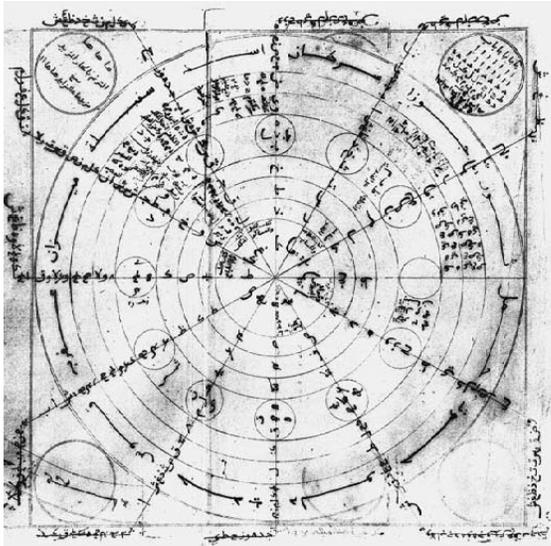


# what can you say? — *Notorious* as a zairja



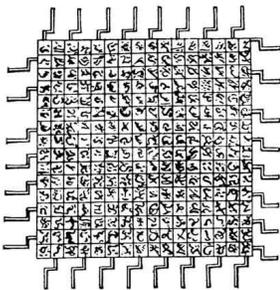
The aim of any study of metalepsis is to approach the ideal of “unlimited predication” — fundamentally, how to think and speak about relationships between any set of conditions, ideas, events, or operators *productively*, so that this relating becomes a *means of thinking*. The value of this ability contributes “centrifugally” to public discourse, but the “centripetal” value to the thinker is even greater. Metalepsis allows the consideration of relations to serve as a kind of artificial intelligence, a “topical machine,” able to experiment, speculate, and discover. The “unlimited” component of unlimited predication is not an authoritative encyclopedia for others but, rather, a private device for generating a white noise that amplifies weak signals to a level where they may be excavated from an anonymous background.

The idea of a metaleptic thinking machine draws from the tradition of the ancient zairja (زايحة), an actual device that existed and was described by Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406), the Tunisian–Andalusian historiographer and economist. It is likely that the Catalan mystic Ramon Llull (1232–1315) contributed to or was influenced by the astrology of the zairja. How the zairjas worked is not entirely clear, except that the main aim was not to clarify thought but to confuse it. Combinatorial diagrams cross-pollinated ideas so that their inner forms became visible. An “agutezza” figured as (Stoic) animus was distilled and extracted.

Despite the esoteric-sounding lore surrounding the zairja, the principle is entirely scientific. In the phenomenon known as stochastic resonance, weak signals require the presence of white noise in order to be detectable. In a closed acoustic system such as a pond, for example, background noise allows crayfish to hear predators approach because signals that would otherwise be too faint are amplified by the randomness of the pond noise. But, stochastic resonance suggests a geometry that is key to the operation of the zairja and the logic of metalepsis. This would involve two positions separated by a barrier with a primarily acoustic (dys)function: one cannot hear the other in a normal way; some delay or re-routing is involved. For this reason, the pair could be called the “Pyramus-Thisbe operator.” Other narrative couples that satisfy this function are: Romeo and Juliet, Roxane and Christian (*Cyrano de Bergerac*), Narcissus and Echo — in each case the delay ( $\partial$ ) constitutes a mechanism for incorporating negation at the level of production.

The aim of a “calculus of metalepsis” is to demonstrate the direct functionality of stochastic resonance by means of a “third position” remote from the Pyramus-Thisbe pair. In some narrative examples, great or extreme or even unimaginable distance plays a direct role, as with the rule of separation that forces Castor and Pollux to rotate between life and death without meeting.

## the word gets around



An automated version of the zairja appeared in Jonathan Swift’s novel, *The Tale of a Tub* and was copied almost directly by Daniel Libeskind in his production of a “writing machine” for the 1986 Venice Biennale, curated by Aldo Rossi. Libeskind’s version, like Swift’s featured a matrix formation alluding to the interaction of 16x16 elements controlled by 32 cranks. There is a deep idea here! This matrix zairja *IS* a matrix, where dimensions play a role. Two of them operate as agencies “from behind the curtain” so to speak: Lacan’s “university discourse”:  $S2/S1 \rightarrow a/\$$ . Each element resides within a *field*, affected by this action-at-a-distance. There is a display to an “Other of the Other,” whose existence is a controversial issue in psychoanalysis.

Lacan’s objection is based on the question of a “metalanguage,” whose possibility he (rightly) denied. However, what if the Symbolic already is a “metalanguage”? What if there is, already and always, a potentiality-made-actual at the level of material transaction? This is the  $><$  element of metalepsis, the Janus point of extimity where, as Jacques-Alain Miller puts it, “*jouissance* grounds the alterity of the Other” (“Exitimity,” *The Symptom* 9). In university discourse this alterity grounding is put directly, in the ambiguous command to “Enjoy!” The “*Ché vuoi*” of the phallic stage turns desire around on itself, and the place of this turn is  $><$ , the point where Eros/dæmon is inserted into the askesis of the predicative series.

This is not just an obscure footnote within an obscure calculus! This is a point recognized for a long time by a broad range of artists, writers, architects, etc. In Alfred Hitchcock’s 1946 film *Notorious*, the function of the cellar key is to be a “key that is a key.” Like any good master signifier, it re-organizes all signifiers around it by reversing its signifying function. It turns around the *Ché vuoi* in the scene where Sebastian needs the key to the wine cellar as the champagne supply is being rapidly depleted by thirsty guests. The cellar contains contraband uranium, concealed in bottles of Pommard. Hitchcock was himself “a man who knew too much.” The screen play was written before the revelations of the Manhattan Project. The “Trinity Test” took place July 16, 1945, in Alamogordo, New Mexico. The FBI, curious about how Hitchcock might have known about the strategic uses of uranium, investigated, only to discover that uranium was a “lucky guess” based on discussions with Robert Millikin at CalTech. The otherness of the Other dominates the film: consider Sebastian’s series of glances at the lock in the cellar, where his face expresses a three-step backwards method of “discovery through negation.” Consider the “kiss that is not a kiss but is really a kiss” used by Alicia and Devlin as an excuse for being in the cellar. Consider Sebastian’s mansion as a Cyclop’s Cave, and the rescue of Alicia after being poisoned as a sheep-trick whose final step has been protected in advance by a conditioning of “reversed antinomasia” — reversed predication of “my wife is sick,” allowing Devlin to escape with Alicia and, at the same time, expose Sebastian to revenge at the hands of his Nazi colleagues.



**MAXIMUM EXPOSURE + MINIMALISTIC TRUTH = "NOTORIOUS"**

The key of *Notorious* lies in the title itself. The idea of a scandalous secret being exposed begins with Alicia's notoriety as the daughter of a Nazi collaborator, caught, convicted, and imprisoned. This is built into Alicia's reputation for being a "loose woman" — not tied within the network of (phallogentric) symbolic relations realizing Lacan's infamous slogan, "Woman does not exist." The truthful minimum here is the complex both of en-gendering and truth itself. Alicia's non-existence (internal exile) is based on her internal void, her "Other of the Other," which is related to her truth-telling abilities. She is used by the US Intelligence Service to infiltrate a Nazi spy-ring in Brazil by marrying one of its principals. It is her presence rather than her investigation that converts her Nazi husband's mansion into a Cyclops's cave, a trap from which she must be sprung after the discovery of the essential secret. Her function is that of the traditional maiden held captive by the dragon, whose positive version is the virgin who entraps the unicorn. The horn of the unicorn is the flame, the cave-prison is the domestic hearth. The flame in the case of *Notorious* is the atomic bomb. Everywhere things are what they seem, but this identity creates a rupture in the Symbolic, through a >< insertion that, with keys that are really keys and kisses that are really kisses, make truth that is really true — all identities that are what they are thanks to a journey through the negative.



**"Woman does not exist!"**

What is the meaning of Lacan's most outrageous claim? Alenka Zupančič clarifies: the woman is conscripted for membership within patriarchal culture, "imprisoned" at the hearth as the "priestess of Hestia," whose spirits will condemn the entire family if she defects (is unfaithful, or if a daughter gets married. "Wedded to the flame" however gives her access to a "truth inside a truth," the basis of Lacan's definition of woman as "not all" — "not all of the woman is appropriated by the Symbolic. There is always a remainder." In this light, man is simply a woman who has failed to doubt that she exists. (Remember that Devlin is the one "offended" by Alicia's willingness to sacrifice herself!). Alicia's "not-all" is her remainder, her other of the other. This enables her to be "wedded to the flame" of the hearth and at the same time able to escape it. In patriarchal terms, Alicia figures out the "name trick," that the negative ("My name is nobody") can be used as an identity. Alicia's negativity is her near-death from poison from Sebastian's mother, the perfect super-ego figure. But, even here, *Notorious* complies with tradition by having Alicia "feign" death in order to escape the cave-hearth. This is something Euripides (*Alkestis*) would have understood.

< → > **spatial continuity**  
 < → < **reversal of the close-up**

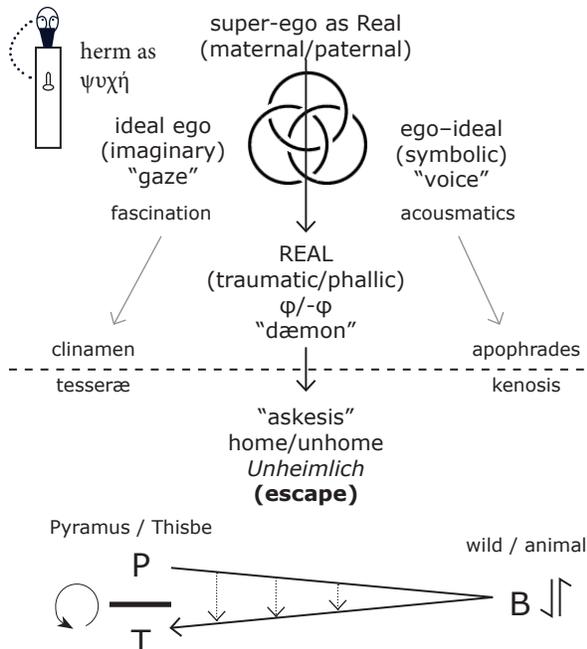
The normal key function is reversed by the boom shot that begins at the balcony and zooms into the key that Alicia has slipped off Sebastian's key-ring.

This reversed predication initiates a dynamic that Devlin-Eros reminds us about when he warns that the guests better have enough champagne.

When Sebastian decides to go to the wine cellar himself after discovering his missing key, he realizes that his wife and Devlin have been spying; their alibi for being discovered is to pretend to be in the cellar for a tryst. The tryst is true but it is used as a fake!

The cellar condenses the function of the mansion as a Cyclops's cave, whose hearth is a unary trait (cf. unicorn's single horn), an *einzigiger Zug* — a *sinthome* that functions metonymically to organize other signifiers around it. Alicia is "wedded to the flame," and the flame here is actually something more real than Hitchcock could have imagined — the fuel of the non-yet-public atomic bomb.

The space opened up by reversing the predicates (cf. Odysseus's use of the pronoun as name in the Cyclops episode) offers up a site as a "place of exception" (clinamen) where the couple, as a "Pyramus-Thisbe operator," can realize the effectiveness of the *absence of the third thing*. This is the left-behind signifier that has fallen outside of its position in the signifying chain — literally! (The key has "fallen" off its key-ring.) Once off, it creates a resonating chamber within which signifiers now operate according to a stereognostic pairing (tesseræ) whose theme is initiated by the sexual cliché of key and lock. The theme of placement — where does this Thing go? — is stated in the most radical Lacanian-Freudian way: it is a lock (hearth) whose key is, profoundly, the "woman" who "does not exist" thanks to her Other



**Revisionary Ratios**

The enigma-puzzle of Hestia and Hermes becomes more familiar without losing any of its enigma when we consider how Sebastian's mansion functions as a Cyclops's cave. The hearth flame is the Psyche, an image of the "masculine" but only in the negative (the manes are, generically and collectively, "the dead"). This aspect as gens/ingenium is a breath-soul, but only in the sense of the word-breath, the *afflatus*, the acousmatic wind (with its 8/16/32 aspects). The soul retains its feminine aspect as anima through the not-all function that converts the acousmatic *mi-dire* aspect of prophecy to a physical distance used as a resonating chamber, in which knowledge split by half (cf. Simonides) creates a stereognosis centered around a point of conversion ( ) that is simultaneously a center and an edge (cf. Hermes/Hecate). The "masculinization" of this point really establishes the original fact of en-gendering, as a part of the process of Hestia's wedding to the flame. The man is really the woman who thinks she exists ... and is easily devoured by the Cyclops who understand the secret of the name. Odysseus/Hermes becomes a woman. The phallus connects to (f.) *Pysche*.

The PYRAMUS-THISBE operator is fully functional in the film *Notorious*. Alicia and Devlin "cannot speak to each other" (acousmatic qualification of Eros) and the secret of their discontent lies in the secured cellar of Sebastian's mansion, in bottles of Pommard. The stages of discovery/escape are established by the stereognosis of "key-and-lock" themes that use Thisbe's not-all echo capabilities to convert the not-all void to the "other of the other" — the kiss that is not a kiss that is a kiss; the key that is not a key that is a key; the flame that is not a flame that is a flame. Triple negation — *Verneinung, Verleugnung, Verwerfung* — works in every case of "damsel in distress."