

## FALSE AZURE

The French Revolution: the challenge and horror of the Real, as freedom; *tuchē*, as Aristotle was to put it and Jacques Lacan to link with *automaton*. Is it possible that the newly liberated psyche, thrown into maximum contingency, can function as its opposite: someone apparently alive but with the kernel of death at his/her center? This is Œdipus, fleeing his Samarra and thereby taking the road exactly. His fate is inscribed within him in an "active" way by use of the negative, which by definition becomes the double negative. This makes Œdipus the equivalent of the Golem or "that which should be dead but nonetheless exhibits persistent life." The question may be pursued at a number of levels — philosophical, ideological, psychological, etc., but it should be the basis of a new reflection on an old geographical problem, namely, how to connect the center with the periphery.

Didn't the French Revolution give rise to the "Gothicism" that produced the most vivid literary representatives of the living person with death at his/her center (Ad) — Madame Bovary is the most poetic representative. What philosophy and criticism have articulated only with great difficulty, popular culture has crafted with extreme precision. "For those who have eyes to see," such seemingly independent creations, such as Proust's epiphanies or Monte Cristo's dungeons, map the territory of the mind set free to the tune of the Marseilles. Once responsible for the domains that religion and custom had formerly subcontracted, the imagination grabbed the blueprints that lay closest to hand: the dynamics of fantasy itself, one version of which was the uncanny's formula of Ad and DA.

Frankenstein's monster is the clearest case, as if Mary Shelley had, during the house-party where each guest at Byron's Villa Diodati on the shores of Lake Geneva was challenged to invent a supernatural tale. The tradition of guests inventing or retelling tales cuts a transect across Western literature, from Boccaccio's *Decameron* to Henry James' "The Turn of the Screw" and Arturo Cavalcanti's *Dead of Night*. The coupling of the supernatural or tall-tale with implied anthology points to the ritual construction of a circle embodied through the geometry of an informal gathering, a cosmogram to expel evil spirits. Shelley's monster came to her as a "waking dream" of a young scientific genius who applies galvanism to an assembly of body parts collected from charnel houses and abattoirs. His invention comes to life but, disgusted with his creation, he abandons it inexplicably. In his absence, the monster murders his younger brother. The living-dead being (DA) is now the fated antipode of Frankenstein, who is now tied to this dread fate (Ad).

To put two ideas together quickly, possibly prematurely, what if the crossed antipodes of the uncanny were literally opposed points on an imaginary planet, whose spherical surface naturally provides paradoxes comparable to the idea of the uncanny itself? On this planet, the monster and its creator are both opposite and identical, tied by the force of the line running through the center of the impossible solid that seems to hold them distant. If the sphere is a possible model, then the maps of the surface of the sphere should demonstrate this singular weirdness: they should represent, in fractal form, the fact of the sphere's closed, curved nature: the fact that it is, like Pascal's God, an "infinite sphere" whose center is everywhere and circumference nowhere.

Imagine that a set of maps is desired, and the goal of the set is to complete the space it describes. In the case of the periphery of a finite territory, a complete description requires inclusion of the territory lying just beyond the official boundary; then logical consistency requires description of the territory lying one more ring of land beyond this, etc. etc. *If the project as ambitious as it claims*, it will encounter the ultimate defining conditions of space itself. Namely, it will encounter curvature. In the case of the curved universe, time is integrated fully with space. The universe, like a round planet, has an equator, beyond which distance from an origin point will cover all but an increasingly shrinking remainder of unexplored space. At some large but still finite distance from the origin, the map-maker will encounter a Very Small Space, the final remainder of *terra incognita*. The ultimate periphery will be both the original starting point and the antipode of this origin. As antipode, the final map to be drawn will be placed in the Atlas at a point that is most remote from the first. But,

because the antipode lies in a space that inverts the logic by which the traveler goes outward in ever-larger concentric circles of space, the final map will be “re-temporalized” as the origin.

The Atlas of the Obverse, at it could be called, can scale back its accomplishments into a more economical *prospectus* by pointing to parallel conditions that have led to the same impasse. Pascal’s famous epithet for God, was passed on with satisfying commentary by the Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges. Can we not go further, to the “Atlas level of consideration,” to consider how the four forms of the fantastic that Borges used in the construction of his stories (the double, travel through time, the story in the story, and the contamination of reality by the dream) are not also the cardinal points that meet at every story’s geographical center. This chiasmic conundrum is the verbal version of the *vesica piscis*, the “body of the fish” that is the mandorla (for its almond shape) made by two circles, each of which has its center on the other’s periphery. The Irish author James Joyce found this to be a sufficient diagram for *Finnegans Wake*, where ALP, “Anna Livia Plurabelle,” could be triangulated twice. The *vesica* is also the basis of the hendecagon, the eleven-sided polygon, whose numerical 11 is a “self-generating” number, 11.11111..., somewhat like the  $\emptyset$  and Fibonacci series.  $10 + 1$  is the basis for many aspects of the twelve-month calendar, and just the ticket for suggesting that, in the French Revolution’s passion for ten, there is a remainder, a kernel of the uncludable, the Real, the *tuchē*, whose geometry constitutes an automaton operating at the center of freedom itself. This proposition, difficult to expound through the sciences it would destroy, is a commonplace of literature, art, architecture, and music.

In the captions given the public-relations industries involved with creating electronic appliances, virtual realities allow us to leave the anxiety-riven world of “everyday reality” for an imaginary 2D or 3D experience quickly generated by algorithms that anticipate our need for motion, color, encounter, and (above all) mastery. This last desire appears in the form of scores we may accumulate, even for the simplest accomplishments. It is the sworn duty of the mice, track-pads, joysticks, and other control devices to convert our minor motions into death rays, fly-throughs, and other deifications of mortal powers. Mastery is conferred for meager inputs, and in some cases (day trading comes to mind) quite real if successful. Mastery in Lacan’s view is always virtual. We encounter it while still in late infancy, when we see the image in the mirror that, as a new Us, proclaims advanced powers. It is in the company of our stereo-reversed elders, the very picture of unity and acceptance into the glorious symbolic worlds of adults. On this side of the virtual, we remain in our dispersed, fragmented state, just as later on in our station before the virtual world of our home computers, we will stay in our pajamas. The body-in-pieces is a back projection of this illusion. We didn’t realize our miserable metonymic state until we saw our *Sosia* in the mirror. *Our Sosia* ... how this charming imposter comes to promise mastery in the anterior future that will have accomplished — by what magic coronation day? — all we desire is a bit complex. First, it is clear that we do not know at all the desires that will be fulfilled. They belong to the others in the mirror, who already seem to be passing out accolades and gifts. The impossible journey past the screen of glass into this crystal palace includes, in the price of the ticket, a tour through a gallery of these desires, where guides and captions always fall short of explaining just how the precious objects (that, as Lacanian *objets-causes*, are simultaneously effects and causes of those effects) of desire are what we should really want.

Our *Sosia* is the twin, separated at birth, that we never met until now, our avatar, armored from head to foot to withstand any challenge. We are carried into the crystal world, the *azure*, by a wind that, correlated to a certain momentum that makes us almost fall into the virtual, as if we had been headed there but stopped by the unseen solid glass, blows past the death of that screen. Certainly this was the same wind that carried the bird attracted to Zeuxis’s grapes, muraled on the wall in his contest with his rival Parhassius. The bird did not anticipate the screen of representation. The same force that broke its neck was the one that allowed it to finish its flight with the theft of a grape. The judges who took this death as proof of Zeuxis’ superior abilities also experienced a crash as they looked at what they took to be the curtain concealing Parhassius’s work. The wall had materialized as a curtain, the curtain all the more effective for concealing what they desired, that called out to them, Siren-like, from behind a veil. — Open it up! they implored Parhassius, but he did not, could not. It was the painting itself, an image of the very surface that had killed the avian. Their necks broken, they

dreamed the collective death dream, narrated by the call that could not be voiced. The internal acousmatic voice can only be "placed" within an unknown geography, also contained within the atlas of the inverse.

Such a call was made by the corpses crushed by the rubble of the banquet hall in Ceos, exposed to sunshine unexpectedly after the collapse that Simonides had escaped by being called, erroneously it seemed, by two men who had mysteriously vanished as soon as he stepped foot outside, avoiding completely the catastrophe the other guests were to endure. Their calls were their names, acousmatically nowhere, desiring the somewhere of recognition within their families' pantheons, settled in a second, symbolic death so that their souls may rest. Between this first and the hoped-for second death, Simonides contributed his art of resonance, set up between place and name so that his poetic tricks might be directed to the guests in person. This was indeed a "stochastic resonance," since the determinism of the signal constructed by memory to trigger the name at the occasion of place was now loosened by chance, affordance to contingency, *tuchē* to *automaton*.

Isn't this the line that always distinguishes authentic travel from other kinds of human movement? For instance, running an errand is not travel but the spatialization of carrying out orders. Wandering lacks form and meaning. Intentions, even ones that run aground, are needed for travel; also the exposure to contingency and the resistance to its worst effects. The true traveler knows when to employ a guide, also when to discharge him. He/she may travel in company but is defined, in both goal and discipline, by solitude. Thus the trope, the turn, finds its emblem in the labyrinth, map of the soul in the underworld. In the labyrinth's fractal design, the material defect lies in the way it simulates escape by entrapment and entrapment by escape. The longest paths spiral back into the center, the center-most run for the door: Lacan's *pointon*,  $\diamond$ , becomes  $\langle \rangle$ , the sign of scale dysfunction. His *matheme* for fantasy,  $\$ \diamond a$ , says as much as "the subject, divided by this inverting journey, must simultaneously flee and confront the desire of the Other." The other calls, but the walls scatter the sound, the names are strewn across the floor along with the rubble of a former architecture.