

The Dummy (Dead Man)

In analysis, and in what could be called “analytical thinking” (deployment of Lacan’s arsenal of formations describing human subjectivity), there are four positions, which Lacan likened to a game, in particular the game of bridge — funny because of the pun that makes it seem as if Lacan also refers to the way his “L-scheme” creates criss-cross relationships based on the contrast between the Imaginary and the Symbolic. The subject itself takes up one “hand” in the game, two other players constitute the Imaginary by representing the analysand’s ego (a) and the analyst’s ego (a). The analyst must play the trick of taking the part of the dummy (in French, the “dead man,” *le mort*). In the context of the L-scheme, the dynamic between a — a' is the struggle between the ego at the level of the mechanisms it creates to maneuver the game to its liking *versus* the comedy that strives to “naturalize” oppositions within pretended primitive “organic” relationships.

The mechanistic strategy is, in Žižek’s terms, the “red pill” offered by Morpheus (“Sleep”) to Neo (“New Man”) in *The Matrix*: to see the machinery of the Real as such. But, the Imaginary of course cannot actually offer this. It can only hold out this “insider status” to Neo as a condition for him becoming an informed insider, a cynic in possession of the knowledge that life is only an illusion.

The seeming alternative to this “unhappy consciousness” is the organic but illusory happiness held out by the subject’s own ideal formation (a') as an ego in a natural formation that was “already-always” present and shown, through the customary devices of the Imaginary, as a specular self, cast in the future perfect (future anterior) tense even though the subject remains hopelessly out of synch with it.

The blue pill and red pill create the axis of the Imaginary, which should remind us of the situation of the mirror stage, in which the young child’s specular image is encountered, initiating the shock of contrast between this literally future perfect masterful self and the “dummy” on the other side of the mirror who must be propped up to enjoy this view. The child can participate in this specular Imaginary, decide on the blue pill option of illusion of mastery or the red pill of symbolic castration, a “place in the organization” in exchange for permanent servitude (identity will forever be replaced by the “costumes” given to the subject to fill).

The red-pill/blue-pill option is really not an option, as Žižek has so often pointed out. Like the trick of a “Hobson’s choice,” there is no choice at all, but a forced choice planted inside the appearance of choice. If the child does not “choose” symbolic castration (castration = a transfer of identity to the ego *by* the Symbolic), the alternative is exile into an autism without language. As soon as the child accepts the context given by language, “the fix is in.”

What is missing in the mirror stage’s blue-pill/red-pill option is the element of the Real, and this must be constructed along an axis that is orthogonal to the Imaginary. This is technically the axis of the Symbolic, but the key is that a — a' cannot be symbolized. The Symbolic reveals the real in terms of the negative: breakdowns, gaps, impossibilities. Hegel’s “tarrying with the negative” thus is singled out by Žižek as the only methodological device capable at dispelling the red-pill/blue-pill deception of the mirror-stage’s Imaginary. The father super-ego option (red pill) and mother super-ego option (blue pill) are, after all, pre-sets for the subject. In Hitchcock’s *Notorious* (1945), after Devlin escapes with the rescued Alicia, the Nazi husband Sebastian is left to face either his mother or his Nazi colleagues. Devlin and Alicia act out the Real through their “impossible” trick device of using the truth as a lie. Devlin takes Alicia to the hospital because she is “sick,” but of course she really is sick. Sebastian and his mother have poisoned her (deceptively) to conceal from Sebastian’s colleagues that she was actually an American spy. When Devlin demonstrates her Real illness, it is this “faked” illness brought into full view, where Sebastian is unable to deny it.

The same trick, positive employment of a negative to avoid the Hobson’s choice of false alternatives, took place in the cellar scene. Devlin and Alicia needed to discover what the Nazis had been doing in Brazil. They suspected that it had something to do with minerals but, at this point in the war, had no idea about uranium (the A-bomb project was still top-secret). One of

Sebastian's colleagues had nervously indicated a bottle of Sebastian's privately labeled wine, so they plan to investigate the wine cellar. Alicia steals Sebastian's key to the cellar and use a party as an excuse to get Devlin into the house. As the guests begin to guzzle Champaign, the ticking clock device pulls the audience into a chiasmus drawing Sebastian down to the cellar to discover the investigative couple. As he descends the stair, Devlin embraces Alicia in a "false kiss" (intended to make Sebastian think they are in the cellar for a romantic reason) but of course the kiss is Real in that it is a positive deployment of a Negative, which draws together all of the levels of deception that have to this point constructed the film's story.

Notorious shows us how the Imaginary illusion of free choice is foiled by finding the gap in the Symbolic (Sebastian knows he's been fooled but he realizes he can do nothing about it). At the level of the L-scheme's criss-cross, this is the answer to the specular alternatives that seem to dominate the field with only the mechanistic, cynical place "inside the system" or the naturalistic enjoyment of illusion. Devlin plays the dummy by "playing dead." Indeed, critics without Lacanian interests have traditionally noted that Cary Grant's portrayal of Devlin is "wooden." His character calls for it. In the second scene of the film, we see Devlin as the "odd man out" at Alicia's party. Alicia has to ask who invited him. We see his head from the back, a dark silhouette that could be easily mistaken for a tall person sitting in the theater seat in front of us. In Woody Allen's *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (1985), a character in a film steps out of the virtual space of the film into the audience. In this case, Cary Grant is a man in the audience who steps into the film. His two-dimensional shadow is fleshed out by having the camera's position rotate 90°.

Before this entry into the film, Grant had been a "dummy" in the sense that the audience role requires viewers to remain silent and still for the duration of the film. Emulating a dead or dreaming person takes all audiences back to Plato's allegory of The Cave, where we deal with the dominant position of the Dream as such, in the form of actual dreams or the dream's literary descendents, narratives and fantasies. As Lacan and Freud emphasized, it is not the interpretability of dreams that is important, it is the creation of "meaning effects" through a kind of "rebus" logic, a "language-like" system that actually resists linguistic translation and can be seen only through holes in actual language. The connection between the audience's passivity (the necessity to "play dead") and the English term dummy adds an unexpected bonus to the Lacanian-Freudian view that Lacan developed in other ways. Being a dummy also means playing the fool, as in the ventriloquist's dummy, typically a naïve child or retarded dwarf who provides the punch-lines that trump the master. Playing the fool fills out Hegel's famous Master-Servant paradigm in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. The servant comprehends just how the Master is a victim of a Hobson's choice predicament. The Master is willing to risk his life in exchange for respect, but the only stable respect he can secure is that of the inferior Servant. The Servant gives this respect but realizes the irony. As Groucho Marx famously said, "I wouldn't want to belong to a club that would have me as a member." The Master is forced to belong to the only club that will have him as Master, the club of his own Servants. The Servant plays the fool, remains silent, invisible, *discrete*.

The Master-Servant formula conceals a scandal. Realizing the enormity of the scandal is Hegel's genius; realizing that this scandal is the basis of a *science* is Lacan's (and before him, the unrecognized genius of Vico); and realizing all of the implications of this scandal is Žižek's. Although the Servant must play dead and act the full, it is not the Servant who is dead, it is the Master. As Žižek pointed out, speaking about religion, God was dead from the very beginning; keeping this secret has been the basis of all religions. Hegel also realized the connection between this "logical" scandal and religion. When he pulled the rug from beneath the gold standard of logic, the principle of identity (A=A), he referred to the saying of Yahweh: "I am that I am." This is the naturalistic position, the "Popeye theory of reality" as some wag noted. That it is also the conservative position of the organicist view, from Schelling's "beautiful soul" to the present-day New Age manifestations of self-help ego psychology. In other words, A=A is the naturalism of the blue pill.

The scandal is that the Master is the "dead man," and that we should not let him (or Him) know. We must continue to pile the altar with burnt offerings, we must sit still in front of the orthogonal parade of symbolic identities. "He is not dead, but only sleeping" — the placebo

given by every graveside cleric — is actually the reverse of the analytical insight: he is not just sleeping — he's *dead*! The faster we get to the interval known in Lacanese as "between the two deaths" the better. The *lamella*, the cells/flesh that continue after the corpse is officially proclaimed as such, is the impossible-Real condition by which the negative is fleshed out, so to speak. We see the dead in dreams because, simply, dreams *cannot distinguish the living from the dead*. We only have to invert this formula to see how the "un-" conscious is actually the "dis-" conscious: the inability to distinguish. The fact that dreams give us not meanings but rather "meaning effects" — rebus-like compositions of things that are themselves but not themselves as they "speak" about something else — our tact/discretion (playing dead) as Servants gives full play to the Master — the Master as Signifier, the Master Signifier — in full gallop through the scandal that sustains him.

Architecture is in some sense the obverse of film. Where film plays out the optical aspect of the mirror stage by seating the metonymized subject in front of a digetic playing out of the specular, ending with a game of identity (character) captured in such formulæ as "whodunit" or "the hero wins/dies," architecture stands the subject before an apparatus of decorum, where identity issues are resolved through frames (spaces, rooms, views, courts, etc.) where the difference between the living and the dead, as in a dream, will be ignored. Unconscious becomes dis-conscious: "We won't let you know you are the dead man; we will play the fool." In essence, this is decorum (tact, discretion, *commodity*) at its purist. Architecture's materiality sustains the fiction that it will be here when we are dead and gone; architecture's decorum (functionality) sustains the parade of optical constructions that, while we are chained inside The Cave, conceal the topological Möbius-style twist that marks the edge of The Cave and its painful Real.

The red pill of cynical participation in the management of illusion's mechanisms or the blue pill's sustaining illusion of organic foreverness — isn't this what Northrop Frye described in his contrast of the humanly constructed vanishing points of "freedom" and "concern"? Using *Brave New World* to illustrate the former's construction of a lotus-eater's paradise of suspending all anxiety, with drugs if necessary and George Orwell's *1984* as a contrasting nightmare descent into the mechanisms of reality, Frye nonetheless employed a red-pill/blue-pill logic, specifying a remarkably Lacanian third pill, the "not yet to be" world of literary imagination. Žižek would

, who follows Lacan in his pessimism about any ego-psychology, positions himself to the left of any New Age utopian solutions. This does not mean that one despairs in the face of this impasse. On the contrary, confrontation of the Real, in the form of the gap built into desire, leads to science, to knowledge of truth. Lacan, who echoes Vico in this regard, holds that human subjectivity is the only possible object of any science, because it is the only creation we may regard as fully ours. Knowledge of nature is contingent, based on points of view, armed with technologies, that a subject may take up with respect to the perceived world. Knowledge of subjectivity, in contrast, is limited only by the complexity facing any project to use a point of view as a basis for, first, description and, later, understanding. Within the subject's topology, there is no inside or outside to constitute the classic object-ivity of science — a point of view opposed to objects projected on to a representational plane.

Privation and Prohibition

In the universal history of literariness articulated by Northrop Frye, the imagination begins with the dream. The first narratives do not stray far from this basis, and the storyteller has the cultural obligation to be a "proxy dreamer" for his audience. The audience dreams through him, and the relation of the narrative to the magic spell and charm is not forgotten, even when literature develops its severe realisms. The dream has some built-in disabilities, namely the lack of the ability to distinguish between the living and the dead. This accounts for the dream's status in antiquity and religion, that it is a chance to visit the "land of the dead" and return. This conflation of death and dreaming converts this disability, a privation, into a prohibition. What cannot be done is perceived to be expressly forbidden. In waking life, it is impossible to "visit" the land of the dead, as a mortuary tourist. Turned into a prohibition, this impossibility is converted into a prohibition that the dream demonstrates can be violated, and once violated the question shifts to the matter of punishment or cost.

Within the domain of the romance, the form of literature that remains the truest to the dream and never steps too far away from the campfires of oral recitation, punishment and cost issues are loosely accounted for. A loan can be forgiven. A gift of incredible value comes along at just the right time. A large debt can be incurred just by picking a rose from the wrong garden. The true cost of doing business is concealed from the naïve hero, whose starts out in the poorhouse but ends up in the Fortune 500. The princess always marries the pauper, in other words; the frog turns out to have a trust fund.

As narrative moves away from the campfire's extended dreams, the accountants arrive. Costs are calculated with a precision that is played out in the symmetry of "ironic" plots that use (mistaken) identities — as in the case of twins separated at birth; debts incurred early that are called in decades or even centuries later; words that escape the lips that are not only not forgotten but active after the death of the speaker. In this new age of strict accounting, literature's move away from the dream becomes a move towards the courtroom and altar. The difference between the two seems to be more a matter of the point of view. The moralizing chorus prefers the altar — a wedding to right all wrongs, as in *Much Ado about Nothing*, where the symmetry of misunderstanding is a necessary prelude to bliss. The individual subject sees things differently, and where judgment isolates the subject, death is the obvious end of the action.

A new axis is formed: that of prohibition, with two possible main outcomes, celebrated by a marriage or a funeral. The "can't" of the dream becomes the "don't" of comedy and tragedy, whose audience relationships are summed up by laughing and crying, both forms of convulsion. As with the case of Slavoj Žižek's ticklish subject, the subjects of comedy and tragedy anticipate future pleasure or pain and thus "convulse" in advance. The hero is already-always either married or buried, so to speak. The "don't ask, don't tell" attitude developed to move away from the unlimited "telling" of Romance, is really the principle of suspension of knowledge known from the start, with narrative simply allowing the truth to come out in carefully measured installments, imperfect symmetries to sustain interest by creating discomfort. Already married or buried, the heroes find out only at the end, and the motives of the action swirl around the "don't ask, don't tell" rule. The hero is really dead (the Greek word for hero originally meant, simply, "the dead"), or, in French, the dummy (*le mort*). The audience perceived the end before the characters, and their complicit silence is allowed at most a collective gasp. The audience sits in the dark auditorium, acoustically receptive, the image of death because, as Richard Bernheimer has noted, it duplicates the rings of heaven with its dilated concentric rows, cut through the middle to admit the stage's left-right logic of character's motions.

Frye's categories of Romance, Comedy, and Tragedy thus account for literature's origins in the dream, and the gradual movement away from the dream as privation becomes prohibition. For architecture, this is also the movement away from the circle to the inwardly contradictory spatial structure of the Greek and Roman stage. Vitruvius idealized the Roman version as a semi-circle cut across by the stage and its machinery. The acoustic realm of the auditorium, a place where "eyes wide shut" sums up the synesthesia of sound for sight, meets its "match point" in the stage's aspiration to be as much as possible like a two-dimensional screen, able to create an optics visible from any angle ideally, but in practical terms best when seen within a carefully limited cone of vision turned backwards. Renaissance theaters would, as the optical devices of the stage became more important, tighten this cone of vision and elongate the auditorium, as if to say that sight had won out over sound as the contest of identity within a strict accounting system evolved more demanding logical forms.

Optics and identity — the key themes Freud identified in the phenomenon of the uncanny (*Unheimlich*). The German word reveals what the English and French cannot, that this is a negative without a positive to foils. The home is a place for keeping things away from the eyes of strangers; the invisibility cultivated by *Heimlich*, homey, is the same that generates the spookiness of *Unheimlich* — something comes to light that *should have remained hidden*. We see before us something that should not be seen, namely the dead who does not know he is dead, and in our silent, dark auditorium, we are not going to tell him. The optics will dominate, our silence is commanded. We listen, and when we do make noises we will make

them officially, in the form of laughter or applause. Muffled sighs are the most we can do until the end, when the dead characters, the dummies, find out what we have long known, that they are dead, which explains why the ceremonies of marriage and burial have, in all cultures, so many significant points of similarity.

The gnosis of the audience is tied up with the conspiracy not to tell the dead they're dead. The accounting system that calculates the cost of everything (and, ironically, as if the joke expression makes existential sense, "the value of Nothing") is based on privation (silence, immobilization), and this establishes the axis by which the privation of the dream (inability to tell the dead apart from the living) is now balanced by the desire to know and the strategies to overcome (or face directly) the fantasies of marriage and burial that had previously held us in our seats. Irony, in the form of farce or satire, maintains the literary status of gnosis, but outside the theater, "science" is the word that must be given a more specific, more poetic meaning. No longer the attempt to master the object through its attributes, science can be only a knowledge of the subject, a self-knowledge. It must, on account of this rule, be represented through "half expressions," what Lacan called *mi-dire*. "Don't ask, don't tell" becomes *ask* (.5) + *tell* (.5) = *science* (1.0), or, more accurately, $\sqrt{-1}$, since the science itself is -1 , the inverse or other side of positivist science, and its components can be *seen* only one at a time, like two characters played by a single actor (a ploy, it should be noted, of David Lynch). In other words, the key components of the uncanny, optics and identity, add up to *i*, $\sqrt{-1}$, an "irrational."

The "final" articulation of the narrative imagination, historically and logically, thus maintains an alliance with the first, the dream-based Romance. Who woulda thunk it? On the basis of privation, the prohibitions of Comedy and Tragedy are taken into account and transformed into point-of-view issues. Satire, and the science that carries it on after the theater closes, thus adhere to a Contextual strategy of adjusting the frame. The first and otherwise primary move involves the pull-back: the camera moves away, enlarging the field of view just enough to reveal a margin where stand the crew and equipment that had been standing just out of the visible scene. We see both the original show and the production process. The original story becomes a story-in-a-story, and the question is, which one rules? In metafiction, a group of actors produce a play whose plot spookily predicts their own real-life dramas. The painting shows itself on the wall that now displays it (*Las Meninas*), but indirectly, through a triangulation to be discovered by coupling optics with identity.

By this pull-back ploy, reality itself is equated with the painterly technique of using a darker margin to re-frame a scene beyond or within.¹ Or, the original scene is shrunk to fit into a room at the back, a mirror at the back, a landscape shown through windows. The $\sqrt{-1}$ becomes the means of showing the past as contemporary and including it architecturally, as a Lacanian "treasury of signifiers." When shown in a painting, it can be explained away as allegory, as in the Dutch paintings of household goods (food, instruments, books) foregrounding a space with a door or window opening on to a scene from the Bible. Architecturally, it is possible to walk from one zone to another. Time is connected by space. Every space, based on the pull-back of $\sqrt{-1}$, is a manifestation of the Renaissance conceit of the "memory theater." The rings of theater seats, as Bernheimer advised, are now turned around by the same motive that compelled Giulio Camillo to make the stage look like the auditorium, optics/topics to act "acousmatically," representative of a voice *for whom the question of location has not been resolved*.

"Resolving location," not coincidentally, becomes the aim of the "new science" of the subject initiated by Giambattista Vico and resumed by Jacques Lacan. As if taking the plan of the memory theater to heart (just where *is* that voice coming from?), Lacan integrates Freud's revolutionary acousmatic approach to psychoanalysis with topology, a way of synesthetically converting sight to a logic of touch. Touch should not be isolated as "one of the five senses," but seen as the broader issue of tangency, adjacency, contiguity, and contingency — that is, the *metonymical* side of things, the counterbalance to the function of semblance (and metaphor) where optics threatens to dominate, as in the compelling specular other seen in the mirror by the young child who is still, metonymically, a "subject in pieces." Lacan shows how optics and identity work within the logic of the $\sqrt{-1}$, "agreeing to disagree," offering the

impossible "Hobson's choice" between the Imaginary, the maternal, and the Symbolic, domain of the Father-who-does-not-know-he's-dead.

Before Lacan there was Vico, for whom the symbolic was also a matter of giving the subject a place, accepting the terms of the symbolic (= "castration") and thus entering into the ideology of culture as such. Vico, like Lacan, coupled the Imaginary with the image, with the subject's perception with an eye outside of the body, a displaced point of view, an eye of the Other, a partial object and thus indistinguishable from the Gaze, the uncanny windows of the un-homely house that watch from within concealed darkness. Such houses are just as much the fate-directing astrological constellations, the "houses of heaven," as they are the families that inhabit literal houses. The back-and-forth between houses as constructs of fate and "literal" dwelling-places is a cultural constant. An estate is both a landscape domain and a legal entity. There is the "House of Channel" as well as the place where Coco Chanel might be living at any given time. Parliaments have houses, so do dogs, shared in abstract by husbands in disrepute.

Vico's houses corresponded closely to Frye's: the mythic house of the dream, the myth, and fairy tale, which was at the same time nature in its "emblematic" presentational mode; the rule-bound economies of Tragedy and Comedy, based on the hero's ability to deceive and the audience's to bring heroes to account. Vico described privation directly: the first humans, *because* they were unable to conceive of the true causes of things, *prohibited* knowledge by inventing the cloak of religious mystery. Truth was the domain of demons, pried out only by strictly regulated procedures of divination — the first science to be used as such. With demonic truth converted into Law, privation became prohibition, at first literal and severe, then (through the devices of literature) accommodating. Comedy allowed forgiveness within ideological limits; Tragedy at first allowed license and ambition but kept account of the costs and presented the bill at closing time. The latitude of ideology opened up by Comedy and Tragedy's dialectical points of view made it possible for Satire, the contextual, frame-conscious human, to see things from "other points of view." The Mechanism of Tragedy had competed with the Organicism of Comedy; now the Contextualism could see both as equals with different angles of view, and irony came into its own.

Where does the voice come from? This is the commonplace of the kidnap plot, made possible through the untraceable phone call demanding ransom. Akira Kurosawa's 1963 film, *High and Low*, tells two conjoined stories about just such a voice. The remarkable thing about this corporate take-over drama and police procedural is that the psychoanalytical idea of the dummy; the critical-theoretical idea of the forced choice; the literary categories of Romance, Comedy, Tragedy, and Irony; and the hybrid and transcendent ideas such as acousmatics, the $\sqrt{-1}$ of the impossible-real "partial objects," and the ideological contexts of the unconscious as a dis-conscious — the essence of the transition from privation to prohibition that involves the "interval between the two deaths."

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1. The technique of *chiaroscuro* covers, in ordinary art-historical parlance, any effect of contrasting light and dark employed to create a sense of spatial depth. It should be argued that this simply makes the pull-back technique of creating a secondary margin, a frame-within-a-frame, portable. Used inside a scene, light and dark models the form of figures and pulls them forward from their darker background. A candle can, for example, pull faces "forward" to some imaginary screen inside the field of representation (cf. Caravaggio's *Denial of St. Peter*). It is the relation of light to this "screen" of representation, a kind of "call and response," that makes *chiaroscuro* what it is, and makes all of its general employments into versions of the frame-within-the-frame, more accurately designated by the term *encadrement*.