The Bo(undary) La(nguage) (dia)Gram is an articulated Möbius-band structure that revises Lacan’s ‘L-scheme’ to show ‘objective’ versus ‘subjective’ structures as ‘operators’ (artifact—representation orthogonalities) that are ‘collapsed’ to emphasize the uncanny’s two main themes of identity (‘contractualities’) and optics (‘anamorphosis’). The BoLaGram is not a picture or representation; it is rather a ‘schematic’ whose individual elements are unstable and co-identical, just as in Lacanian psychology the subject’s unconscious seems to come from the Other but has been placed there in advance by the subject and appears in reverse! There are no stable ‘definitions’ of the BoLaGram’s component parts or interactions. Rather, the ‘ad hoc’ applications of the diagram done on an experimental and speculative basis are the primary evidence of the fundamental instability and uncertainty that constitute the most enduring ground for culture’s ‘intransitive’ creations.

1. from the L-scheme to Möbius

The four elements of Lacan’s L-scheme provide the primary zones of the bolagram: an Other, A (the hollow edifice of authority), the subject, $, (‘barred’ because the subject is, if anything, a location within a network of symbolic relationships), imaginary/fantasy projections of the subject of idealized points of view (f), including the subject’s own ego, and the perennial surplus of the symbolic system (a), desire in its manifestation as lack, surplus, or perversely materialized object of desire. An additional zone marks the crossing (ω) of the ‘anamorphic’ relationships between desire and idealized points of view that have some kind of access to desire’s ephemeral objects and the ‘contractual’ relations between the subject and its various Others (masters, audiences, authorities, etc.). There is no zone in the bolagram’s circuit that is not the other; the Möbius-band logic means that any zone or twist is apparent. But, the illusion of appearance is the business of the subject and its disingenuous ego, so the vertices of the diagram are ‘reality’, whereas their collapse and failure belongs to the Real that returns along a path (∂) parallel to that by which their opposition was constructed (Ø).

2. subject and object matheme

Lacan’s ‘matheme’ for fantasy is instructive: $•a, or ‘the subject in one of a hundred relations to desire’, was meant not to be understood but, rather, used. The poinçon (♦) was intended to limit interpretation rather than assist it. Nonetheless, the relationship is a ‘structure’, just as a network of roads facilitates traffic but says nothing about the meaning of the trips taken across it. Here, the subject and object, by means of forming ‘operators’ (orthogonal relationships) create the same empty designations and are in this sense ‘idiotic’, particularly in light of the fact that they are symmetrically combined. This is intended to reflect the wit of Groucho Marx, who noted that ‘my client may look like an idiot and talk like an idiot, but don’t be deceived … he is an idiot!’ The use of truth as a deceptive cover is the essence of the human project, and the phenomenon of self-reference (recursion) is its mathematical procedure.

The object and subject matheme’s idiocy stems from the flexibility that allows the vertex in each case to be alternatively ‘contractual/representative’ or a ‘surplus-imaginary’ artifact. This means that the ‘anamorphic split’ of the L-scheme’s rectangle (upper left) can occur in a variety of ways. In the example of Hoffman’s ‘The Sandman’, this allows the story to take place between the initial violation of the father’s violated command (that the children should sleep and not witness his alchemical experiments) and the child Nathanael’s ‘unrelated‘ episode of fascination for the automata Olimpia. His ‘objective’ disobedience and ‘subjective’ romance are linked by the metamorphosis of the lawyer Coppelius into the optics salesman Coppolo, a ‘contractual’ personality into an anamorphic one, just as his violation of his father’s command involved concealment and a stolen view from behind a curtain. Guilt in the former case revisits the circumstances of the ‘theft’ of surveillance.

3. anamorphic criss-cross

The bolagram addresses the issue of the intersection of the uncanny’s two main Freudian components, optics and identity. Where ‘transitive’ consciousness demands self-identity (A=A), the intransitive unconscious permits the intransitive phenomenon of the double. Where transitive optics specifies a cone of vision and figure-ground relationships, the intransitive unconscious uses a topology where dimensionality and distance can suddenly collapse and where appearance and disappearance moderate create specters, miracles, and monsters at will. The Homeric story of the Cyclops’ imprisonment of Odysseus and his crew illustrates both of these themes, suggesting that just such topological ‘knots’ decide the difference between authentic and inauthentic travel. Odysseus is able to blind the Cyclops (anamorphic trick) but is unable to escape without the creation of a double through the fictional name of ‘Nohbdy’, which the Cyclops takes to be a proper name but for his neighbors it’s just a pronoun, so when the Cyclops calls for help, they ignore him because ‘nobody’ has harmed him.

diagrams: BoLaGram