# sorites/3: extending the sorites to "universal signature conditions"

Why begin the project of a "universal critical dictionary" with a topic as obscure and unknown as "sorites"? Surely it would be better to survey existing conditions and approaches, review and select the most promising ideas, and set out on a solid foundation of the known and familiar before extending into the difficult territory of contradictions and unconsidered new forms. Sorites, however, offers something unique. It is an "insider's game," a peek at processes kept in the engine room of consciousness. Itself empty and without politics, culture, or history, sorites is able to penetrate political conditions, other cultures, and all periods of history where contingent circumstances have given it particular practices and physical props.

Without understanding such fundamental and universal components of human action as exaptation, occultation, chirality, super-symmetry, reverse predication, etc., the gaps, fractals, and breakdowns we encounter everywhere in human life would be misattributed to the contingent conditions of particular situations. Like detectives in a novel, we have to learn that "not jumping to conclusions" requires a disciplined delay that holds out for the peculiar way "structures of exception" reveal themselves. In this forensic effort, we are aided by others who have also chosen such a starting point. They, too, will have recognized the importance of exaptation, occultation, chirality, etc. even though they will have given them names appropriate to their own intellectual age and artistic temperament. There are many ways to store things out of sight in works of art, for example, and this is done whether or not the artist is conscious of any critical idea of exaptation. There are stratagems of occultation unique to the magician, the painter, the architect, the musician — "each to his/her own," so to speak. Chirality, which may appear in the form of a mirror, twins, binary signifiers, or some other case where identity and difference are combined, reveals the general truth, that we know the world in a "handed" way — stereognosis — and that this handedness is embedded in our cultural/collective unconscious at an early stage.

With an eye to the variations of names given to these universal components, we use the sorites as a mental template, not just to order the evidence at hand or to translate the professional vocabularies of the particular artists, writers, architects, etc. who have employed it. Even less would we want to reduce the complexity of examples to any standardized model. Rather, we use sorites to corroborate examples of all kinds — a test that any science should require. Without consistent terms or disciplined procedures, critical theory would be a private affair, a means of giving nothing more than a personal characterization. Knowledge, to be knowledge, must be sufficiently anonymous and independent so that it transcends the particular knower who gave it form in one particular instance. It must embrace the principle of disinterest that is key to any science's claim to objectivity. Like the examples that are found to "prove" the presence of sorites in diverse media, cultures, and historical periods, the current collection must itself be capable of transference to other critical theories, other (skeptical) theorists, other aggressive tests of its principles and procedures. Theory must expose itself to failure, since every good theory sounds good until it is pushed to the point of failure, revised, and refashioned.

The extensions of the sorites idea here reflects a particular interest in architecture, the visual arts, cinema, and narrative. It uses "sentinel theorists" (Freud, Lacan, Hegel, Vico) to corroborate methods and concepts as well as to broaden the audience of critics who might wish to repair or extend the sorites idea. The extensions aim in particular directions that may themselves connect with theorists who have already established their claims: (1) picture/frame theory, the consideration of the general idea of the "point of view"; (2) analysis of the "event dream," particularly as treated by Pavel Florensky; (3) the structure of theatrical space, particularly in relation to "stage whispers"; (4) the cases of close-up magic and the pickpockets' art, both of which use "slow space" and "fast space"; (5) cases drawn from mythology which have preserved distinctive means of transformation, vendetta, catalepsy, and occultation; and (6) cases from all media where chiasmus — "ring design" — constitutes conditions of internal symmetry. In order to have a vocabulary that is sufficiently flexible yet consistent, We depend not just on the "sentinel theorists" but on those who have inadvertently and unknowingly provided useful terms: Harold Bloom, Henry Johnstone, Slavoj Žižek, Mladen Dolar, James Joyce, Karl Marx, and even the Marx Brothers. Within this matrix of sentinels, informants, sites from random media, cultures, and historical periods, let theory begin.
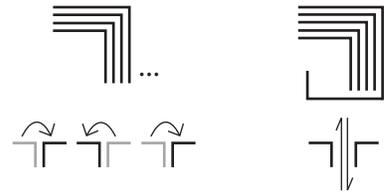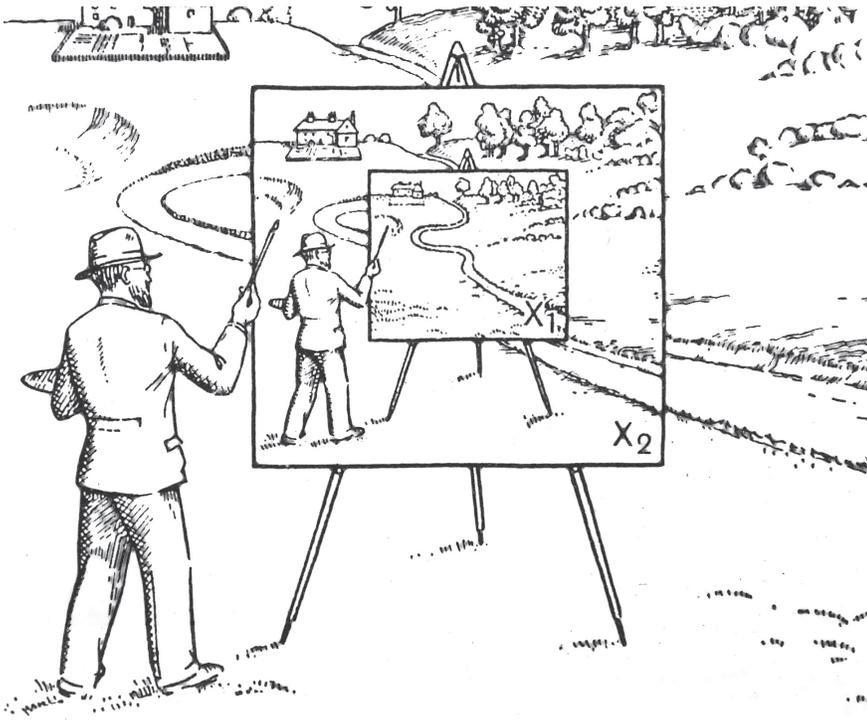
The painter who "wishes to paint everything" (left) faces the paradox of infinite regress: he must continue to step outside his present action to paint an ever-more-inclusive picture of reality. This is at first a palintropic task: the attempt to paint one's self can't reverse the canvas to point in the other direction (upper right), the painter has to "step back." A series of concentric frames multiplies the mirror intention. The realization of the irony is reveals an underlying palin*tonic* time: the desire to capture the whole scene arose simultaneously with the desire to divide it. The whole is equal to the gap that blocks the whole from being achieved. This gap was not the result-effect of representation but, rather, its initial condition. The gap returns the "odd man out" to the point of origins. The first frame was, in fact, a double frame (upper right).

1 / Point of view. This illustration of the "built-in irony" of the point of view — subtracting one's self from the visual scene in order to represent it — almost directly duplicates Spencer-Brown's calculus expression for recursion. A series of enclosing brackets can have one of two results. If there is an even number of enclosures, they can be confused a number of round trips from one space to another, ending "back home." If there is an odd number, the series is able to curve in on itself, returning the last crossing to the interior of the first position. The idea is that the even number can be interpreted as nothing more than a series of back-and-forth travels across a single boundary. This overlooks the passage of time and the (Thomas Wolfe) observation that "you can't go home *again*." The journal records two trips, the map sees none, since the return trip cancels out the original trip out.

The discrepancy between map and journal accounts offers an insight into the conflict between palintropos, which as binary can only "remember" the present state, 1 or 0 so to speak; and palintonos, a "sliding operator" whose constant monad of past, present, and future continually adds to a narrative line. The illustration of the painter painting himself painting painting himself painting … etc. comes from John William Dunne. Dunne, a friend of the British physicist Arthur Eddington, became interested in the relativity of time after a series of prophetic dreams. He developed his own version of Heraclitus's paradox in *An Experiment in Time* (1927), *The Serial Universe* (1938), and *The New Immortality* (1938). He used a model also employed by Marcel Duchamp: time as a three-dimensional solid, cut by a "time plane" that moves orthogonally through the solid. The surface of the plane, intersecting solid figures, shows apparent motions, but in fact it is the plane that is moving, not the figures.

Like coriolis force (the apparent curving of fluids do the actual rotation of the earth beneath straight-line motions), Dunne's time was akin to the travel of light in a strong gravitational field. In the first, "weak" version of Relativity, Einstein explained that space, normally "in line" with the travel of light as the "shortest distance between two points," could be distorted by strong gravity. In his second, or "strong" theory, Einstein realized that space itself was primordially bent. Light's curve marked the boundary between two domains, one divided by observation, the other spherical, monadic, and "timeless." Curvature was thus an appearance within a palintropic division of observer/observed, subject/object, here/there, now/then. The "re-entry into the form," Spencer-Brown's term for recursion/self-reference, returns the "odd man out" to the point of origins.

2 / The defective/unreliable narrator. Psychoanalysis shares with medical practice the fact that in specific cases where truth is expected, it is specifically not to be found. Patients lie to physicians about their symptoms and must be second-guessed. Analysands lie to analysts, but those trained in the Freudian tradition expect this and know what to do. Lies, even lies that the analysand considers to be truthful, are keys to the unconscious. A third tradition surrounds this kind of lying: the defective/unreliable narrator of a story — consciously and carefully constructed by the author — who tells a story that he/she apparently does not know about. Ignorant narrators let readers see past their ignorance to guess for themselves what is really going on. In this literary technique, we can see an interesting immediate application of the sorites. Each of the defective narrator's faulty observations have a chiralistic twin, and the reader deduces a "left-hand version" out of what the narrator says in a "right-hand way." The tell comes when there is an odd pairing, as when, in Raymond Chandler's short story "The Cathedral," the narrator directly participates in an Act that demonstrates for the fictional characters and readers alike, the kind of miracle that is going on — a merger of the story's technique with the method of instruction used by the main character in the story. At this point we have a literary case of John Dunne's barbershop mirror artist.

Various diagrams amplify this literary trick, so many in fact that the defective narrator can be used as a hub to link and verify various aspects of sorites logic. The chirality is apparent from the use of left- and right-handed accounts, the left version constructed by the audience from clues from the right. The oddly matched pair serves as the plot point to conclude the story, and in this we may have confirmation that *all* plot points involve the final remainder of the sorites cancellation process. What is a plot point? This is a term used by Syd Field in his famous "method" of plot analysis, which demonstrates that every good plot needs at least two places where the action or audience's knowledge of what is going on (exposition) changes radically: one at near the beginning (to properly frame the story), the other near the end (to set up for a conclusion). This effectively reserves the center section for sorites-style episodes accumulating energy and information. In the cinema, this technique can be used and expanded by involving images as well as dialog in creating right- and left-hand orders of action/exposition.

Architecture's unreliable/defective narrator is more the rule than the exception. Spaces designed for one use are frequently misused or re-purposed. The architect's intentions are almost never clear. One has to imagine that the building itself wishes to speak, but that its uses and modifications are standing in the way. On top of this kind of noise, weathering as well as the weather itself contributes unanticipated effects, and the random effects of use or misuse combine to shield us from the "secret" the building may hold. We stage a place and time to find this secret, even if it is completely imaginary and outside of the ordinary time of the building. In special works where the architect has anticipated intervening effects, we can encounter ways he/she has worked around the obstructions. Just as the writer of fiction using the defective narrator technique has let the audience do all of the work, the architect in this mode works as a minimalist, providing sparse clues and preparing the "site of reception" with great care to prevent it from being contaminated by the "official view" made famous through photographs and guided tours.

The modality of the defective narrator is that of signalizing, rather than signaling. We can think of this a reversal of the predication which defines the "occultation" of the ventriloquist's voice by the dummy. Everyone knows the device of ventriloquists' performances — we look closely to see if the performer can get past the difficult consonants, m's, b's, and p's — which would require the lips to close. But, what if, as in the 1945 British horror film, *Dead of Night*, the dummy was actually the source and not the ventriloquist? This fantastical suggestion can be explained "scientifically" in the case that the ventriloquist is schizophrenic and has allowed the dummy to play the part of an actual demonic inner voice. Here, the French word for dummy (*le mort*, "a dead man") al-

lows an interesting intersection with another word that literally means "dead man": the hero (ἥρως in Greek), the man-god hybrid, almost always originally one of a pair of twins, who is allowed to visit Hades ("the invisible") and return with messages from the ancestral dead. Stories of heroes reversely the positions of man/god they predicate. For a limited time, they are immortal. When predication again reverses, heroes classically are cursed with madness — again, consistent with the example from *Dead of Night*. The voices of the dead of Hades have a particular truth value. They, like the oracles of the Sybil, are neither true nor false in their literal form. They have a truth that has to be experienced to be proved, and only at the time of their realization are they confirmed — thus, they are "truths of the Act." We could say that truth, originally occulted (concealed in Hades), returns in a second form, at a time and place of its choosing.

Unreliable narration can be modeled by a graphic that places, behind the official "voice," a panoramic content that must be reached by "going around" — turning and twisting. This is truth happening "behind the back" of the unreliable narrator, so we must imagine that the space of truth is, although a "back" to the narrator, visible to us. An "odd man out" separates the space of truth from the space of reception. Again, we have an ABA condition, an A that is both = and ≠ A. Nothing could better describe this Hegelian condition than the ventriloquist's dummy and the dead hero who anticipates this stage act.
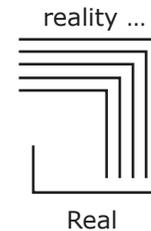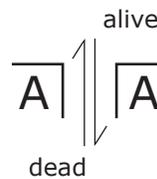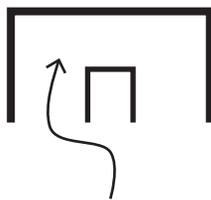
The audience (POV) is placed opposite the narrator who attempts to claim their full attention, but once the audience realizes the narrator's limitations, it is apparent that the "straight story" lies out of the range of the narrator's limited view. The audience must "read between the lines" of narration, go around the frame the defective narrator sets up to control the audience's response. Yet, like the "re-entry into the form" in the Dunne example, we realize that the defect (gap) is in fact a double frame. It engages the audience *directly* in the construction of the diegetic Real, beyond the representational "reality" of the defective narrator. This "re-entry into the form" also goes past the author who has used the defective narrator technique, to see the work itself as constructed within this Real.

The palintropic alternation between the = and ≠ states of A are brought to a "crisis" when the dead (dummy) takes the place of the living ventriloquist in the example from *Dead of Night*. The uncanny's two basic conditions reveal themselves to be mirror images of each other. The gap between life and death becomes reversible. This is the function of the *pharmakeia* (φαρμακεία), the substance that works either as a poison or a life-restoring elixir, discovered by Asklepius when he drew blood from the left and right sides of the dead Medusa. This magic substance condenses the logic of stereognosis — a chiralistic understanding of the world which, in palintropic form, sees a left and right; but in its palintonic mode Real-izes the gap as a primordial situation of face to face. *Videmus nunc per speculum in aegnigmate: tuc autem facie ad faciem. Nunc cognosco ex parte: tunc autem cognoscam sicut et cognitus sum* (First we see through a mirror, in terms of enigmas, then we see them face to face; first we know things as parts of wholes, then we know them as we are ourselves known) — the basis of the (Essene) reading of the Christian Gospels (I Cor. 13:12). The reality of the dummy is that, even before the ventriloquism act, the ventriloquist was his dummy.

5 / The logic of the event dream. The sorites' binomial predications represent statements such as "all animals in this house are cats." But, at the heart of predication is the use of two different registers of time, one that is a forward moving event in the present, the other that has "already been," as soon as it is recognized. The judgment that seems to use set theory to show the membership of one thing in some class is immediate and presentational. It is a realization, a condition that may have existed for a long time but is, for us, recognized here and now. This judgment, however, reflects the fundamental nature of sorites: by the time the collective attribute, "pile," is realized, it has already formed. Backtracking to find out exactly at what point the grains of sand became a pile, or the lack of rain became a draught, or the presence of many people became a crowd … this point cannot be found. Each attempted starting-point can be seen to have a precedent, a fore-runner.

The calculus allows us to generalize the predication's two registers. These two registers in turn relate to the way in which the "event dream" described by Pavel Florensky in *Iconostasis* (1922) stores memory traces of everyday events "spatially" but recovers them "temporally" when provoked by a waking stimulus that, although it is technically the first and causal act, becomes that concluding event in the remembered dream.

The model is derived from a visual analogy developed by the Czech semiologist Jan Mukařovský (1891–1971). Mukařovský's "triangle" describes how experiences accumulated sequentially are registered in an orthogonal dimension so that, when recalled, the order of events is reversed. The last-added element becomes last in the recalled sequence, but it achieves this status by being the element *so near to the external event* (as, in the most famous event dream, a metal frame falling on the sleeper's neck became a guillotine blade) that it pushes an entire stored sequence out of the unconscious into the memory, with events already in a causal sequence.

The calculus shows how every lived event is "stacked" vertically in the unconscious, while a copy is simultaneously aligned along a horizontal axis. The event, x, is sublated by the unconscious as $\overline{x}$, with a copy that, when retrieved, will have the vividness of lived experience. The x $\overline{x}$ x triplet, like the ABA or $\overline{A}$A of the Thesean Labyrinth, directly demonstrates the compelling life-like nature of dreams — it seems that they have really happened or really could happen. The unconscious's storage mechanism is, effectively, a sorites whose "final" conjunction of un-paired elements corresponds to the $\overline{x}$ x of dream experience.

Spencer-Brown emphasized that the series of concentric brackets/crosses suggested recursion. Effectively scale becomes dysfunctional, the last element "re-enters the form" at the first position. This is in fact what happens in the sorites with a return of the series' closure, the two conjoined "orphans," to the point where the sorites began, the "first grain of sand," invested from the start with a minimal subjective expectation of becoming a pile.
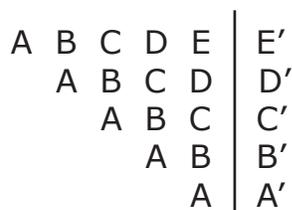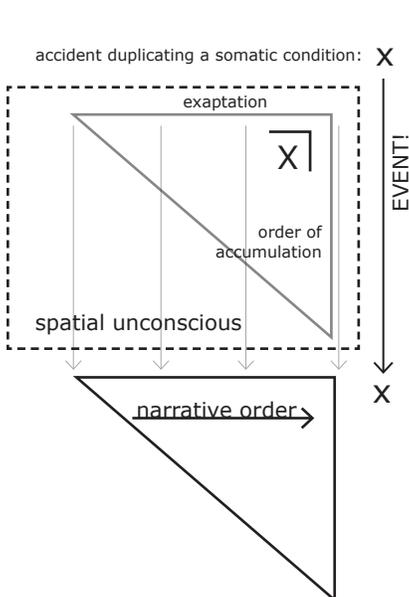
The event dream seems to "end" with the event that must have initiated it — a contradictory exchange of first things last. But, in fact the event is the cause of the sudden "ejection" of the dream structure, from the unconscious into the "open registry of memory," where it is recalled in the temporalized order that was constructed as the "spatialized" accumulation of experiences piled event on top of event. The vertical order of "storage" was translated to a horizontal narrative where narrative causality provided a semblance of coherence. This relationship, similar to Jan Mukarovsky's "semiotic triangle," points to the literal function of the bracket used by Spencer-Brown to indicate a call or cross. Every event in experience has a double aspect — the reason we may use sorites to explore the relations between experience, the unconscious, memory, dreams, and the structure of works of art, literature, and architecture. Palintonos's spatialized temporality activates a palintonic alternation: conflicts, rivalries, substitutions, misrecognitions, etc. — the stuff of stories. Without occultation (palintropos's ability to "disappear" its opposite), experience has no material continuity, i.e. no narrative substance.

5

6 / Rumsfeld's unconscious. The Secretary of Defense under U.S. President George W. Bush, Donald Rumsfeld, was famous for his arguments in support of invading Iraq. He argued that there were three kinds of knowledge: (1) things we know that we know; (2) things we know that we don't know; and (3) things that we don't know that we don't know. Rumsfeld left out, however, the obvious missing case — one which accurately defines the Freudian unconscious, "things that we know but we don't know that we know." Slavoj Žižek notes that this hypothetical number 4 fills out a theory of knowledge that can account for the barbershop mirror and the unreliable/defective narrator. In its direct engagement of the Freudian unconscious, it allows us to reinforce the connection to psychoanalysis.

So, what are the "things that we know but we don't know that we know"? Here we must make a slight adjustment to Zizek's point. True, Rumsfeld does not account for the unconscious, but he gets a few things right without knowing it. That is, there are some things that Rumsfeld does "know without knowing"! We have to make a distinction between two kinds of knowledge, a "positive form" that imagines itself to penetrate into the unknown in the same way an explorer penetrates a jungle, adding a bit more to his/her map each day. This knowledge, however, actually preconditions the unknown. It has already anticipated the forms that it will find. It "knows without knowing," but it disguises its knowledge as ignorance.

The other form of knowing is called *kenosis*. This is a knowledge of process, which sees just how the first form of knowledge (K1) conditions the world while it pretends to look for new facts. To complete the Rumsfeld

+/+	+/−
Rumsfeld: "We know that we know"	Rumsfeld: "We know that we don't know"
Lacan: "All those calling themselves men obey the phallic law (φ).	Lacan: "Men are subject to φ as long as there is one exception (the Big Other)."
Common-sense view of conscious knowledge (K1)	Common-sense view of the unknown as "not yet reached"
−/+	**−/−**
Rumsfeld: "Don't know what we know" category, since we condition the unknown.	*Rumsfeld's missing category*, "Don't know what we don't know": unconscious as double negation.
Lacan: "Not-all those calling themselves obey the phallic law."	Lacan: "No exceptions to the not-all exemption. Experience of paradox, gap, enigma, animism, dæmon.
The unconscious tries to make itself felt (K2)	

square, we add the quarter that stands for the unconscious, the quarter of double negation, −/−. Rumsfeld's missing "don't know that we know" category is really the −/+ that for him is "don't know what we don't know." Double negation of the unconscious is the means by which the mind is able to store contents that can be "called up" when the need arises, but this need, and the occasion for calling it up, is in the hands of the unconscious, not the conscious subject.

So, there are two kinds of negation and two kinds of knowledge involved with this quadration. The first corresponds to the storage issue. Our minds "have" something without having it in any operative sense. We cannot manipulate or control; we can *only retain* — with the proviso that these contents are controlled on the supply side; this kind of memory cannot be made to appear on demand. The second kind of negation has to do with the *form* of recall. While the unconscious' memory could be compared to a spatial system, where items are not sorted according to their occurrence on our experiential time-line (early experiences are just as vivid as recent ones, no one ever dies), their recall requires temporal ordering. This ignores the original time-line occurrence and invents a new temporal order, where time sequence also implies a sequence in the chain of causes and effects. In short, putting things into the unconscious is done temporally, but once "inside," temporal tags are ignored; order is "spatialized." When the unconscious "wishes to send us a message," this message is re-temporalized, according

to a causal order revealing the inner structure of interests, desires, and fears that give memories their true affinities.

Sexuation. Our combined Rumsfeld/Lacan quadration is an opportunity to connect these general conditions of the conscious/unconscious mind to Lacan's other famous quadration, of statements regarding sexuation. Rather than take up the specific interpretations of these statements, consider simply the pattern of negations.

- Men are defined positively in relation to the "phallic law" that commands all identities to be re-defined Symbolically ("symbolic castration"). Once men join the club, they all wear the club uniforms, so to speak. This corresponds to the +/+ condition.

- This rule can be enforced as long as there is an external position, someone who is exempt from the rule and has the power to make or break it — what Lacan called the Big Other. This can be an imaginary or actual Someone, but that Someone is projected by those who obey the rule, endowed with more power than He actually has, by those who justify their obedience in relation to the exception. The exception is labeled +/–, the positive existence of someone who negates the phallic law.

The Big Other exception involves one positive statement and one negative: He is the one who has power (+) to negate the phallic law (–). The +/+ of symbolically castrated men is held in place by the exception, +/–.

- Women are subject to the phallic law in the sense that they participate in networks of symbolic relations, but "not-all" of a woman is subject: –/+.

- There are no exceptions to this "not-all" condition: –/–. Important Note: Women, too, are highly invested in the Symbolic and undergo symbolic castration. But, this investment has a twist. Following their not-all mandate, women are both exterior and interior to the Symbolic. They have the capacity for what Lacan called *l'extimité* — "extimacy" — or, inside-out conversion. They appear to "hug the boundary" between speaking and being, but in reality they *are* the boundary. We could say that –/+ is the boundary's entry side, the +/– of the Big Other is the boundary's exit. The boundary is itself the line between them.

This final state, –/–, fills out the quadration of sexuation, and the –/– of "no exceptions to the not-all condition" corresponds to the unconscious's –/– of double negation, its ignorance of the time-line of experience and its "right to refuse" our requests for its services. The not-all's –/+ ("don't know that we know") replaces Rumsfeld's category of "don't know what we don't know." How? This unknown is not the "stuff out there" beyond our systems of knowledge. Sorites' retroactive realization shows us that the knowing process has already conditioned the things we will experience as raw discoveries. We "already know" what we don't know in the sense that we create ignorance in advance. What we regard as unknown has already be conditioned as a *Terra Incognita*. We make the unknown a property of knowledge itself.

The Rumsfeldian "don't know what we don't know" seems to be –/–, and thus correspond to Lacan's "no exception to the not-all rule," but this is never true in the sense that we already have conditioned the things about which we will regard as impenetrable. As we advance into the jungle of the unknown, we generate more unknowns. Learning of the K1 variety is an endless feedback loop, where the more we learn the more we need to learn. In this sense, modern knowledge fits perfectly within the consumer model of Late Capitalism. Need is automatically regenerated with every attempt to get satisfaction. K2, however, sees beyond this loop and begins to listen to the "signalizing" from the unconscious.

Not knowing what we really know (unconsciously) is about the communications sent out by the double negative, –/–, of the unconscious. In terms of the sorites, the accumulating series of predications is a +/+ of

causes and effects, the elements that are not both causes and effects are, like "free radicals" in chemistry, able to combine: +/− with −/+. The predication that results from this combination is a predication unlike the ones we use to characterize empirical knowledge (K1); rather, they constitute *kenosis* (K2) — knowing "more than we know." All subjects can claim to be Hitchcock's "man who knew too much" by possessing, yet not being able to control, a kind of knowledge that is "more in him than he himself."

This affects the way we think about identity. Normally, we derive our identities from the Symbolic order: we are sons and daughters, parents, brothers or sisters, leaders, followers, workers, bosses, etc. Shorn of these networks of family, work, interests, and friendships, our personalities are subject to breakdowns — we become "idiots" ("private persons" literally) without relationships to the (ideological) rules of social relations and the public order. From the point of view of the Symbolic, such breakdowns are disastrous; but from the viewpoint of self-knowledge, the discovery of something beneath our social roles, these such breakdowns are key to our relation to *kenosis*. Just the trauma of a crisis of K1 knowledge is enough to initiate some understanding of the potential of K2 knowledge — the impossibility of K1 knowledge "ever reaching" the -/- condition of the unconscious. This does not mean that we black out or enter into a spiritual trance. Rather, we are required to undertake a different kind of discourse … a different way of talking, thinking, and acting. In this, we acknowledge a reversed order: instead of thoughts/decisions leading to actions, the act *precedes* the thought. Conscious thought is retroactive. This is what Pavel Florensky meant in his essay on the religious icon: instead of K1's perception of its own limits as fragmentation and gaps, K2 comes to realize that "there was never a gap in the first place." This is NOT by any means to say that a unity, a full circle, is achieved. Rather, it is the gap itself that becomes a portal, the passage between A and B becomes the cause of A and B.

While the act cannot be assimilated into the Symbolic order, it is possible to set up various kinds of acts using various staging devices. Interestingly, these have been known since the beginnings of human culture, first by shamans who mastered the integration of dance, song, and storytelling ; next by, simultaneously, artists who "secularized" these religious tricks, and health-practitioners aware of the necessity of combining the body's own self-healing mechanisms with the mind's concepts of life and death. The connection between medicine and art continues into modern times, to the point that we can "forget how to die" if ideology eclipses traditional narratives. In this sense, theory, always a corrective in relation to ideology, has as its main task the restoration of K2, a kenotic form of knowing, a knowing that requires doubled negation, the missing fourth of the Rumsfeld quadration.