heidegger’s thesis; Habermas, having proven that “the half-life of missing the point is forever,” flunks. The others drop out of school to become ideology salesmen.

Cross-inscription involves a symmetry between opposite conditions. Jentsch's "primary atoms" of the uncanny — (1)  $A_D$ , the living subject who is haunted by the spectre of death awaiting him and (2)  $D_A$ , the dead subject who, after literal death, has "forgotten how to die" until he dies symbolically — are opposites, but within each the generative logic is also that of opposition/negation. Thus, AD imagines that personal choice constructs a tree that branches out from a single trunk, while death meets him with a reverse tree that moves from multiple branches to a single, fatal trunk.



inside → outside  
=  
outside → inside

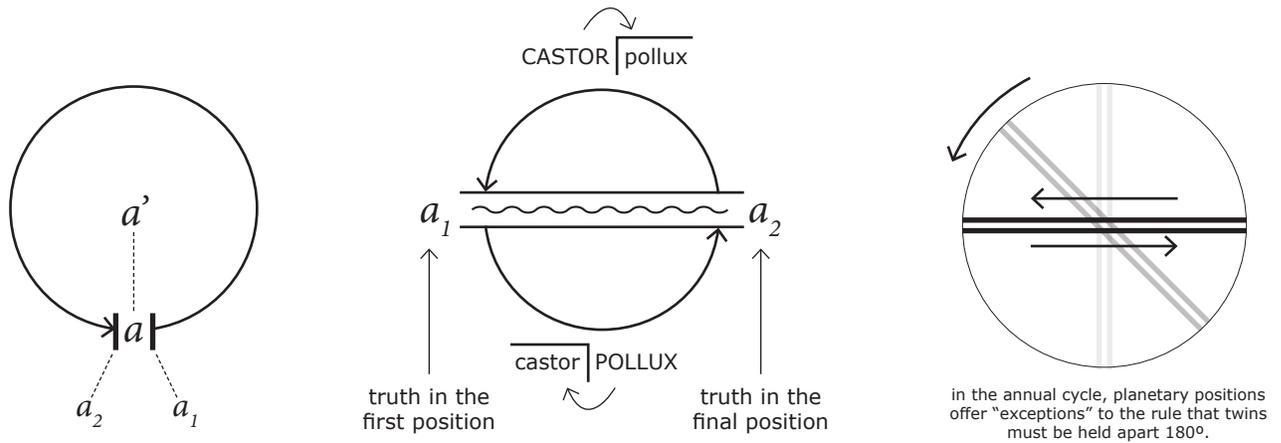
The dead subject who has forgotten how to die faces the paradox that even in death, one is afraid of dying! Movement becomes a kind of floating, a momentum past an initial push, and the logic of motion becomes the logic of fluid mechanics: flows and turbulence. While fear of the first death is absent (and creates a floating sensation), the fear of a second death constructs a pure form of anxiety that is both portable and durable. The model is that of Icarus, challenged to find a space mid-way between the sun and the sea. Icarus's fall into the "second death" reveals the rule: the middle is also the edge.

**I** / The space between the two "frames" of binary opposition also has its "between the frames" conditions — offered in two different flavors: one for the subject fleeing death, another for the subject who has forgotten how to die. These are signatures of the main "atoms" of the uncanny according to Ernst Jentsch, but both Freud and Anthony Vidler failed to take up the theme of symmetry in their accounts. Had Vidler seen the connection, he would have noticed the many architectural correlates that make all true architectural conditions into some form of the uncanny, rather than exceptions to the "norms" of *Venustas*. Had Freud grasped this distinction of symmetries he would have been able to move directly to the issue of death drive, the energy underlying all of the drives (oral, anal, phallic), a cycle of repetitions that sum to (1) circle around an inaccessible center, an object that holds desire within an equally distributed gravitational field; and (2) a gap *in this same circle*, created by the central object that, now as an obstacle to passage, constitutes a "short circuit" in the pleasure principle, giving pain equal capacity to produce the pleasure that gives rise to desire's forward/regressive motion towards its goal.

Lacan "repaired" Freud's failure to give the uncanny a proper role in desire by inventing and applying the idea of extimacy, a "geometry of inside-to-outside" in the idea of an "intimate exterior" and "alien interior" (the inside frame). "Extimacy" affects each "part-object" correlative to each of the drives (anal/shit; oral/breast; phallic/penis); but Lacan went further to specify the gaze as part-object of a "scopic drive" and the voice, an (acoustic) call as the part-object of an aural drive.

Just as Lacan "fixes" Freud with an inside-out theory, Vidler's (ideological) error of relying on a model of norm-and-exception can be repaired by going back to the idea of space and time itself. The "repair" in this case requires fusing space and time to view architecture in terms of the performative instants where *Venustas* makes a brief, fragile appearance and then vanishes. It would however be a further error to regard this moment as insubstantial. Rather, it is an instant so perfectly structured that it escapes capture by ideology (Lacan's  $S_1$ ), discourse, and the Symbolic-Imaginary modes of subjectivity. It is, in short, the Real of architecture, temporally structured to avoid being confused with or assimilated by "reality" that is ideologically constituted (Lacan's  $S_2$ , "knowledge").

Lacan's fix relied on *l'objet petit a*, the "indefinable term," the so-called object-cause of desire, the kernel of the Real that exists in "chiralistic negation," which resists theory as much as it resists assimilation into any aspect of symbolic experience or imaginative/fantasy constructs. The *a* can be said to be the "tipping point" between Jentsch's "atoms,"  $A_D$  and  $D_A$ ; the internal "supersymmetry" of both the subject fleeing death only to meet it, thanks to the structure of its flight and the momentum of the subject who has forgotten how to die, who moves along a meandering enfilade (labyrinth) thinking that turns to the outside are turns to the inside. The *a* is also the difference between  $A_D$  and  $D_A$ , what makes them two versions of the same *Unheimlich* condition. It is both the center of the circle about which the subject is held in a fixed orbit, and the gap in that orbit where impasse takes on the form of a password, a liminal passageway, a loss of subjectivity that is also the reincarnation of the old subject into a new body.



2 / The “ethnographic proof” (Vico’s “philosophical/philological” method) can be engaged once the functions of double negation are “calibrated” to align with mythological and religious narratives. The *objet petit a*, “object-cause of desire,” which resists domestication within the Symbolic ( $S_2$ ), is the gap in the drive that returns, like the rock of Sisyphus, to the same point after every labor. There are two “moments” to this gap, the moment of departure, where impetus pushes drive outward but where it will be deflected by the gravity of the gap, which is also the center of the circle. Just as it almost completes a full 360° circuit, the drive encounters a “moment of truth,” a final truth to complement the original truth — the obverse of its own origins and an understanding of how, thanks to the “occultation” of *a*, drive had been led by the illusion of a goal.

As a theory of subjective drives, the gapped circle may seem abstract. But, there are correlates to the gapped circle in history that provide “objective” (unmotivated) versions of this theory. These are the “philological” aspects of the “philosophical” (or, rather, psychoanalytical) idea. Where the former must rely on clinical evidence and deductive terminologies, the latter involve layers of traditions, rituals, narratives, and material practices. The case of the gapped circle is particularly rich, for it is foreshadowed historically by a wealth of foundation rites, the majority of which play out the idea of the circle through the theme of twins, one mortal, one immortal, who share in mortality by rotating across a watery boundary separating the living above from the dead in Hades below. Because Hades means literally “invisible,” we additionally have a means of talking about appearance and disappearance in terms of these twins and their rotating immortality.

Castor and Pollux are the guardian spirits of Rome, but Rome’s foundation involves a permutation of the Castor-Pollux formula. Romulus and Remus, also twins, set about to establish a city by first plowing a schematic wall, a trench in the earth. Remus mocks this symbolic gesture by jumping over the trench without proper observances, and his impiety is punished by death. This story of fratricide abbreviates many key details — the involvement of human sacrifice in securing a space from magical or military means; the need for a “twinned kingship” to rule simultaneously in the land of the living and the land of the dead; the necessity for the king to have “two bodies,” one as mortal as any other, but another entirely based on the Symbolic; and the need to key-in the civic calendar to astrological and astronomical events. Even the murder and its concealment are significant: the need for Law, epitomized by the command not to kill, to be commanded and enforced by one who is exempt.

Ethnographies such as this one are used not simply to “prove” the validity of psychoanalytic concepts, rather the point is to use ethnography to uncover aspects of theory that have not been discovered or have remained obscure, and, in the other direction, to use theory to predict the existence of hitherto undiscovered ethnographic details. For example, the involvement of the double frame idea expands the Lacanian *objet petit a* gap into a passage-way. Ethnographic correlates point to the key aspect of this passage: a fluid, a “river.” Ethnography again qualifies: the river is circular (corresponding to the circle of the calendar year, the retreat and advance of the sun). And, the gap is found again, in the guise of the tradition of a gap in the calendar year, devoted to mis-rule, inversions, and fool-play. The Greeks held that the gods themselves were required to make oaths while striding the circular river, the Styx — and here we have an account of the origin of law. This process of “informative reciprocities” fills in the blanks of both (psychoanalytical) theory and historical ethnographical examples.