

Shadow Line (a rough draft for others to develop)

in memory, Mary Vaughan Johnson 1961–2021



Joseph Benoit Suvee, *Invention of Art of Drawing*, 1793.

Shadows make a line and are, thus, woven into the history of drawing and its vicissitudes. The shadow line localizes the relationship of light to dark and, metaphorically, life to death. Shadows also belong to something, namely the object or person that has “absorbed” the light that would have belonged to the ground had it traveled there unimpeded. Light is life,¹ and in this the shadow indicates an ongoing of life’s relation to light, that as long as something stands it is alive, and when it falls it falls to meet its shadow.

This etiology or eschatology of the shadow line runs parallel with the history of drawing, beginning with the story of Kora, the daughter of the Corinthian sculptor Butades (600 b.c.), who, anticipating the loss of her lover departing to war, traces his profile from the shadow cast by a cooperative candle flame. The spooky correspondence of the silhouette to the soul has stuck in the popular consciousness since that day, brought into keen focus with the use of shadow projections onto a screen in some forms of theater, where the relation of actors to the dead is established in other ways.

The case of Kora has this clear result: drawing is a panacea for anxiety. It is a rehearsal for dying that, improbably, works as a visual prophylactic, possibly as a placebo. The drawing is a draw-ing: a drawing *off* of the soul/psyche into a fixed repository, antipodal to active life. Should that life’s action be tragically cut short, the drawing will be a “having drawn off” of the soul that will continue to haunt the drawing’s initial capture. When photographs come along to be set on the mantelpiece or piano top, the effect will be even more ghostly.

The issue fast-forwards to the early 1900s, when séances were popular, thanks to a pressure to be relieved technologically by the moving picture: the desire to animate the corpse, to hear it speak (or gesture, in the limitation of the first silent films), to imagine it animated (vampire literature), to allow the

¹ By the same token, death, which sustains the momentum of dying as the medium of the *kenosis* of the deceased, who “does not know he/she has died,” takes the color of black and time of night, where shadows are able to dissociate from bodies. The geometry of this interval “between the two deaths” is projective and immersive: the sudden “fall” of a 2d self-intersecting, non-orientable form into 3d Euclidean space, which has been figured in literature as the *deus ex machina* (don’t forget the role of the automaton!), the epiphany, and the sudden appearance of a stranger who cannot stop talking (*apophrades*), as in Rostand’s *Cyrano de Bergerac*, 1897). The hero Cyrano, to save the wedding of Roxanne and Christian de Neuville, delays the Count de Guiche’s attempt to interrupt by impersonating a madman who, falling from a tree directly into their path, claims to have just returned from a trip to the moon.



The theatrical phantasmagoria arose with the introduction of gas lighting, which afforded the projection of illusions in the auditorium simulating spiritual presences. These violated the plenum of the fourth wall, architecturally the proscenium arch, to simultaneously terrify and paralyze the audience, an actualization of the “Stendhal Syndrome,” the sudden paralysis or even death of the spectator in awe of a work of art, as famously depicted in the opening scenes of *The Great Beauty*, Paolo Sorrentino, 2013, when a Japanese tourist visiting the Janiculum dies of a heart attack while attempting to photograph the cityscape below.

ghost to walk around (Día de los Muertos, Walpurgisnacht, etc.) in violation of the idempotency² of the tomb, whose function is clearly that of *idem* put in spatial terms: *don't move around*. The purpose of this moving was clarified by Bram Stoker's *Dracula*: refueling. The role of blood in relation to movement is contained by the blood itself. With death, blood falls in the body as if to mimic the fall of the body to the ground, the shedding of blood to drench the earth — all of which are graphically represented in the fall of the shadow onto a planar surface, traced by carbon or ink, both of which are credentialed by Gehenna.

The turn of the century saw movement loosened by “ghosts” in several striking inventions: the horse-less carriage, the flickering shadows of cinema, the ships without sails moved by steam fueled by (again) carbon. It is fitting for all clues to lead back into something black that is dug out of the earth, just as it was deemed magical for dies, at the same time, to yield a more florid synthetic rainbow, replacing the traditional vegetable

sources.³ The red and the black, the fallen and the risen, joined forces. Combine these, Stendhal opined, and you have a deal with the devil but also a consequent payment in full. To rise is to postpone the fall. At the apogee there is realization in the pause of floating, weightless, of the true terms of the deal. The dupe⁴

² I introduce this term from electrical engineering (an idempotent switch is one that, once activated, remains activated and insensitive to subsequent “calls”) to generalize the case where something must be held in place. This is important for sleep, for example, where the sleeper must be completely paralyzed for the duration of non-REM sleep (see Matthew Walker, *Why We Sleep: Unlocking the Power of Sleep and Dreams*, 2018). Tombs serve a double purpose; to protect the corpse and the riches buried with it, but also to keep the deceased from wandering about. Tombs are simultaneously prisons, their function distilled by the sarcophagus, literally the “eater of flesh,” tying desiccation to the idea of city foundation, where the sacrifice and symbolic burial of a hero constitutes the “geodesic monument” of civic location, which is simultaneously a “dried out locale.” Hence, in vampire lore, the “hero” is always thirsty, and slaking this thirst leads to transgressive wandering. Normally, the generic “hungry dead” are allowed to wander and join the living in banquets only once a year. In Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, the count makes an exception for the stone guest he has wronged, and the knowing composer gives away the secret that the wine Marzimino, “March corn seeds,” are, as in cultures that celebrate the new year at the point of the spring equinox, must be sprouted then buried or drowned (sacrificed). In foundation myths, the transition from hunter-gatherers to fixed-field agriculture plays a part (*Aeneid* 8.415–429).

³ One of the best accounts can be found in Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*, 1973. See Joseph Tabbi, “Strung into the Apollonian Dream”: Pynchon's Psychology of Engineers,” in *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 25, 2 (Winter, 1992): 160–180.

⁴ The “dupe of drawing,” like the dupe of writing, is one who falls under the spell of his/her own action, coming under the control of an automated force induced by self-hypnosis, as most depictions of Kora's invention of painting show. Henceforth, it is more accurate to say that “the artist is made” rather than “the artist makes,” which is the meaning of Vico's conversion formula, *verum ipsum factum*, demonstrated with startling results in his *New Science*, 1744, where, in §345 Vico passes over control of the work of writing to the reader, an “anamorphic” strategy of creating a \emptyset -function between the acts of creation and comprehension. Proper interpretation of strong works, from this point on, will always be an “interpretation by the cut,” an understanding of the “thaumatropes/tesseract” division of *idea* into a self and other, as in the case of *Vertigo*'s thaumatropic device of Judy/Madeleine. “To dupe” has a fictional status in that the Con is constructed by the Mark, a relation that is best materialized with the toy token spun on a chord to merge two images anamorphically. The archeologist Marc Azema has argued that the thaumatropes shows that the idea of cinema appeared first, in Magdalenian cultures, 17,000 — 12,000 BCE, where thaumatropes were used to automate prayers and spells.

of the drawing must return to the starting point. This has its own geometry, its own form of knowledge that reduces to the way the idea of escape (the ground) has itself created the ground from which one tries to flee but must fall to in return payment (idempotency). In other words, just thinking about escaping makes a trap from which there is no escape (the idea behind the meander of the Thesean labyrinth).



The relation between indexicality and the anamorphic phantasmagoria has been “discovered” by popular culture, *The History Channel's* exposé of an image anamorphically (and thaumatropically) concealed within Leonardo da Vinci's famous painting of St. John the Baptist. *Ancient Aliens: Da Vinci's Secret Messages*, Season 13), The History Channel, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-sVpS27e8ZQ>.

The Plague is available in red or black. Reversing this, the two colors, brought into proximity but retaining their alternative difference, contaminate because they have become transferable. The confidence trick that promised quick profit connected the mark to an “alethosphere,” a continuum where all falsehood is washed, whitened, folded, and returned, to be redeemed with a matching number.⁵ This laundry theory of fate requires the Faustian promise of spot removal (cf. *manchar*, “to stain,” the surface of Don Quixote's La Mancha), the removal of marks created by carbon, powder or liquid, laid by hand or stamped by press. Speaking readies but writing is about precision (Francis Bacon, 1625), as if

to say that the hand, in making a mark, “meets up” with a black that comes out of the depths within the drawing surface or page of writing. The hand draws forth.⁶ Or, possibly, the stylus or press anointed with ink *calls forth* by *pointing*, in the way that the index finger is, by definition “indexical.” By pointing, it substitutes a distance, directs it to be covered, and predicts an arrival where meaning will have met its maker. Indication will always specify a *depth* relation, a fall, rise, or (more accurately) a cyclical rise–fall.

Thompson says that the long cape worn by Yoruba kings served two purposes.⁷ First, it swept smooth the footprints that, if left behind on the ground, could be coopted by evil magicians. Second, it “contained”

⁵ In his Seminar XVII, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis* (1970) Jacques Lacan presciently posited a system of gadgets connected by an earth–encompassing network, an “alethosphere” not unsimilar to the present day Internet. The “gadgets” (*lathouses*) would be “cons in miniature,” luring the user in with promises of utility and recognition but in reality mining their use on behalf of capitalist exploitation — did someone say “smartphone”?

⁶ The pointing gesture is a contronym. The pointing finger is indexical, an action–at–a–distance. The remaining fingers clench around themselves in defeat, having lost the object in the distance that they had wished to grasp, conceptually (*G. Begriff*, concept and grasp). Ernst Cassirer had paired this self–alienating gesture with the mimetic gesture (cf. hand waving to imitate the sea or wind) as the “thaumatrope” of the human spirit, a split between an attempt to possess and depict immediacy and a directive but forever–failed attempt to establish bi–univocal concordance, the index of one–to–one, through a strategy of framing and reproduction. Strangely, Hitchcock extends this 1:1 with his idea of reciprocity in grasps used to save someone from falling. When this grasp fails (*Vertigo*, 1958) a death–dream ensues. The hero undergoes an “orthopsychic dream” (that the theater audience perceives as diegetic fiction) to correct his life in its remaining few seconds. When the saving gesture succeeds (*North by Northwest*, 1959) lovers are united. These two films are themselves thaumatropic, spinning between falling/releasing and being raised up.

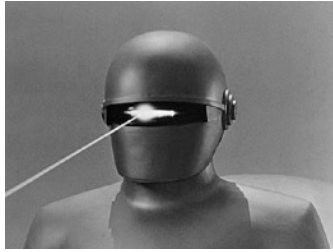
⁷ Robert Ferris Thompson, personal conversation, 2013. See also *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy* (New York: Random House, 1983).

the king's shadow, which also could be injured. Yorubans, like most other sensible observers, believed that stabbing a shadow was as good as stabbing the one who cast it, but would create less of a fuss. Thus, all semblance magic is a matter of limiting the liability of the would-be killer, or lover (depending on the object of the magic). The effigy does not strike back or call for help. This "buys time" for the spell, meaning that spells require intervals. The next question is, "Where do these intervals exist?" Any answer must break the tradition of secrecy protecting the logic of magic, but this is a secrecy that is naturally self-generating and self-sustaining. Magicians "know without knowing" (*kenosis*). If asked, they would confess nothing because they know nothing. Any explanation of magic is an imposture, created to maintain magicians' reputations by concealing the fact that they know nothing in a literal sense; their "knowledge" is entirely in the form of actions that are effective, thanks to a virtuality that is part placebo effect (under the proper circumstances and in the presence of the right props, victims are willing to die just as dupes of close-up magicians are willing to see things appear out of thin air), part neuro-psychic (certain movements, repeated, can make things disappear or suddenly appear, "as if by magic").⁸

By means of a virtuality of effectiveness, in contrast to the more virtuality of the imaginary that situates a viewer's point-of-view within Euclidean circumstances, magic returns truth for deception and is a means of converting the contronym into a spatiotemporal vector. Imagine an arrow with two points that can be fired, simultaneously, to create love in one victim and a hate in the lover's object of desire. This arrow summarizes most of Lacan's theory of the relation of demand to desire. It is the arrow that Eros devises in revenge for Apollo's disparaging remarks about the poor demon's archery skills. It's an imaginary arrow or, rather Imaginary in the Lacanian sense of a mirror-ized arrow, an arrow that is simultaneously the image in the mirror and the object standing before the mirror. Mirrorization is different from reflection in that it refuses the offer of domestication by which mirror images are taken for granted. "To be mirrorized" is to permanently retain the power of transfer, the "plague option," by which the reflection is able to move across the glass boundary in order to contaminate the object of desire, poison her, put her forever beyond reach.⁹ This is a geometry problem, and to solve it we must follow the advice of Pappus of Alexandria (300 a.d.) when he showed how to construct such an arrow out of the "anywhere" of two lines thrown onto a common plane. Pappus's two lines and the three points on them are not just contingent in their angles or distances (abolishing Euclid and his compass), they become "contingency itself," a chance out of which, improbably ("magically"), absolute determinacy emerges. (Determinacy is, thence, "that which emerges," just as emergence will always be determinative.)

⁸ Actors are, literally, poetic agents who bring about effects without having to "know" the characters they are playing, beyond their ability to create, through speeches, movements, and positioning, a transferable force that penetrates the fourth wall of the proscenium, which serves the role that is played, in the electrical circuit, by the capacitor. The character does not exist until it is "played" (acted) in a performance that is "determinate." As with the electrical circuit, the fourth wall capacitor is variable. Its thinness is controlled by lighting, drama, and performance. It is thinned to the point of endangering the audience when the dramatic value must be increased to top volume. The result is gauged by the paralysis and hysteria of the audience, crying or laughing, fixated to the point of collapse. This miniaturization of the Stendhal Syndrome recalls Stendhal's famous chromatic fiction, *The Red and the Black*, a Faustian story. The arrow shot in ambition is the fate that brings down the high-flying hero, and thus it is another case of a contronymic vector and a "virtuality of effectiveness." One recalls the adage of Francis Bacon ("Of Studies," 1625): "Reading makes a full man; conference a ready man; and writing an exact man." Exactitude (determinacy) is the result of a readiness to act, which retroactively interprets what has been read ("known"). Knowledge is not knowledge until it has been interpreted, long after, by an act that specifies the exact location of what was known but not known to be known (*kenosis*).

⁹ Jacques Lacan retells the last half story of Apollo and Daphne, saying that it is the origin of architecture as a "surface of pain," in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, Seminar VII (1959–1960), trans. Dennis Porter (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Co., 1992), 60. The first half may be retrieved in Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths* (New York: Penguin Books, 2012).



Gort (=automaton), neutralizing the military's defensive circle, in *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, 1950.

Girard Desargues and Blaise Pascal will, in the 17c., revive Pappian magic in forms of shadows trained to do the same contingency tricks.¹⁰ Again, Eros's arrow will fly off in opposite directions with opposite effects, defining the virtuality of effectiveness that Euclid will not be able to draw. The question of drawing returns. Do we draw in Euclid or draw in Pappus? The question suggests two senses of "draw in": one on the side of a medium, like playing a tune *in* the key of C; the other in the sense of a call beckoning forth some power out of the depths. The question is explained by the fact that drawing is itself thaumatropic. The line must by definition be drawn *across* the plane (its medium), to trace or mimic the shadow, but which, by indicating, calling forth, the shadow, has pointed across a depth, made a

deal with the devil. The tradition of rubric, red ink to indicate the words spoken by Christ, give away a secret, that the line shows the artist, Psyche, to be herself a thaumatrope: *aut deus aut dæmon*, either a god or devil: the red or the black. Whichever, she is contagious, and magically so, which means that space draws around her *cordons sanitaire* that, like the rings of armament placed around the spaceship in the 1950 science-fiction thriller, *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, penetrable by the extromissive eye-beam of the automaton, Gort (cf. the artist's ability to concentrate and redirect the collective brightness of the stars, i. e. "to dazzle"). *Aut deus aut dæmon* is not a choice between two options but rather a circulation, a circuitry, traced around the void of the impossible situation.¹¹ The circuit carries around the duplicitous energy of the true-as-false and the false-as-true, which every artist knows to be the critical role of the plane of projection that, no matter how flat it pretends to be, never merges the color with the object, the shadow with its owner.¹² Hegel (reportedly speaking "with a straight face"): Truth cannot be stated in a single sentence.¹³ Between the TF and FT of this simple token credential, the dual, thaumatropic, circuit reveals that it, too, drinks the blood of the immortal anamorph.

¹⁰ Girard Desargues devised an "idempotency" method by which triangles "perspective to each other" (held within the bounds of lines radiating from a fixed point-of-view) are allowed to take any angle or size. Their sides will extend to converge on points lying on a single line at a distance from this cone. If the cone represents visibility itself, the line may be said to lie within a virtuality determined by the accidents within visibility as such, a *domaine Pappus* represented as a plane, and which Lacan configures as the Imaginary. This comparison is meant to suggest that the second virtuality of determinacy emerges from the Imaginary as a Symbolic "directly aimed at" the Real, thanks to the "unconscious" determinacy emerging from appearance. This explains in part why appearances (the world "out there") are always treated with skepticism/doubt, and why truth is always considered a matter of concealment and secrecy.

¹¹ This is the connection between Lacan's specification of the torus as the surface of the psyche's division between demand and desire (Seminar IX, *Identification*, and Freud's 1895 essay, "The Possibility of a Scientific Psychology"). The two voids of the surface relate to the artist's *necessary* deal with the devil, as in Faust's case. This is because the devil allows for a *duration* between acting (with magical skill) and retribution. The "life of the artist" is metered by a chiasmic clock that palindromically adds, to every gain, a complementary suffering. This is the message of Aristotle's "Problemata 30.1," on melancholy. The constant is the black bile of the humoristic substance, toxic at any dosage, unlike the other three humors. The "any" is an idempotent amount, requiring complementarity of the palindrome.

¹² These meet without merging, in mirror reversal: love/hate, hunter/hunted, body/soul, interior/exterior (Lacan's *éxtimité*), motion/rest, birth/death. These cannot be known but they can be "rehearsed," or, more specifically, brought to the case of the "dress rehearsal," where actors present the play to an auditorium that is empty and dark. This is the architecture that takes place on the "lip of the void" (Lacan, Seminar VII), where, when encountering the sudden appearance of something miraculous, we ask the question of retroaction: "What must have taken place before?"

¹³ This self-intersecting, non-orienting forced choice comes to us thanks to Norman Madarasz, "Introduction," Alain Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1999), 3.

