Möbius spin-offs: twisted box, operator

Just as Lacan derived his L-schema and other key concepts from the image and idea of the Möbius band, the Boundary Language system elaborates the Möbius band into its basic diagramatic devices: the twisted box, the ‘operator’, ‘anamorphosis’, and the BoLaGram (boundary language diagram) itself. The BoLaGram will be covered in detail elsewhere, but the basic twisted rectangle with anamorphic crossing will be introduced as a version of the Möbius band.

1. the twisted box

When Lacan used a rectangle to array the principal components of the psyche and then used a zig-zag to explain it more directly, he pointed to the same perplexities as those raised by the primary ‘uncanny’ narrative, ‘The Sandman’. The stable structure of the rectangle seems to grow from family relations: Nathanael and his father, the evil friend of the father, the fairy-tale told to get children to go to sleep, the child’s belief in the fairy-tale. In this ‘ordinary’ scenic view, we realize there is a puzzle. The puzzle is not in deeper symbolism concealed within the elements, something we don’t know, but rather the surface upon which the story is inscribed. It is not flat, it is not ‘transitive’. It is like a Möbius band.

In order to operationalize the Sandman narrative into evidence of the uncanny, it was necessary to (1) split the box, (2) twist its halves, and (3) compress the halves into a linked, circular structure whose (anamorphic) crossing summarized the ideas of spatial and temporal convolution which, in the logic of the unconscious, is not convolution but rather the ‘line of least resistance’. This is as if to say that we only have flat maps that show the shortest line between two points on a globe as a curve. We can’t perceive the function of least distance, in the same way that consciousness and projective representation cannot grasp the ‘least-distance solutions’ and collapse of distance that are afforded through psychic structures. They seem ‘uncanny’ to us because they violate the measures of distance and time we use to structure our ‘reality maps’.

2. the ‘operator’ and its collapse

In the classic case of the uncanny, the previously invisible/concealed ‘artifact’ ‘falls’ on to the vector of representation — that is, it ‘comes to light’. This is the ‘return of the Real’ in Lacanian terms, a re-location to the precise center of the hollow structure that has structured the Other, the central position from which the object-cause of desire will re-frame the Other from the inside out. This collapse is also a collapse of the distance that separates the subject from the Other, and a collapse of dimensionality in general.

Operators collapse for various reasons: the uncanny’s collapse is both a return of something long forgotten and a dimensional event. Works of art in general use the artifact to ‘store’ clues and materials for later revelation in order to create suspense and surprise that accelerates the temporality of the art experience.

Because the vectors can be related to the optical dimensions of perception, they can support analogies where the ‘sagittal’ line-of-sight, the plane of representation (represented by windows, screens, and the like), and surfaces that simulate the visual field (maps, board games, computer and television screens) and their edges and conditions offer material conditions for the collapse.

This brings about the uncanny’s ‘uncanny’ ability to combine material conditions, spatially, and time into play as dramatic effects. Where the uncanny was cloaked in ritual and religion, this was the magic of transformation and spectacle; loosed by the Enlightenment, it became the essence of Romantic theater and the genre of the fantastic.

3. dimensional effects

The collapse of the orthogonal independence of the vectors of representation and artifact is also the collapse, potentially, of the spatially orthogonal vectors of the Cartesian coordinates, x-y-z (length, height, depth). The experiential correlate of this collapse is circular or spiral motion, frequently accompanied with falling or vertigesic climbing (as in the film Vertigo, where Scotty’s fear of heights compounds the fear of the tower). The operator’s collapse necessitates a ‘return of the Real’, which corresponds to the ‘empty’ center or center occupied by a monster, such as the Minotaur of the Thesean labyrinth or Cyclops of the cave used to imprison Odysseus.