

The Speculative Topography of the Lathouse

A lathouse, I would claim, involves three “agencies”: an element of portability (one can fit in your pocket), a seeming advantage of connectivity (which has been compared to the Internet or, more ominously, Global Capitalism), and the structure Lacan identified as a *furrow*, which re-configures the otherwise simple sphericity of the alethosphere into an *a-sphere*, a coincidence of the opposite properties of perspectival projectivity and the projective geometry of non-orientable, self-intersecting surfaces.

In the confidence trick, there are also three agencies. A Con attempts to establish a dominance over a Mark, but a third person is required, a Shill, who impersonates a disinterested bystander drawn into the Con’s proposition. The Shill is like the magician’s plant in the audience, judged to be an objective and naïve by-stander characterized by their free will and ignorance of any design. The triangular structure is made up of a compass-like relation between the Con (at the apex) and two solid legs extending to the Shill and the Mark. The closed compass, ||, does not work until a space is opened up between the Shill and the Mark, graphically represented as the Greek letter, Λ . The bottom chord of this, a kind of *locale*, is the temporal drama of the Con. In it, the Shill conceals half of his/her nature while presenting the other to the Mark. This concealment/anamorphosis is particularly effective if the Shill anticipates the Mark’s investigative curiosity and invents a fictional other side to eclipse any of the Mark’s speculative hypotheses.

In the case of Hitchcock’s 1958 film, *Vertigo*, this other side of the Shill is the actress Judy’s portrayal of the Con, Elster’s, real wife, Madeleine, “weaponized” by the story that Madeleine is haunted by the ghost of a wronged ancestress, Carlotta. To cut off speculation about the Shill’s authenticity, the issue of authenticity is “pre-fictionalized” by the story of Carlotta’s tragic death and Madeleine’s obsession over it. This pre-conditions the Mark’s, Scottie’s, discovery procedure, to find out what Madeleine is really “all about.” Instead of discovering that she is really an actress hired by Elster. Judy incorporates her actual function as a “thaumatropic agent,” her “spin,” into her presentation to Scottie. Her “other side” is a durable enigma. Even when Carlotta is “vacated,” the enigma endures as a cloud-like virtuality that works at two levels: (1) Scottie’s attempt to reconstruct the shop-girl who resembles Madeleine, actually the actress who *was* Madeleine, into the woman who was his love object, uses the cloud construct; Judy, after re-doing her hair, finally “becomes” Madeleine in Scottie’s eyes; and (2) the cloud conceals the actual scam that had victimized Scottie from the beginning. Scottie thus can be keenly conscious of the “spin” converting Judy to Madeleine *without* being aware of the con. But, when he sees Judy pull on the necklace she had used as a prop to convince Scottie of her relation to Carlotta, the jewel manifests the spin as such, and Scottie realizes the trick. At this point, the “Euclidean” appearance of the story vanishes into the void of convergences.

Don Kunze
June 15, 2021