

# LAYING GHOSTS

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Fantasies exist to be exorcised, but their hold on fragile existence is so ferocious that they appear, by virtue of this strength, to be permanent. Pushing and pulling them off their territory requires the discovery of the physics of their tenaciousness, but what is this struggle for, exactly? The fantasy is not simply a delusion, an 'untruth' blocking the way to enlightenment. In Freudian terms, it is the basis for the relations of the consciousness to the unconscious, a relation that Lacan would come to define in terms of a 'double inscription' of the subject within two registers, one based on the opportunism that makes best use of the adjacencies of experience ('*tuchē*' was Aristotle's term), and the other, unconscious, operating with a blind, sleepless fury ('*automaton*').

Fantasies exist to mask the relation to the Real, and for that we should be grateful. The Real, after all, is traumatic, unsymbolizable, utterly resistant to explanation and commentary. Fantasy helps us avoid, circumvent, or falsify this Real, and the regularity of the devices by which it accomplishes this useful service leads to the major forms and structures of arts devoted to extending fantasy through narrative, paint, film, and building. For the most part, a catalog of these extensions seems preferable to an exorcism of their sources. Wouldn't it be better simply to live with fantasy, the motive, and describe and analyze fantasy through its metaphors and metonymies — in other words, through its formal devices?

The answer of psychoanalysis is that the spell of fantasy permits ideology to run full speed through culture and personal mental life. The ego-centered bias of American psychology has all but eliminated any reference to the unconscious, focusing instead on a 'self-help' model of mastery and an obstacle-course definition of the environment. In terms of this model of the mind — whose ascendancy over Freudian models was intentionally engineered by the U.S. psychiatric profession — supported what Lacan called 'the American way of life'. Through the effective agency of popular culture media, consumerism, nationalism, commodification, class entitlement, and global aggression provide an *ad hoc* template for applying the ego psychology idea.

The 'clinic' stands for the scientific evidence — principally from the Freudian-Lacanian field — that resists, in terms of theory, the ego-psychology basis of ideology. But, the clinic has an equally compelling relation to popular culture. The discovery of the inner defects of mind that discover the basement of fantasies' amusing popular culture forms, tends to resolve in canonical ways that build the case against ego-psychology in non-clinical, non-technical terminology. Culture and philology have long been a means of 'testing' the tenets of psychology, philosophy, and pure science. Michel Foucault argued that the ancient system of

phlegmatic, choleric, sanguine, and melancholic humors dominated even through modern empirical psychiatry, to determine the etiologies of mania, depression, and other maladies. Freud was more subtle but no less structural. His early interest in Judge Paul Schreber's paranoia discovered an inner symmetry of displacements, as Schreber could imagine his love for his analyst only as his analyst's hostility towards him. As interest moved to the issue of hysteria ('false malady'), then obsession (the case of the Wolf Man), then cultural manifestations of personal conditions (*Moses and Monotheism*). What may be too easily bracketed to the side or forgotten entirely is Freud's interest in, and key contributions to, the understanding of the uncanny. In this momentary turn to literature, which echoes in a key sense Freud's complete reliance on Schreber's autobiography rather than the patient himself, Freud built the first early bridges between psychoanalysis and the arts, although it is clear that the role of fantasy had not yet been in his mind.

Fantasy as a turn away from the traumatic Real had to wait for Lacan to articulate it in a way that would reconnect to the fundamental formula Freud borrowed from Ernst Jentsch, the 'primary cases' of something dead that refuses to die entirely and its complement, something alive that contains within its heart a kernel of death. These complementary paradigms were well known in the 'literature of the uncanny', especially in the sensationalism of vampires and zombies. Lacan's spatio-temporal idea of an 'extimate' (*extimité*), the ultimate archaeology of the 'subjective object' (partial object) and objective ('barred') subject played into his central formula for fantasy,  $\$ \diamond a$ , or objective subjectivity and subjective objectivity related through a scale dysfunction ( $\langle \rangle$ ) that also 'points to' two parts of the circuit that contains these terms. Lacan insisted that these parts not be read as complementary or equivalent in any way. But, in some commentaries, Lacan talked about combining two alternative kinds of complementarity,  $-x$  and  $1/x$ , which in algebraic combination produce  $\sqrt{-1}$ , or  $i$ , a lucky coincidence for explaining the necessary relationship between the Real and the imaginary fantasy.

Returning to the theme of how the conscious and unconscious are related — which is after all the whole point of psychoanalysis and its principal distinction from psychology and cognitive sciences, which have discarded the notion of the unconscious as such, we are returned in both the examples of fantasy and the canonical diagnoses of the clinic to a situation of framing. That is, popular culture and empirical psychoanalysis, *via* the structure of the uncanny and Lacan's extensions of the uncanny into the extimate and the formula for fantasy, reduce to a diagrammatic analogy of the frame. When Freud arrives at the bull's eye of the uncanny's own 'uncanny' self-inversion (the German term *heimlich* 'automatically' produces its opposite through the component of security and concealment); and when Lacan points his *poignon* to the anxiety of presence on one hand and the narratives of separation and absence on the other; we are in the land of the double frame, temporalized by the radical conditions set up by anxiety and separation. With anxiety, temporality is ruthlessly venatic. We meet death in the

marketplace and, horrified, flee to Samarra, but death is waiting for us there. Our every motion of escape puts us into the lair of what we are running from. With separation, this geometry of inadvertent return is formalized as a wandering guided by hidden symmetries; the zigzag paces to and fro inside a cage, between capture and escape. The escape is an escape from a bounding dream or delusion, what Don Quixote thought had happened to the parched plains of La Mancha ('the stain'), a blight imposed by evil magicians. What is the escape 'to'? Does the fugitive find peace or just another form of the puzzle? Because recursion is a part of the structure of the cage, this discovery depends on reaching a 'second death' after the first, symbolic death that has imposed the cage. If R1 is the kind of reality that most people think of when they use the term, an enclosing higher-order truth that requires us to 'break out of' our limiting illusions; then R2 is an internal, telling defect, a plan of the prison that traps us. Decipher it and we can escape.

The ciphers of R2's form of the Real constitute another technical potentiality for the exorcism of fantasy. In psychoanalysis, the model of exorcism is as inappropriate as it is descriptively accurate. The demon within is not an alien but, rather, the subject who must admit to authorship. This is Lacan's unconscious debt to Giambattista Vico, who took the Socratic mandate, 'know thyself', to its logical conclusion: *verum ipsum factum* (we may and must know what we have made). We created the puzzle of R2, to escape to R1 we must devise a 'philosophical-philological' method — i.e. we must combine the abstractions that play out the idea of truth and consequences with the symptoms created by cultural life. In a sense, Vico's *verum* and *factum* play by the rules of Lacan's separation and anxiety (absence and presence) motifs. Vico even realized the key roles played by metonymy and metaphor in this twinned methodology: while metaphor concerned itself with transmutations of form, metonymy kept to the 'automatic' constructions that were the by-products of conscious cultural constructions. The tuchē of opportunity and the automaton of the *verum* insured that cultures, cast hither and yon through history and geography, would go through the same evolutionary stages.

Vico explained his cipher as a cipher: the imaginative universal was the *master key* of his main work, *The New Science*. Unlike the logical idea of the universal, the imaginative universal did not create a Platonic 'divided line' from the low particulars of experience to the high truths of universal laws. As if he had just read Lacan's account of extimacy, Vico planted the universal within the particular. He 'doubly inscribed' the demon within the corporality of imagined, alien substances: the sky, the earth, water, wood, etc. Like Lacan, Vico made it possible and necessary to describe the condition of the Real in terms of a diagram where opposites left their linear sequential relationship and crisscrossed into each other. The first humans, unaware of their own fierce nature, imagined an objective nature 'out there' — the first subjective object — which held its demonic dominion as long as this self-ignorance could sustain itself. The subject animated/autonomized the world and the world, in return, wound up the clock of culture that, when it ran out, would end in the madness of rationality, the final

expulsion of demons (subjectivity) from objective reality. Literally, the mind aims to kill the world, leaving the anxiety of objects as a Wasteland without common mental places for cultures to rely on.

Vico's 'ideal eternal history' is easily expounded as a death narrative, a journey 'between the two deaths', if only because the two defining terms of the Jentschian uncanny serve as *terminus a quo* and *terminus ad quem*.  $A_D$ , the living subject with a minimal kernel of death at its heart, constitutes the death-driven anxiety of life with its apparent choices serving as the perfect medium for the operation of Vico's version of the Aristotelian-Lacanian automaton, his Providence, whereby the accidents of geography and history insure that culture will always be 'out of place' and 'out of time'. The reverse condition,  $D_A$ , the subjective object, awaits mankind: the 'anxious object' that mirrors the demon-inhabited substances of mythic thought.  $D_A$  initiates and concludes the series, but the anxious subject, caught within the *tuchē* of experience, unknowingly reverses the polarities. Nature is not entirely killed by irrationality. Its minimum element of life constitutes an obscene surplus, such as the fetish value Marx cited as the basis of exchange, or the repulsive push-back of nature against human misuse and intrusion (the shark of Steven Spielberg's *Jaws*). In extreme conditions, extreme remedies apply, as in Ridley Scott's *Aliens*, where the horrific monster emerges from the body interior of the scientist-machine sent to explore a sleeping cosmos. Extimacy rules the Vichian machine, and popular culture fills in the blanks.

These ghosts of the Vichian-Lacanian extimate need to be laid to rest. Why? Restlessness is inherent to the nature of a ghost, itself the consummate Lacanian partial object, a shadow gone AWOL from its body, final cause on the loose, an organ: sheer desire. Ghosts in literature and art are fictions. As partial objects, they are real, *all too Real*. Their restlessness is their eponymous quality. Just as *heimlich* migrates cozy security to its opposite *via* the common term, concealment, the ghost begins with *Geist*, soul, and host/hospitality but ends in ghastly hostility. There is not disjunction, as Freud showed for *unheimlich*; the opposite was already-always inscribed when the house was built in the first place. Just as architects were originally responsible for ritual sacrifices to secure the *firmitas* of their work, the *firmitas* of the body is afforded by the 'prequel' of sacrifice, which comes to the subject from outside and before: the name. In very real terms, the child within the womb already has access to this sound, delivered though the womb to the fetus. We are already somebody else before we are anybody. We are ghosts to begin with:  $A_D$ . No wonder life begins with a cry! We are anxious and misrecognized.

The dead element, the name, does not sit well with the living subject. And, when we die, it will be the resistant element that will survive. Children in many cultures are taught to remember scores if not hundreds of forefathers' names. The name is what distinguishes the human grave from other decaying animal remains. And, in fantasies of separation, it is what guides the soul in separation. The zigzag meandering of the soul defines this state in terms of

motion — thus *rest* is the antidote, the end, the answer. The stake through the vampire's heart is the only thing that will get it to stay put. In other variations, the vampire in the room can be restricted by a circle of communion wafers, or the cross brandished as a stop sign. Motion and rest; ghost and host. The formula is flexible enough to extend to travel in general which, when it aspires to authenticity as a form of learning, resembles its underworld counterpart, the *katabasis*, κατὰβαίνω. Given that the original meaning of the word 'hero' was simply 'the dead man', it seems that the weaving motion of descent is the clear signature for the interval between the two deaths and, hence,  $D_A$ . The path of this motion, as well as the places that determine its landmarks, additionally take on the significance of a cipher. Laying a ghost to rest, therefore, is a matter of decoding, of finding within one message, another.

With the translation of a logical condition to images and diagrams, the cipher condition finds its closest visual correlate in the phenomenon of anamorphosis, the 'image within the image' that, once a correct point of view is taken up, is revealed. Because the image within the image is a variant of the trick of the frame within the frame, we can rely on the same topographical model, where the space between the two frames and their relation to the two forms of reality, R1 and R2, are simultaneously about the 'double inscription' of the subject caught between the coincidence of consciousness (*tuchē*) and the blind chance of unconscious (*automaton*).