

THE TRAP OF NOTHING

THE (ARCHAIC) CONSUBSTANTIALITY OF *MY MAN GODFREY*

Don Kunze

Abstract

Gregory La Cava's 1936 screwball comedy film *My Man Godfrey* is structured by consubstantiality, which will be defined here¹ as the reification of a second, oppositional element in response to the negation of a first. Because the second element is conditioned by the very thing it negated, a third element is required to reverse the (subjective) point of view as corollary to the first, objective reversal. The film takes place in the depths of the Great Depression; its story centers on the discovery and restoration of 'the forgotten man', represented by Godfrey Parke, who has renounced his wealth and social position to live in a shanty-town under the pseudonym of Smith following a failed love-affair. After being 'claimed' during a scavenger hunt, he becomes the butler of the family of a New York industrialist, Alexander Bullock. One daughter, Irene, falls in love with him, the other; Cornelia, attempts to frame him by planting 'stolen' pearls. Godfrey eludes her trap and uses collateral from the pearls to invest in the futures market, where he rescues his host's company's shares to save the family from ruin. With surplus funds he reclaims the shanty-town site and builds a modernist night-club, employing his former 'forgotten men' companions. Consubstantiality is played out visually and dramatically. Its component parts are encoded into a visual paradigm to demonstrate the toroidal logic that connects consubstantiality to Jacques Lacan's theories of discourse and sexualization. Here, topology qualifies Freud's contention that 'Psyche is extended; knows nothing of it' by showing how the non-orientation of the 2-d manifold becomes the self-intersecting traps of 3-d immersion – traps that are already well-known as dramatic devices.

Key words: consubstantiality, *My Man Godfrey*, Jacques Lacan, *katabasis*, projective geometry

Consubstantiality, a revised view

Consubstantiality, a theological term, is more generally the condition of balance that arises out of termination (Cassirer 1955). At the moment of negation, an oppositional entity appears, seemingly structured by the very thing that it negates, a left-hand Jekyll to the right-hand Dr. Hyde. This double reversal rule specifies that (1) nothing vanishes without structuring an imagined counter-force that is (2) then held to be the cause of the first's cancellation. Cassirer gives the example of night's opposition to day in mythic thought (ibid. 83-118). When light ceases, darkness becomes more than the simple privation of light. Cancellation immediately presumes the existence of opposing forces as cause of the ending. The reified, embodied night revises day retroactively. The organic birth-life-death rhythm of day easily transfers to night, but is considered as an *anti-organic*, as if death had been the original source of this structure, the zero-degree condition against which life had been allowed 'on loan' (ibid. 78). When mythic thinking says that night *opposes* day,

¹ The doctrine of consubstantiality officially begins with the ὁμοούσιος of the Nicene Creed (325 c. e.). James Joyce uses it six times in *Ulysses* (1922) and Kenneth Burke (1969) formalized it as a rhetorical principle. My revisionary reading is derived from Ernst Cassirer's second chapter of *Mythical Thought* (1955), 'Foundations of a Theory of Mythical Forms: Space, Time, and Number'.

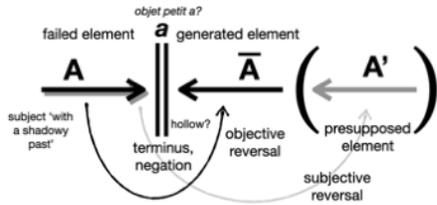


Figure 1. Consubstantiation uses termination (failed element, A) to imagine an opposition (generated element), that objectively reverses and is structured by the primary A. This objective reversal however requires a second, *subjective* reversal that opens up a second, alternative – anamorphic – point of view. At the point of negation, the oppositional/alternative views create the possibility of the doubled terminus, or hollow face separating the failed and generated elements. Drawing by author.

reversal (and extension) of the subjective position.³

This Mitchell both-sides-now logic has a cinematic sense, where the narrative beginning, middle, and end, are structured by visible places and the views of them allowed to the audience. If the film *My Man Godfrey* can be said to be a case of the consubstantial, we must consider (1) spaces to be pitched in a rhetorical mode of temporality and (2) our views into these spaces a katagraphic cut (Causse 2018) made by the collective Psyche into a substance that, once cut, becomes rhetorical. (3) These can then be analyzed in terms of Jacques Lacan’s four primary forms of discourse (2007). The master signifier (S_1), signifying chains (S_2), *objet petit a*, and barred subject (\$) will dance across a quadrated field of Agent, Other, Production and Truth, like *Commedia del’Arte* actors, to play out the sorrows and joys of the Hysteric, Master, University,

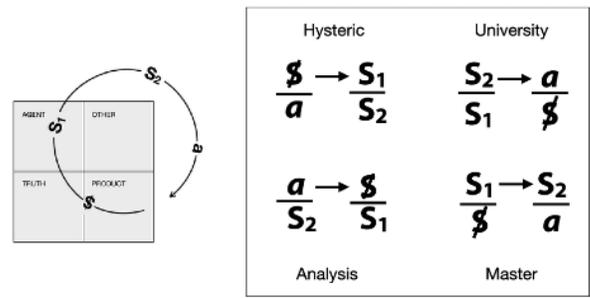


Figure 2. Lacan’s ‘rotational’ system of four discourses, based on Aristotle’s square of logical oppositions. The logic of rotation will be, in *My Man Godfrey*, the sequencing of three scenic *foci*, the shanty-town, the Bullock’s apartment, and the night-club. The sequence is Hysteric/Master/University. The discourse of Analysis is ‘silent’ both in the plot (Godfrey’s failed romance is not described) and in the diegetic film, where this *matheme* has to do with the audience’s access to the story *via* the screen. Drawing by author.

² The production of the zero-degree from simple termination is the basis of the tragic ‘arc’, where a rise of fortune must be followed by an equal and opposite fall. It would not be hard to see consubstantiality as the *force majeure* behind Lacan’s mirror stage, where the child’s reflection, not simply a reversed copy of the young subject, also demonstrates antagonism. This is a crisis of the Real, with retroactive recognition of the pre-subject’s prior condition as a *corps morcélé*, combined with the over-valuation of the spectral Other (Bowie 1991: 21-9). Needless to say, it is a faint but true copy of Hegel’s thesis-antithesis-synthesis dialectic, keeping to Hegel’s avoidance of reading synthesis as resolution and insisting on the contronymic reading of *Aufhebung* as both cancelling and preserving.

³ Thus, in the argument to be unfolded, Psyche *is* this extension of the subjective position from a primary ‘diegetic’ position to a ‘critical’ reversed view, where the reversal counts as the Real of this transference. From the standpoint of the diegetic, this extension will resist assimilation by the Symbolic. Hence, Psyche will ‘know nothing of it’.

and Analysis (Fig. 2).

My Man Godfrey begins with the Hysteric encounter of socialites with homeless men roughly encamped on the tippings beneath the shadow of the Queensborough Bridge, S_1/S_2 . It then surprisingly flips to the Master's discourse site, the lavish interior of the Bullocks' apartment at 1011 Fifth Avenue. As if to prove Hegel's point about servants being ironically superior to their masters, Godfrey plays the servant-supposed-to-know but doesn't overdo it. He's a servant-Other with productive secrets, S_2/a . A second plot-point flips the story to conclude in the office behind the night-club, S_2/S_1 , where 'the only difference between a derelict and a man is a job', $a/\$$. Under the guidance of University Discourse, we Enjoy! ($a/\$$) the ending because it has suppressed the discourse of Analysis to serve as the pivot guiding the performative arc formed by other three discourses. This fourth position also holds the position of the 'true first', the reason for Godfrey's decision to take up the archaic role of the 'passive hero' and submit to suffering and trials.⁴ This 'true first' accounts for both the *outside* encounter at the shanty-town and the butler episodes *inside* the Bullocks' apartment. The film seems to know what Lacan has told us about the relation of outside to inside (Miller 2008). It combines the themes of Hysteria with Mastery to corral the energy needed for the University scene at night-club ('The Dump'), where 'the only difference' theme (the job as the bar in the \$ of the man) in the discourse of Analysis features the *objet petit a* to provide what Lacan would later describe (1961-62: 36) as a void (Fig. 3, lower left corner) created by conjoining inside-out conditions (Lacan 1973). Uncannily, the film has Irene Bullock bring, on her visit back to *what she thought would be the original shanty-town*, a supply of firewood to fast-start her romance with Godfrey. The archaic relation of fire to marriage seems to be the ethnographical result of the *a* shifting from its University position as Other to its Analytical position as Agent, but we should be grateful for this additional relation to extimacy. It seems that not only had the director just finished reading Lacan's Seminar XVII, but that early cultures knew all along about the extimacy of fire, as both purification and revelation.

The invisible but functional hinge and the topology of desire

The film cannot directly articulate the fourth discourse, Analysis. This *matheme* showing the agency of the 'missing object' *a* operates as the silent, melancholy pivot about which the other three discourses fan out to create a maximum tension between Hysteria and Master, then converge on the University. The 'on-stage' position of *a* in Analysis conceals the truth lying in the signifying chains, S_2 , which

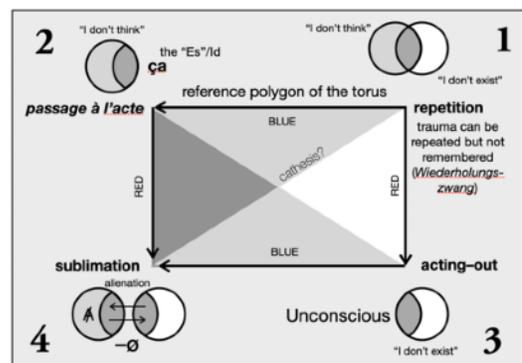


Figure 3. Lacan's adaptation of Aristotle's square of oppositions, demonstrating structural (toroidal) relations between repetition (1), the *passage à l'acte* that takes place outside the Symbolic, the acting-out that takes place within the Symbolic (3), and sublimation as the closure of the topological torus (4). The diagonal connecting repetition to sublimation is 'cathetic' in that it relates the 2-dimensional topology of demand to the necessity of immersion, to 'see what is technically speaking invisible'. Source: French transcript of Seminar XIV, *The Logic of Phantasy*. Rolf Nemitz, *Lacan Entziffern*, <https://lacan-entziffern.de>. Annotated by author.

⁴ The theme of the passive hero is documented in Cooke (1999). Because so many plots involve the disguise, wandering, and trials of a figure both once blessed, now cursed by the gods, the event-structure of this necessary hemisphere of narrative amounts to a universal template employed by nearly every culture. The passive hero can be read as one hero playing out two episodes or two heroes occupying antipodal positions, one living, the other dead.

engineer this expansion-contraction. Lacan insists (2002: 418) that these chains lie on a 2-d surface, but thanks to the twist between each component, the surface itself is topologically twisted. The string of pearls that Cornelia has tried to plant in Godfrey's room to incriminate him has worked in the same way. The pearls themselves hold together because of the twisted string. The pearls become the plot-point where action suddenly rebounds from an expected consequence to a surprising alternative. The audience enjoys the twists but doesn't see the rebound coming: $a/S_2 \rightarrow S_1$.

A string in topological terms is a 'one dimensional subspace' that, in Lacan's system, would relate to the 1, the unary trait that Lacan mathematized in Seminar XIV (1966-67). Lacan carried Freud's *einzigster Zug* from its role as a telling recurrence, an accident with an unconscious cause, to the level of a mathematical formula as fundamental as $E = mc^2$. Because the 1 is not recognized as 1 until we come to 2, when we retroactively realize its role, I would say that the 1 is melancholy and compare its sorrows to the \emptyset , the set of sets, of the Russell Paradox that don't include themselves (Chiesa 2006; Friedman 2016). The 1 as unary is primordially alienated from within, simultaneously separated and without – in other words, a melancholy of extimacy. Like the melancholy of the system of humors, where black bile is deleterious in any amount but, as if in compensation, both a poison *and* an elixir, agent of life-to-death *and* death-to-life – i. e. a *pharmakon* – the 1 is 'toroidal' in its mathematical connection to the Fibonacci series of numbers (1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21 ...). It is non-oriented in being a constant only in relation to a value greater than and less than (the principle of the Golden Rectangle), but self-intersecting in the way that merger with itself produces successively better approximations of the Golden Ratio, \emptyset : 2/1, 3/2, 5/3, 8/5, 13/8 ... etc.

As both toroidal and iterative, the unary 1 tells the story of the fundamental unit of psychoanalysis, the Signifier over the signified, S/s . The S/s specifies an unknown – who knows what the Other wants by this s ? It is always a '*che vuoi?*' But, as an 'x', an unknown, the signified constitutes a distance, an elsewhere, a space beyond (shown as beneath, $/x$) the margin below the surface constituted by the 2-d metonymical chain, $\underline{S} \dots \underline{S}$. This is the hole in the 'doughnut' of the torus, the vanishing point at which the parallel virtualities of *My Man Godfrey*, the wedding and the break-up, will converge in melancholy. Like the \emptyset of the Fibonacci numbers, it is a vanishing point lying on the horizon at infinity. Yet, it is an effective center, in the same sense that the last scene of *My Man Godfrey* connects to the first, pivotal, untold story of Godfrey's failed romance, a/S_2 .

Immersion, the cinematic fourth wall, and the projectivity of discourse and sex

In the *matheme* for consubstantiality, \rightarrow does not exist alone. The \rightarrow is finite: $\rightarrow |$. This finitude requires an agency created out of the sheer negational power of the $|$. The reification of the \leftarrow that springs into being as soon as \rightarrow becomes $\rightarrow |$ is, like the creation of night as the adversary of the day, a palindromic necessity: $\rightarrow | \leftarrow$. However, it, too, does not exist alone. It has been structured by non-orientation: $\rightarrow | \leftarrow (\leftarrow)$. It emerges from negation as a positive form, *but because we need to see it*, a subjective angle of view must be added. There is no viewing space within the 2-d surface created by linked metonymies, each of which is singular thanks to the fact that, as a link in a chain, it is a 'twist and nothing more'. To view the twists, there must be a fictive distance between the viewer and viewed – 'fictive' because the 2-d surface does not admit such a separation. This distance must emerge out of the flatness of the projective plane, but in mathematical terms, this emergence is called 'immersion', and the fiction of the new subjective view, (\leftarrow) , is Lacan's

principle of *ex falso quodlibet sequitur*, ‘from the false, everything may follow’ (1966-67: 33, 36-7). The ‘EFQ’ rule of emergence (Wikipedia 2006) is nothing less than the principle of cinema as a 2-d projection of an ‘anything’ (*quodlibet*) that is taken to have a collective but indeterminate meaning, an S/s true to the non-indexicality of human language and the (fictional, if viewable) virtuality of the signified.

Aside on the issue of why we can't see 2-d projective forms

It is possible to see representations of projective forms – Möbius bands, Klein bottles, toruses, etc. – but we are looking at immersions, not the 2-d forms themselves. Our viewer-viewed dimension is the fiction we must insert to allow our inspection of the 2-d form in perspectival 3-space, but this view comes at the expense of seeing forms self-intersect – become a trap. To appreciate the paradox of self-intersection, employ the ‘pinch test’ of the Möbius band. It is obvious that one can hold the strip of paper between one’s two fingers. The test of projectivity must be made by pulling the strip (or sliding the fingers) across the full length of the band to demonstrate that the two edges are actually one edge, and that the two surfaces, which are so clearly the *verso* and *recto* of the material paper, are actually one side of the twisted band. But, what of the twist? It is clearly visible. It is the graphic feature of every drawing that identifies the Möbius band as such. But, in 2-d projective space, *the twist does not exist*. Topographically it is the non-orientation of the form. To view the band perspectivally, this non-orientation must be translated into self-intersection. The twist of the Möbius band is an illustration of the need for *ex falso quodlibet* and the reason why the discourse of Analysis is, like Godfrey’s failed romance, the invisible pivot of the story.

Immersion produces the self-intersection that corresponds, along with the ‘sagittal dimension’ of our point of view (POV) and its corresponding vanishing point (VP), to fantasy. The technical name for this POV–VP line is ‘cathesis’. It is a product of our need to visualize projective forms even though this visualization will be a ‘seeing without seeing’. Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s *Visible and Invisible* (1968) could be re-translated as ‘The Necessity of the Invisible to the Visible’ or, in Godfrey terms, ‘The Necessity that the Visible *act on behalf of* the Invisible’. We need this fantasy to cover over the Symbolic’s lack in relation to the projective Real of the 2-d surface’s non-orientation. Our Imaginary must provide the work-around of self-intersection to satisfy our sagittal, cathetic curiosity.

This is clearly what Lacan did, by connecting the contingency of the unary trait, Freud’s *einzigster Zug*, to the mathematical certainty of the 1, but as a vanishing point, $\rightarrow |$, at the horizon lying at infinity. If consubstantiation has a limit at infinity, \bullet , then this limit needs and implies a second, reversed subjective point of view. This explains why *My Man Godfrey* must involve two negations, one that opposes Godfrey’s wealth and status with his self-imposed exile and submission to servitude in the style of the passive hero, another that inverts the *objective* story, coupled with a *subjective* transposition, the creation of a reverse-angle point of view that allows the audience to watch this objective transformation take place. Just as we demand to make a Möbius band we can cut, twist, and glue, the audience needs to ‘see the twist’, which is the function of the plot-point that *immerses* the 2-d sequence of events so that a scene can show the twist as surprise.

Why immersion becomes an opportunity to talk about the fourth wall of cinema

This second negation, counterpart to topology’s immersion, is the fourth-wall function of cinema, where the space first occupied by the camera and production equipment is removed to be replaced by the space

of the auditorium. Even the apparatuses that make these two spaces possible, the camera and the projector, are inverses of each other.⁵ The camera *passively* takes in and processes the light chemically to produce the gray-toned surface of the film. Then, the optical logic is reversed, and light shines from behind the film to project the images onto the 2-d screen. We could write the film-and-projection sequence of cinema as con-substantiation using the consubstantiation cyphers, $\rightarrow| \leftarrow(\leftarrow)$, with the $|$ as the surface of the film that first receives (passively) the focused light, $\rightarrow|$, then is the screen onto which the processed image is projected, $| \leftarrow$. There is even the space for the audience watching the projected image, (\leftarrow) ... what Alexander Bullock might have called 'a big room with the right kind of people'. This inversion of technology allows us to speculate if and how the $|$ might also be a double negation, $| |$, or how the $|$ is, to begin with a 2-d surface that must be non-oriented but, then, self-intersecting, which should be shown as separated by the *objet petit a* as the principle of the non-orientation of *jouissance*, $|a|$.

Consubstantiation, originally the religious/mythic idea of incarnation and metamorphosis, is secularized, as Amos Funkenstein would say (1986), into the modern idea of cinema. The key is to see the self-intersecting form of *My Man Godfrey* as the 'toroidal' twist of the four discourses it uses, meaning that the customary sequence of Analysis>Hysteria>Master>University is something of a Möbius band whose twist exists, like Pascal's God-as-infinite-sphere, nowhere and everywhere. If we can see *My Man Godfrey* in terms of immersion, the need of the fourth wall's exchange of visibility and invisibility, we can return to Lacan's quadrature of the discourses and other four-part schemas, such as his *mathemes* of sexualization, to ask the important question: *where is the twist, and what does it mean?*

The screwball comedy film is content to stay out of the politics of psychoanalysis and simply show what it means, what it must mean. This is how consubstantiality works as an 'Idiot's Guide to Psychoanalysis'. Within the *matheme* of $\rightarrow | \leftarrow (\leftarrow)$ we can isolate components that allow for alternative labels. The full sequence of operations could be re-christened as *conatus* to describe how necessity inexplicably emerges out of contingency. The other side of this primal contronym would be what Freud called 'transience', the necessity of re-imagining any single scene as a series ruled by an entropic energetics. If we fashion entropy as a succession of metonymic signifying chains, we see that its vanishing point also lies on a horizon that can be re-positioned as a center, and the 'neg-entropy' phenomenon of emergence creates *cathesis*⁶, the identity of viewer and viewed (because one generates the other). This, in cinema, requires a fourth wall that replaces the technology of filming into the technology of projecting.

Because of human language's non-indexicality (Lacan: 'non-bi-univocal concordance'), we create the problem and then solve it ... but imperfectly. The mark of our self-imposed failure is the universal *a*, the lack, the remainder, the twist that is both there and not there. Psyche is indeed extended, just as Freud contend-

⁵ In the early days of cinema, cameras were actually re-engineered to be projectors.

⁶ I convert the term 'cathetus', used by Filippo Brunelleschi to describe the spooky correspondence between the viewing point and vanishing point. 'Cathesis', a 'Janusian' power of vision able to enclose a 360° field of view, generalizes this correspondence to be consistent with projective geometry's principle of non-orientation. Euclidean geometry's definition, 'a line perpendicular to a surface (or line); in particular, either of the sides of a right triangle other than its hypotenuse', grasps the role of orthogonality as usefully representing the independence of two descriptive vectors. Just so, in projective geometry, the vanishing point at infinity can be represented as the zero-plane where parallel line 'families' intersect and can be represented by Cartesian coordinates. If the plane is positioned at $Z=0$, each vector can be represented by X and Y coordinates (Wildberger 2021).

ed in his enigmatic note (1938). It is not enough to add that Psyche ‘knows nothing of it’ (Carignani 2018). I would claim that *theory itself* fails to assimilate this extension, and as a result has its own theoretical unconscious. The mark of this failure is the *a*, which we can represent and even model with Lacan’s slide-rule analogy (1966-67: 146, 155, 158, *passim*) in relation to the unary trait. We embed our theoretical failure in the ‘number that is not a number’, both the 1 and the \emptyset , which lies as a vanishing point, both the center and edge of the series of the powers of *a*, and make it out to be the primary and primal instance of *extimité* (Miller 2008). We must use our lack to structure our theories. We must make actual extensions in what we could most inclusively call ethnography (popular culture along with the fine arts, folklore and myth along with the neurotic compulsions and fantasies involved in ‘reality’). If Psyche extends anywhere, it is *into* here and *through* here.

The overlays: discourse, sexuation, fundamental polygon of the torus, Godfrey

Thanks to Lacan’s engagement with projective geometry’s non-orientation, with immersion’s necessity of self-intersection’s creation of invisible traps, we can say that Psyche’s ignorance of its own extension *is* the unconscious; that its limitation to the 2-d surface of metonymical chains banishes depth psychology’s iceberg model.⁷ Proof of this is in the very place where there *is* no unconscious, i. e. in psychosis. Here, the unconscious must be pantomimed, pretended – just like in the movies! From outside the Symbolic, it is the *passage à l’acte* that, for art and ethnography, is the *necessity* of the performative. By this, I mean that ritual re-enactment as a cultural phenomenon is the other side of the neurotic’s acting-out compulsion to repeat. And, within each ritual this psychotic ‘lack of an unconscious’ is the necessity of structure, or rather structure as the necessity to repeat.⁸

The invariant (psychotic) ruse of archaic anamorphs

This is especially evident for pre-modern cultures, which in very early times relied on invariant rituals as the basis for law. To insulate and preserve the authority of the aleatory procedures of divination, repetition protocols were unvarying – this was the rock to which Prometheus was bound.⁹ Mobility was allowable only under the disguise of resistance. Brides could not marry *willingly*, altars could not be moved *voluntarily*, strangers could not be received *hospitably*. These reversals were bound up in a contronymic logic that

⁷ Don’t blame Freud. The iceberg model apparently came from Granville Stanley Hall, one of the founders of American psychology (Green 2019).

⁸ The outside of the inside and inside of the outside is behind the rule in ancient and Medieval times, of locating theaters at the edge of town or, if in town, restricted to specific days (Knight 1997).

⁹ Vico (1948: §§387, 503, 549, 713) explains that Prometheus’s immobilization is key to understanding the relation of the hearth-flame to the subsequent invariance and severity of ancient law. Prometheus was ‘heroic’ only in the sense that the designation ‘hero’ originally signified nothing more than a dead person. Religions of the hearth were local and separatist. ‘Cyclopean’ cultures resisted consolidation and could not be collectivized without a transition myth, such as the Roman story of Curtius, whose sacrifice allowed the Forum as a common center and the College of Vestals to centralize the worship of the *manes*, ‘heroes’, of the flame.

was more performative than linguistic.¹⁰ Of course, brides *were* married, altars *were* moved, and strangers *were* welcomed *as long as*, and *as soon as*, camouflage could be erected to create a radical and durable anamorphosis which was visible only in a limited sense. The aim was to create two points of view, whose connecting line (*cathesis*) pivoted around the fulcrum of the hearth. From one angle, say the ‘angle of effectiveness’, a virtuality was maintained to allow marriage, movement, and other transactions necessary in what were mainly ‘cyclopean’ (non-integral) societies. With family religions localized at the hearth, the *manes* embodied by the flame forbade defection or any modification of serialized rituals. The view from beneath the hearth fire had to be constructed so that those who broke the rules were cleared of any complicity. A modern vestige of such practices is the custom of carrying the bride across the threshold of the new home. Originally, this would have been a sign that the bride was in fact abducted and raped, not the voluntary and enthusiastic participant she actually was.

Other ‘reverse angle’ procedures were required to entertain strangers in the home, to trade surplus goods with unknown parties (‘silent trade’), and to form political alliances. The reverse-angle solution led to terms – contronyms – that embodied the necessary combination of actual and advertised meanings of events, objects, and even conversations. One could say that the reverse-angle ploy meant that every cyclopean custom was anamorphic, not limited to the standard insertion of a sub-image within a main image we have come to regard as a standard begun by Hans Holbein’s double portrait, *The Ambassadors*, but anamorphic (and consubstantial) in the more fundamental requirement for there to be *two angles of view*.

The logic of these cultural contronymics was analogous to projective geometry’s relation of the 2-d non-orientable form to the immersion into 3-space of self-intersection. In ancient tales such as Apollo and Daphne, the Cyclops episode in Homer’s *Odyssey*, or Actæon’s encounter with Diana, the role of immersion is a necessary constant, with its indispensable and invariant theme of entrapment. In modern tales such as *My Man Godfrey* the twinning of immersion and entrapment is no less evident no less structural. By taking topology to ethnology, we see why Lacan insisted on fashioning Psyche’s extensions as cross-caps, toruses, and Möbius bands. Even in his seemingly quadrilateral schema of the four discourses, there was the ‘necessary twist’ that, in *My Man Godfrey*, assigned the point where the ending could be found in the beginning – a cinematic contronym – as a literally melancholy pivot, about which the three main episodes could swing. Just as Analysis features the agency of the *objet petit a*, the film did not represent the fore-story of Godfrey’s failed love affair; similarly, it ended just at the point where his presumably successful marriage was about to begin. We have hearth-fires to mark both the *terminus ante quem* and *terminus post quem*. The campfires of the shanty-town brighten the shadow of the Queensboro Bridge in the first scene of the film; Godfrey’s office is warmed by a blazing fire in a stone fireplace in the last scene. Curiously, Irene brings a supply of firewood with her, as if to cement her intention to marry Godfrey then and

¹⁰ Freud’s trouble with accepting Carl Abel’s thesis of the proliferation of contronyms in primitive languages was due in part to the fact that Abel’s critics were linguists who did not accept the idea of language as evolutionary. There were no primal terms because there was, in their minds, no primal stage of language development. This in part explains the failure of modern linguistics to evaluate the more ambitious theory of Giambattista Vico (1948 [1725; 1744]), which, like Lacan’s theory of metaphor, proposes a mentality based on suppression and (metonymic) emergence. Vico is not simply a precursor to Freud and Lacan, he originated the idea of the unconscious as the ‘ideal eternal history’ present in every artifact, mechanized by the logic of the ‘imaginative universal’ (*universale fantastico*), a structure leading to ‘rhetorical reality’ rather than a trope based on analogy ‘with one term missing’. Just as Lacan would defy Perelman’s comparison of metaphor to analogy (Swales 2019), Vico had, two hundred years earlier, proposed that metaphor was the basis for *imaginare*, the Imaginary as such.

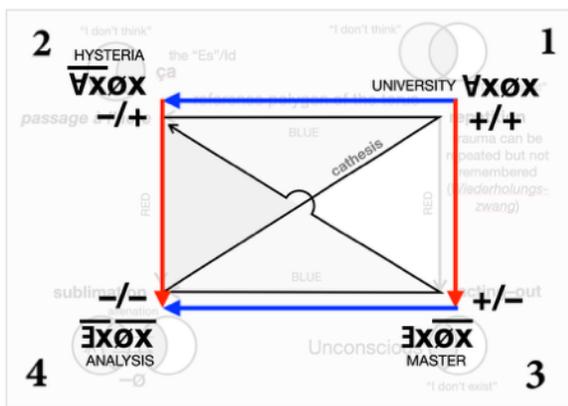


Figure 4. The torus relating repetition to sublimation via the inside-out positions of *passage à lacte* and acting-out suggests a similar topology for the four contingent conditions of sexual difference, where ‘those who would call themselves man’ must obey the phallic rule ($\forall x\emptyset x$) as long as there is at least one who does not ($\exists x\sim\emptyset x$), and where ‘not all of those who would call themselves woman’ obey the phallic rule ($\sim\forall x\emptyset x$), and there are no exceptions ($\sim\exists x\sim\emptyset x$). Reductions of these conditions to plus/minus abbreviations (+/+, +/-, -/+, and -/-) allow comparison to the torus’s own plus/minus positions marking the expansion and contraction of the fundamental polygon. Drawing by author.

zling – how the more general structure of consubstantiality might explain the negation-of-negation logic as meeting the needs of an audience, whose collective imagination must be synchronized within the cipher of *objective* reification, $| \leftarrow$, and *subjective* reversal, $\leftarrow (\leftarrow)$. This is more than a re-arrangement of puzzle parts. Consubstantiality in this instance is the comic supplement that supplies the fantasy to account for the inadequacies of the 1930s Depression Symbolic, where the Real showed through with far greater vengeance than the trash tipplings that encroached on the shanty-town. This silly film’s accomplishment lies in its structural precision, its seemingly detailed understanding of consubstantiality. First, we should inventory the effectiveness of this paradigm in terms of its overlaps with other protocols that Lacan has presented as rule of order: not just for discourses but sexuation, metaphor/metonymy (in

there after securing the authority of his hearth. A ‘priestess of Hestia’ in the midst of modernist architecture closes the curve with one line in the future, $|$, one in the past, $|$, to make the space in between $| a |$, the gap in the circle of discourses that have assigned Analysis the role of the hinge. And, just as a is in the position of Signifier to the signified in Analysis’s a/S_2 , Lacan insists that the *truth* of the metonymic chain is its ‘topological substratum’ (2002: 418). This is the *superficiality* of discourse. Truth lies in the twist, which allows the \rightarrow , the viewing point, to be repositioned as the vanishing point, (\leftarrow) for the family of parallel lines¹¹ that have connected the \rightarrow with the \leftarrow , as structural spandrels.¹²

Coincidences of the torus’s fundamental polygon

It is no profound accomplishment to fit elements of the story into machine-like wheels of Lacan’s discourses. The film seems to have a clairvoyant appreciation for how the sequence of Hysteria>Master>University>Analysis rotates S_1 , S_2 , a , and $\$$ across the field of Agent, Other, Product, and Truth. It is rather more interesting – and puzzling –

¹¹ In projective topology, any line is a ‘one-dimensional subspace’ that presumes that it and other parallel subspaces will meet at a common vanishing point, which can be represented at the horizon lying at infinity or at the center of a projective plane where the lines can be defined using Cartesian coordinates.

¹² It is a sore point with me that Slavoj Žižek (2009) failed to see the relation of the spandrel to consubstantiality, even though he had succeeded in showing how the architectural spandrel’s ‘uselessness’ was the basis of emergence, *chez* Stephen J. Gould. But, here again the essay failed to connect emergence to the critical role played by the sorites, the proper name for the paradox Žižek abbreviates as ‘one grain more, one hair less’. The third strike in Žižek’s attempt to connect to architecture would have connected sorites to Lacan’s 2-d linguistic model of metonymy, which would have led to the understanding of Freud’s parapraxis in relation to the reason behind his suppression of ‘Signorelli’ in the first place: the fact that Freud was a stranger in a strange land. Lacan leads the way in associating the repetition of words that are not Signorelli with the necessity to map his metonymies across the Adriatic of his vacation travels. In most other matters, Žižek gives us nothing but home runs.

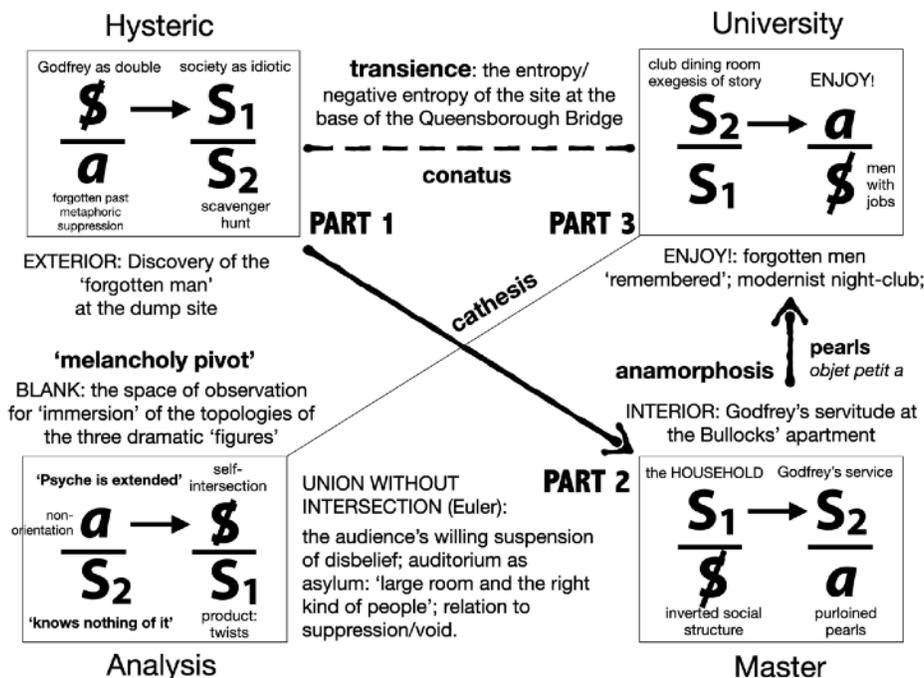


Figure 5. *My Man Godfrey*'s three main parts progress from a 'scene of Hysteria' at the trash dump shanty-town to the antipodal apartment of the Bullock family. After the intrigue with the planted pearls and revelation that the collateral of the pearls as allowed Godfrey to short-sell Bullocks' shares and save the family, the night club resurrects the dump as a modernist night-club. The 3+1 design assigns a dimension for spectation, Analysis, the 'asylum' of the film that is allowed by regarding the 'projective figure' of the story to be 'self-intersecting' — the production of plot-points where logical twists create traps then escape them. Drawing by author.

dreams, condensation/displacement), the analytical process plotted by the L-schema, and the 'parapractic' relation of repetition to sublimation *via* the inside-out opposition of acting out and *passage à l'acte*, described in Seminar XIV, *The Logic of Phantasy*.

Lacanian psychoanalysis is replete with diagrams, *mathemes*, ciphers, formulas, Euler circles, and other graphic supports. Lacan's capability as a 'visual thinker' still outstrips most of his readers' capabilities. His knowledge of topology and knot theory, his understanding of key correlates such as the Cayley-Klein matrix to the Borromeo knot is rarely challenged. Despite the damage potential of extracting one schema from its context, let me refer to the quadrature that Lacan adapted, it seems, from Aristotle's square of oppositions. In Seminar XIV, *The Logic of Phantasy*, in no fewer than five sessions (8, 9, 11, 12, 13) Lacan redraws this square in what is unmistakably a 'fundamental polygon' representing the topological figure, the torus (Fig. 4).

In this standard mathematical shorthand, two vectors, one red, one blue, diverge from a single point. On Lacan's original toroidal diagram from Seminar XIV (Fig. 3), this is labelled 'repetition'. The vectors end at opposite corners, which labels *passage à l'acte* (upper left) and 'acting-out' (lower right). These antipodes, he notes, represent positions *outside* and *inside* the Symbolic. A line connecting them would be, in visual



Figure 6. *My Man Godfrey's* opening and closing scenes, both with the Queensborough Bridge in the background, but with the silhouette reversed, although in the same aspect, in the process shot made to be the view through the office window. Photos by author.

perspective terms, cathetus, the uncanny connection between the point of view and vanishing point that Brunelleschi observed in the depths of the mirror (Edgerton 1973)

Terms suggested by consubstantiation – conatus, cathesis, transience, anamorphosis – can be written across Lacan's torus, where Aristotle's negative must be given a double twist, beginning with the cathetic vector connecting sublimation to repeti-

tion (Fig. 5). In Godfrey terms, this is the way the left-out fore-story and post-game marriage with Irene are spookily identified. In the ritualistic night-club office, we see the silhouette of the Queensborough Bridge (Fig. 6). Curiously, the profile is in the same position we saw it at the opening and middle of the film, but the squarish building in front of it is now in back. Clearly, this was an accident of back-projecting a so-called 'process shot', where the need for two reversals to register the image confused the crew. This error is, however, a 'slip of the tongue' that punctuates the blah blah blah of the film as discourse. It is both insignificant and significant, like a gambler's tell. It points to the function of $|a|$ in Analysis, the frequency the Analyst's ear must tune in to in order to plan interventions that precede, $<$, in the form of suggestion, or follow, $>$, in the form of a cough or murmur. The meme $|a|$ might as easily be temporalized, as $<a>$, to suggest the technique by which variable tempo opens up a space in the Analysand's blah blah blah for the Unconscious to speak forth. The temporal $<>$ could be considered the spatial figure of the mouth of the Unconscious, open but empty, like the mouth of Mother Courage in Bertolt Brecht's famous play.

Cathesis connects Analysis with University, sublimation with repetition. What of it? Is not Analysis like Alexander Bullock said, how all you need is to get 'a large room and fill it with the right kind of people'? Isn't this the way we might describe the position, the so-called fourth wall, where the audience occupies the space formerly taken up by the camera and crew? Isn't it also that timing, typically 24 frames per second, is critical for the visual image and its virtual spatiality? Doesn't $<$ and $>$ also suggest the reversal of the camera into the projector? Could we rewrite a as $|a|$, since it is a means of calibrating, in the same way Lacan used the powers of a to 'calibrate' the unary trait?

What's love got to do with it?

If we lay Lacan's *mathemes* of sexual differentiation over the fundamental polygon of the torus, Analysis falls beneath the double negative of the feminine condition of 'no exception' to the principle of the not-all. The double negatives in the matheme $\sim\exists x\sim\emptyset x$, can be abbreviated as $-/-$. The upper-right corner of the Hysteric, where Irene abducts Godfrey from his position outside the Symbolic, is the upper corner of the

mirror, $\sim\forall x\exists x$, abbreviated $-/+$ ('not-all of the woman falls beneath the phallic rule, \emptyset '). Godfrey is in fact feminized by his voluntary passivity. Possibly, he felt that his former romance has failed because 'he wasn't man enough'. He continually resists the romantic advances of Cornelia, Irene and the Bullock's maid, Molly. After Godfrey reveals to the family that he has rescued them from ruin, Angelica Bullock mourns his departure with the admission that 'he was the only one who really understood women.' If not on these counts, Godfrey earned his claim of the $\sim\forall x\exists x$, the not-all position, by concealing not just his identity but his superior status beneath his butler's black suit. With the first of its two terms 'negated', Godfrey's hysteria is a $-/+$.

The other end of the mirror, $||$, is held up by the appropriate reflection of this, $+/-$, the act-out of the exception to the male position, the at-least-one who does not obey the phallic law who guarantees the efficacy of that law as 'repetition', $+/+$, the University, where *jouissance* comes in the form of a job for every man. If the *a* is the means by which, by registering time, extension becomes possible as the projection of the film onto the screen. The camera is turned around to become a projector and, at the same time, another point of view (\leftarrow). The plot establishes its own version of (\leftarrow) once the passive Godfrey goes active as the owner-director of The Dump, built on top of the former trash pile (Fig. 5).

The story may now conclude with the Œdipal fantasy of marriage, antipode of burial as the real meaning of the trash pile as a zero-degree materiality. We do not have to thumb through Frazer's *Golden Bough* for long to find cases where openings in the forest are used for altars, or where burial and marriage are theatrical homonyms. If *jouissance* structures the University ending of Godfrey, it simultaneously opens up a fourth-wall asylum, the theater as the perfect 'large room and the right kind of people.' The lack generated by the subject-who-speaks, as soon as s/he speaks, whose remedies fail, converts into a spatial and temporal place to witness the self-intersections of immersion: stammers, stumbles, slips of the tongue, bungled explanations. These traps of self-intersection are the stuff of comedy. Godfrey traps himself, Irene wants to free him. Cornelia sets a trap, Godfrey evades it. The butler disguise traps the Bullocks, Cornelia tries to peel it off.

Only at the end of the film is there a 'final trap' that inversely frees the audience from their willing suspension of disbelief. Who can resist a bride who shows up with her own firewood and minister? What better $+/-$ for the $-/+$ than the $-/-$ of sublimation followed by ('repeat after me') I-do/I-do. And, what better shadow to serve as the canopy for this ceremony than the Queensborough Bridge, in Janusian reversal that lets the couple put the past behind them simply by switching their point of view?

Does Psyche extend on behalf of *kenosis* – knowing without knowing? Is this the meaning of 'doesn't know it' (*weiß nichts davon*) in Freud's mysterious little note (1938)? To close this essay I suggest asking the original girl (Apuleius, 2009). Like Godfrey, she performed a double *katabasis*. Not content with her lover's nest in Hades, she wished to see Eros and violated their prenuptial agreement. Wouldn't the son of Venus

be just as beautiful as the goddess of love herself?¹³ Psyche, hell-bent on immersion, unhappy with her 2-d topological non-orientation, met with the sorrows of all lovers who wish to put love to the test. Immersion comes at a cost: entrapment (self-intersection). No less does the movie audience add a dimension, the fourth wall, by the subtraction of the camera and crew that has, in production, converted the camera to a projector, one version of the antipodal positions of the passive (the camera), $-/+$, and the active projection of the $+/-$. The audience's trap is the 93 minutes during which they must sit still in the auditorium and play dead occupying the fourth wall. They will not only be held down by immersion's extension, they will *be* that immersion, that extension.

Wouldn't this be the perfect time for a contronym? Isn't the hero, in katabasic mode, the very mirror image of the *miles gloriosus* types who rampage their way through *The Iliad*? This depends on what you call a mirror. For everyone but the subject who sees her/himself, it's just a left-right reversal. For the mirror-stage victim, however, it's the double negative, not a top-to-bottom but a switch from *being on top* to *being on bottom*. Here, Godfrey and Psyche might wish they never had extended. Their trials are topologically preserved in the logic of immersion, where to see the twist in the Möbius band we have to endure the mild agony of logical entrapment. Is it one side or two? We can prove it both ways.

References

- Apuleius, L. (2009). *The Golden Ass of Apuleius* (trans) R. Graves. New York: Farrar Straus & Giroux.
- Bowie, M. (1991). *Lacan*. Cambridge MA and London: Harvard University.
- Burke, K. (1969). *A Rhetoric of Motives*. Berkeley: University of California.
- Carignani, P. (2018). 'Psyche is extended': from Kant to Freud *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 99 (3): 665-89.
- Cassirer, E. (1955). Foundations of a Theory of Mythical Forms: Space, Time, and Number, II, 2 (83-152) *Mythical Thought*. The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms 3 (trans) R. Manheim. New Haven and London: Yale University.
- Causse, J.-D. (2018). L'identité et l'identification: des sœurs ennemies*? *Psychanalyse* 41: 105-14.
- Chiesa, L. (2006). Count-as-one, Forming-into-one, Unary Trait, S1 *Cosmos and History: Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy* 12 (1-2): 68-93. <https://cosmosandhistory.org/index.php/journal/article/view/29>
- Cooke, I. (1999), 'Active' and 'Passive' Heroics in the 'Odyssey' *The Classical World* 93 (2): 149-67.
- Edgerton, S. (1973). Brunelleschi's First Perspective Picture *Arte Lombarda* 18 (38-39): 172-95.
- Freud, S. (1938) Findings, Ideas, Problems. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* 23: 299-300 (trans) J. Strachey, A. Freud, A. Strachey. London, Hogarth Press.
- Friedman, M. (2016). Torus and Identification: The Beginning of Lacanian Mathematics *Psychoanalysis: Topological Perspectives; New Conceptions of Geometry and Space in Freud and Lacan*. Beilefeld, DE: Transcript.
- Funkenstein, A. (1986). *Theology and the Scientific Imagination from the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University.
- Fustel de Coulanges, N. (1889) *The ancient city: a study on the religion, laws, and institutions of Greece and Rome* (trans) W. Small. Boston: Lee and Shepard.
- Graves, R. (1955). *The Greek Myths*. New York: George Braziller, Inc.

¹³ On the matter of Eros (and, hence, love/sex) as a contronymic construct and original of consubstantiation: 'Some say that all gods and all living creatures originated in the stream of Oceanus which girdles the world, and that Tethys was the mother of all his children. ... But the Orphics say that black-winged Night, a goddess of whom even Zeus stands in awe, was courted by the wind and laid a silver egg in the womb of Darkness; and that Eros, whom some call Phanes, was hatched from this egg and set the Universe in motion. Eros was double-sexed and golden-winged and, having four heads, sometimes roared like a bull or lion, sometimes hissed like a serpent or bleated like a ram' (Graves 1955: 30).

- Green, C. (2019). Where Did Freud's Iceberg Metaphor of Mind Come From? *History of Psychology*. Society for the History of Psychology News 22 (4): 369-79.
- Horn, L. (2002). Uncovering the Un-word: A Study in Lexical Pragmatics *Sophia Linguistica* 49: 1-64.
- Johnstone, H. (1978). Odysseus as Traveler: A Categorial Study. *Categories: A Colloquium* (ed) H. Johnstone. University Park, PA: Department of Philosophy, The Pennsylvania State University, 103-20.
- Knight, A. (1997). *The Stage as Mirror: Civic Theatre in Late Medieval Europe*. Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK, and Rochester, NY: D. S. Brewer.
- Kunze, D. (2020). Secondary Virtuality, the Anamorphosis of Projective Geometry *Architecture and Culture* 8: 3-4, 667-80, DOI: 10.1080/20507828.2020.1802195
- Lacan, J. (1961-2). Book IX *Identification* (trans) C. Gallagher. http://www.lacanireland.com/web/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Seminar-IX-Amended-Iby-MCL-7.NOV_20111.pdf
- Lacan, J. (1966-67). Book XIV *The Logic of Fantasy* (trans) C. Gallagher. <http://www.lacanireland.com/web/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/14-Logic-of-Phantasy-Complete.pdf>
- Lacan, J. (1973). L'Étourdit *Scilicet* 4: 5-52.
- Lacan, J. (2002). *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English* (trans) B. Fink. New York and London: W. W. Norton & Co.
- Lacan, J. (2007). Book XVII *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis* (ed) J.-A. Miller (trans) Russell Grigg. New York and London: W. W. Norton & Co.
- Lacan, J. (2017). *Formations of the Unconscious, The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book V, The Seminar of Jacques Lacan* (ed) J.-A. Miller, (trans) R. Grigg. Malden MA and Cambridge UK: Polity.
- La Cava, G. (1936, DVD ____). *My Man Godfrey*. Universal City, CA: Universal Studios.
- Lahiji, N. (2009). In Interstitial Space: Žižek on 'Architectural Parallax' *International Journal of Žižek Studies* 3 (3). <http://zizekstud-ies.org/index.php/ijzs/article/view/185>
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1968). *The Visible and Invisible, followed by Working Notes* (trans) A. Lingis. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University.
- Miller, J.-A. (2008). Extimity *The Symptom* 9 (June 20). <https://www.lacan.com/symptom9/>
- Nabokov, V. (1959/1989). *Invitation to a Beheading*. (trans) Dmitri Nabokov. New York: Vintage Books.
- Swales, S. (2019). Metaphor of the Subject *Reading Lacan's Écrits: From 'Signification of the Phallus' to 'Metaphor of the Subject'* (ed) S. Venheule, D. Hook, and C. Neill. New York and Abington, Oxon., UK: Routledge, 308-21.
- Vico, G. (1948 [1744]). *The New Science of Giambattista Vico* (trans) T. Bergin and M. Fisch. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University.
- [Wikipedia] (2006). Principle of explosion *The Wikipedia Foundation*. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Principle_of_explosion
- Wilberger, N. (2021). The Nineteenth Century: Sociology and Pure Mathematics *A Brief History of Mathematics* 3. YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mKlxkpbze54>
- Žižek, S. (2009). Architectural Parallax: Spandrels and Other Phenomena of Class Struggle *Lacanian Ink* 33 (Fall).