

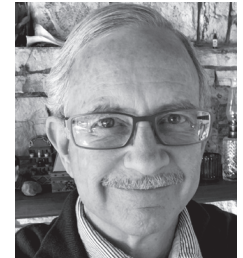
Essiccazione e falso lutto: lo strano caso del *Lacus Curtius*

Desiccation and Fake Grief: The Strange Case of the *Lacus Curtius*

La storia del cavaliere sabino Curtius, la cui morte placò gli irosi diavoli che avevano allagato il Foro Romano, è l'altra faccia del più popolare racconto di fondazione della costruzione fratricida delle mura di Romolo. Combinati, i due racconti mostrano come le città dei vivi iniziarono come città dei morti, luoghi di sepoltura che servono tribù "ciclopiche" sparse e non comunicanti.

Nel caso di Roma, il sito del cimitero era la palude centrale di sette tribù insediate sulle colline vicine. L'eroismo di Curtius è un protocollo codificato di essiccazione per trasformare il cimitero umido in un foro secco, dove le religioni basate sul focolare delle sette tribù si sono consolidate in un'unica fiamma. Per sbloccare questo contronimo spaziale, è necessaria una visione più complessa del "falso lutto" necessario per mantenere buone e, soprattutto aride, le relazioni tra i vivi e i morti.

The story of the Sabine knight Curtius, whose death appeased the angry gods who had flooded the *Forum Romanum*, is the shadow double of the more popular foundation tale of Romulus's fratricidal construction of city walls. Combined, the two accounts show how cities of the living began as cities of the dead, burial sites serving scattered and uncommunicating "cyclopians" tribes. In the case of Rome, the cemetery site was the marshland central to seven tribes settled on nearby hills. Curtius's heroism is a coded protocol of desiccation for transforming the wet cemetery into a dry forum, where the hearth-based religions of the seven tribes were consolidated into a single flame. To unlock this spatial contronym we require a more complex view of "fake grief" required to maintain good — and, especially, *dry* — relations between the living and the dead.



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Parole chiave: *Lacus Curtius*; essiccazione; pratiche funerarie; Foro Romano; psicanalisi

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Physical crying shows how the events of grief surpass and betray the reasons that were their occasion. We cry for “no reason,” which is to say there seem to be many causes for one effect. Crying shows how grief develops and sustains its “practices of sadness,” a recirculation of its own particular form of *jouissance*, the pleasure–pain that combines “doing something for someone else at our expense” with “a failure to say what we mean.” “What you are crying for?” stages a pronoun (“what”) that, put into the position of cause, refuses all attempts to be occupied wholly by any one person or thing.

In psychoanalytic terms, this secret of grief, revealed by crying, is hysteria. Its theatrical form, “histrionics,” gave Freud the idea of explaining hysteria with the example of a Londoner who, passing by the Charing Cross monument, suddenly bursts into uncontrollable tears. Freud’s point was mistaken by the historian, Joseph Rykwert, who, possibly under the influence of Paul Ricoeur, misunderstood the role of the death drive in the city’s economy of grief.² Freud’s example was not intended to ridicule the “respectful/authentic citizen” daring to resist the urban instrumentalism evident in the Londoners who, with no thoughts of Queen Eleanor’s death, went about their devotions to getting and spending in a Late Capitalist city, where functionalism rules out shows of grief. Rather, Freud was emphasizing how hysteria, as a means of *differentiation*, constructs its own space; how hysteria is able to collapse the historical and thematic distances separating the modern Londoner from the long-dead Queen Eleanor; and how it turns space inside-out with the insertion of an a-temporal suspension of places, names, and

identifications. Differentiation is not just distinction. It allows for a space to be created inside a space, a time inside a time. These spaces–in–spaces and times–in–times have three key features: (1) autonomy — once distinguished, they structure themselves with a rigorous but “non-Boolean” logic; (2) portability — they can be detached and re-attached to other objects, persons, and events; and (3) vocality — the distinction is simultaneously a “call,” a nomination, an indication. These three qualities make hysteria’s sites work like the story told at bedtime with its “once upon a time” (*c’era una volta*) invocation that is also a password and an “open sesame” (*šem-šamájm*, gate of heaven). Hysteria’s concentric containment does not stop with one pocket but opens up pockets within pockets.

Hysteria, beyond the histrionics of crying, is a relation of *placing*, *naming*, and the identification process that uses *place-holder signifiers* — *pro-nouns* — to construct a collective experience of “a loss of something that was never possessed.” “Retroactive creation” is, I argue, historically critical — even foundational — for all cities. Thanks to hysteria and hysteria’s space–and–time–bending abilities, grief over the loss of what was never possessed — “fake grief” — creates an economy of ideas, emotions, and actions. Grief, *fake* grief, is essential to the city. In other words: no fake, no grief; no grief no city (*fake>grief>city*).

I will structure my argument for *fake>grief>city* by contrasting a positive with a negative: (1) the “normative” collective idea of the city, as a kind of perspectival scene-making, with (2) a concealed “orthopsychic” (hysterical) space-time used to frame the normal scenes. The hysteric is able to step into

and out of this orthopsychic space. Like the grieving Londoner, the hysteric’s passport into orthopsychic liminality sets up an economy of emotion that uses her own appearance and disappearance as both *framing* and *framed*, form and content. The hysteric’s ability to switch between two radically distinct domains and systems of causal relations contrasts so much with the “perspectival” idea of city formation that there are two distinctive types of stories told about urban origins. The first is the familiar tale of brothers — usually twins — who create the city by dividing an interior and an exterior: a city wall protected by military as well as spiritual defenses. Containment is paid for by the murder of one brother; and the need to conceal the scandalous crime (Remus by Romulus) generates the myth that sustains and coordinates the mysteries of citizen/stranger, sacred/secular, and temporal/eternal through a consistent relation to the Möbius-band “incontingence” of inside and outside. This “perspectival” tale type dominates. But, within it we can find an alternative account. Evidence for this in the Roman case is the story of the knight, Curtius, who amongst all of the citizens gathered to hear the soothsayer’s pronouncements of how to recover the Forum from its flooded condition, acts *as if* he understands the puzzle (fig. 1). His sacrifice is not just a story of heroism and the need for citizens willing to die for the common good. It is an algorithm linking, among other things, (1) desiccation’s relationship to the function of mourning and the “orthopsychic” journey of the soul after literal death, (2) a WikiLeaks-style exposure of the techniques the living use to deceive the dead, and (3) the means of converting an “economy of burial/mourning” into a centralized and

diversified economy of secular, symbolic networks. Archaeological evidence from all seven sites of ancient city formation collected by Paul Wheatley (1971) confirms that cities of the living were first cities of the dead. Ethnographical evidence of how household religions in “cyclopean” cultures were consolidated around the institution of a central civic flame tell this story at a different scale and context. In both of these independent corroborations of the “hysterical” conversion of the space of the dead to the space of the living, the theme of duplicity shows how myth works as a collective fantasy to conceal the traumatic Real. The contrast between the “perspectival” myth of fraternal origins (Romulus/Remus) and the “orthopsychic” heroic sacrifice (Curtius) is not simply a case of two competing categories. Just as the perspective scene requires the ortho-graphic division of space into viewer/viewed, content requires regulation principles that are both separate from yet *inserted into* the very content they frame. The name for this binary function is metalepsis, but the important point is to see how hysteria, as both a “clinical” presentation of symptoms and a “socio-cultural” mode of discourse, relates the perspectivalism of the common view with the liminal manifestations and presuppositions of grief.³ The Londoner inexplicably weeping over the death of Queen Eleanor constructed her own space, from the inside out but also, palindromically, from an outside of impossible distance (the remote event) to a center of inexplicable loss — the loss of something the Londoner had never possessed. The palindrome of hysteria is its relation of outside to inside, the construction of a space inside cities and settlements that is also an outside, neither “perspectival” nor



fig.1 The context of the *Lacus Curtius* in the Roman Forum, with the Arch of Severus and the Curia in the background. The actual lake, a concentric array of stones, was adjacent to the *Via Sacra*, directly in front of the Column of Phocas. Photo by author.

hierarchical. It is a self-framing frame that, like crying, sets up its own economy of emotion.⁴

I. The Curtian Lake

The story of the Curtian Lake should be well known, for it is told on placards posted at the site that is visited by thousands in the restored *Forum Romanum*. Livy provides the most popular account.⁵ The Roman Forum has been flooded, become a mire; or, some accounts say that a chasm has opened up. No one knows what to do. A soothsayer is consulted who advises that, to return the Forum to its dry state, Rome must sacrifice that which is most precious to it. Only one person understands this augury: a Roman knight, Curtius, who intuits that Rome's most precious possession is a citizen who is willing to die. He thereupon mounts his horse fully armed and rides into the mire, which immediately hardens over. This particular sacrifice takes us past the folk-tale euhemerism of "... and that's why we have a Forum!" The "hero" — Curtius is certainly that — is etymologically connected to death. The word ἥρωας was originally used to designate *nothing more than* a dead man. The dead watched over and protected the living, and through a series of fabular displacements, the dead *man* was animated and set among us, still dead in essence but able to act heroically to protect the living.

I claim that it is also important to note how Curtius fills in the gap created by the interrogatory "that which" the soothsayer gives as a blank to be filled in by one who "knows without knowing why or how he knows." This is *kenosis*, a form of knowledge that bypasses the usual language-based rules. Kenosis, like the hero, has the ability to travel between knowing and

not knowing, being and not being. If the hero is, as etymology tells us, *already dead*, then kenosis is a *form of action* that dispenses with referential explanations and rational causality. The kenotic Curtius knows by acting. He fills the blank space of the pronoun, the indication that has pointed to *nothing*, by jumping fully armored into the lake. In this sense, the lake and the pronoun are synonymous. Reciprocally, pronouns are *wet*. They are newly dead corpses that must wander through an orthopsychic liminal space to be surveilled, interrogated, judged, until at last they are *named*.

The kenotic hero is — and this is a fundamental and revolutionary point — passive.⁶ He embodies the passivity of death, in the purifying form of his *voluntary* dying, which preserves death amidst life and life amidst death. In other words, he is the "personality of the uncanny", who, as Ernst Jentsch once famously pointed out, is nothing more than variations on the theme of twinned recto/verso conditions: (1) life drawn inexorably to its end by invisible fate and (2) the momentum of the dead person past the point of literal death.⁷ While "pictorial" fantasy dwells within the first condition and Curtius engages the second, the theme of desiccation shows that Curtius teaches us how the picture itself gives way to an anamorphic presence — a blank spot, a point from which the picture looks back at us. When we dress up this blank spot with architecture, we use monuments, tombs, and other markers to employ a vocabulary of meridians, crystals, and Platonic forms — "eigenforms" that, in being themselves self-negating and mathematically formless (unprojectable) allow all other forms to exist. Such sites are "orthopsychic." They surveil us and

stand as reminders, correctives. They set a standard for the living based on the authority and continued presence of the dead.

Because the hero voluntarily dies, because he willingly submits to suffering, it is easier to consider the role of Freud's most controversial idea, the so-called death drive (*Todestrieb*). This "master drive" constitutes the template for all three of Freud's "partial" drives (oral, anal, phallic) and Lacan's two added drives, the gaze and the voice. It would be wrong to think of the death drive as somehow a binary opposite of the so-called pleasure principle as representing a "life drive." Rather, Freud saw the death drive as internal to the search and demand for pleasure. Because pleasure that thinks it has found its object extinguishes desire, only to find that its object fails to satisfy it, desire presupposes an empty or non-existent object, what Lacan signified with the expression, *objet petit a*, the "other" (*autre*) spelled with a small letter, in contrast to the Other, the Big Other (*Autre*). This is the object as pronoun, something that is waiting to be specified, but once it seems to be specified, finds the specification unsatisfactory. The *objet a* is the correlate of desire because it can never be found and possessed. It keeps desire open.

Thus, within the pleasure principle, desire works as an antipode to demand. We *ask for* something but we get an empty response. This is the twist to our demands for approval in the oral, anal, and phallic phases of childhood development. But, in the "adult drives", the gaze and the voice, we can see how the demand to possess or injunction to enjoy always falls short, always involves a missing element, a gap, a void. In sense experience, this incompleteness creates

“lipogram effects” like those Georges Perec created in his novel, *A Void*, by omitting the use of the letter “e.”⁸ Absence creates a turbulence in the signifiers, objects, and feelings that remain. This turbulence means that the missing element is both present and absent at the same time, as an effect that, through negation, becomes a cause. The Curtian Lake, like other monuments, is an “eigenform” because it works in space the way the lipogram works in a text. The “turbulence” of the space around the lake or monument must be considered to be the key feature of the “liquification” defining all sites of mourning, and the hero’s role of desiccation in traversing the pictorial secular city and the orthopsychic space of the dead.

II. Devils on Horseback

Remember that Curtius was an armed horseman. There is a fable of anthropology, that early sedentary societies gradually made use of nomadic tribes whose skill in warfare complemented the former’s skill in maintaining steady food supplies, artisanal products, and exchange economies. At first, relations were contractual, as in Kurosawa’s *Seven Samurai*. A crisis arose and the farmers went to look for mercenaries who will never be able to settle down in one place. The armed horsemen directly embodied the principle of displacement, not just in relation to their nomadism but to their social relations as well. Their presence offended the ancestral gods of the settled farmers, whose spirits penetrated the earth at the “portals” of the family hearths. To intermarry, the knights had to stage a rape scene to indicate that their brides have been *entirely unwilling* to leave their fathers’ hearths, where they served as “priestesses of

Hestia.” Defecting brides had to feign passivity before marriage could take place. The bride had to be *carried over the threshold* of her new husband’s household, a custom that still survives in many cultures.⁹

The horsemen, *heroes*, lived only to risk their lives. In a sense, heroes are fundamentally contronyms (terms combining opposite meanings). Their *active* nature included the *passive* element, a willing exposure to suffering. Their codes of honor put prestige ahead of survival.¹⁰ Their religions were heroic, patriarchal in most cases. They were the link between the first societies, based on settled agriculture grounded in seasonal cycles and ecological relationships, and those “Homeric” cultures whose warring states and prideful kings extended the religions of divination to worship of gods who, like the kings who ruled them, were prideful boasters, prone to war, deception, and revenge. The earth-bound *manes* of agrarian societies had no monuments beyond the hearth and the herms marking the corners of their agricultural fields. The heroes made monuments commensurate with their prideful boasts, designed after the stacked spoils of war.¹¹

But, why did the Forum become — or begin as — a swamp? Aldo Rossi passes on a standard interpretation in his *Architecture of the City*.¹² The seven hills were occupied by tribes that had nothing to do with each other. They were “cyclopean” in the anthropological sense that each tribe kept to their separate, mutually exclusionary, hearth-based family religions. Their ancestral gods, the *manes*, did not tolerate contact with strangers. Any commerce, any exchange of surplus goods, had to take place “silently”, through the time-honored practice of “silent trade”, where goods

are left by one party, found by the next, who leaves new surplus goods, which are in turn found by the next passer-by. The spots were marked out by *herms*, or piles of stones, and the system was thought to be magical, a form of regulated public theft, presided over by the god of the accumulation function, the pile, *Herm-es*. Silence and secrecy were natural and essential in maintaining the proper religious distance to avoid contamination by strangers.¹³

The valley between the tribe-controlled hills was a marshland (fig. 2). Topography and hydraulics created the perfect conditions for it to be used as a common burial ground used by all tribes and managed by an “eighth tribe” of undertakers who, “untouchable” in relation to the seven hill tribes, would operate invisibly and in secret. But, the untouchables’ mastery of the customs and languages of the seven hill-bound tribes made them natural translators and middlemen. So, when consolidation of the tribes into a single citizenry required the centralization of the separate hearth-fires that were the authority of clan-based religion and civility, the untouchables played a key role, as both shamanistic priests and administrative “kings.” For this to happen, the seven separate flames of the seven tribes on the seven hills had to be consolidated into a single sacred flame. The burial ground could no longer remain mutually liminal to the seven tribes; it had to be central in both an administrative and civic-religious sense, and religion could not longer be chthonic and family-based but “Olympian” and regulative. It was necessary to create a “retroactive” myth about its formation, where the marsh was recast as a natural disaster destroying an (fictionally) original forum. The new myth would have to be about

“disaster relief.”¹⁴

Retroactive revival of a non-existent original state is a commonplace in psychoanalytic accounts of trauma. Because trauma cannot be assimilated by the Symbolic — it is a secret, radically and structurally — it can only be recalled and relived retroactively, but what is recalled is not the trauma but a simulacrum set in the past. Ancient historians’ accounts of the foundation rites of Rome attest to the construction of a primal fantasy to settle the matter of origins within the scandal of Romulus’s ritual plowing and Remus’s subsequent fratricide. The plow divides an inside and outside but also the living from the dead. Remus’s status as the (already-in-place) dead twin is portrayed as mockery of Romulus’s piety.¹⁵ But, topologically, the Curtius and Romulus/Remus stories are the same. Remus is the “hero” who, portrayed as a villain, collectivizes the malicious aspect of the *manes* who haunt the area required for the secularized forum. The dead must be blinded to allow the consolidation of the hearth-flames, and one of a pair — brothers or a betrothed couple — must demonstrate absolute passivity. According to Erwin Cook (footnote 6), this idea is carried forward in the tradition of the active hero *versus* the hero who willingly submits to suffering, thematized by no less a source than Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Odysseus wanders during his self-imposed exile, exposing himself to dangers that could be easily avoided.

His passivity allows him to play a “speculator” pretending to know nothing in order to learn an equally potent “everything.” For example, Odysseus wishes to know if the Cyclops will bestow the gifts hosts are traditionally obliged to bestow on visiting

strangers. While most would say that this experiment was a failure, the results of the experiment go beneath the surface of the tale. It is a story about the (cyclopean) hearth and resistance of archaic societies to consolidation into cities; the elements of human sacrifice mandated by absolute authorities of auguries are retained; the theme of “blinding the *manes*” is retained. Saving these pieces and reconstituting their order is the “project of knowledge” that drives *The Odyssey*.¹⁶

By the time Curtius arrives as a fictional hero to tell his tale about the Forum, the original Romulus/Remus foundation myth has been laid aside by the device of a flood or earthquake that has left an archaic forum mired in sludge. The kenotic Curtius “knows without knowing” what he must do and rides fully armed into the underworld. It is the prerogative of heroes to visit Hades and return, but Curtius in this case does not return. His act is the answer to the puzzle, and the forum is restored. But, in this answer we have a “synthesis” that reveals that the thesis contained within itself, from the very start, an antagonistic antithesis.¹⁷ This antagonistic antithesis was the relation of the living to the dead, the necessity to blind the *manes*, whenever such secret activities as marriage or trade was concerned. And, wherever marriage (made to appear as rape) and trade (made to appear as theft) take place in stable, regulated ways, we have Hermes, the god of boundaries as well as of erotic love and theft-by-stealth, to thank for it.

The antagonistic integration of thesis and antithesis in the origins of cities *materializes* the antagonism as an element within the thesis, or “problem statement.”¹⁵ The problem of marriage is that it can’t occur without

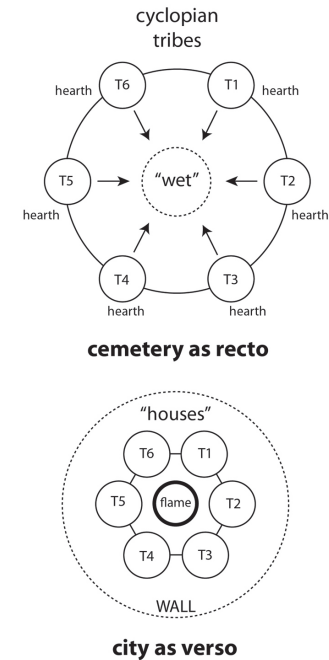


fig.2 Paul Wheatley (1971) summarized archaeological and anthropological data from all seven sites of urban origins to conclude that in all cases, a “city of the dead” preceded a city of the living. The common use of a central burial location, administered by shamanistic “undertakers” specializing in funerary formalities and expert in astronomy and astrology, divination, mathematics, language translation, storage and exchange of surplus goods, and administrative functions, allowed “cyclopien” tribes (T1, T2, etc.) to maintain their separate hearth-based religions without risking contamination from neighbors (“recto”). Cultural transition to urban society forced an inversion of this spatial configuration (“verso”), replacing the “wet site” of burial with a centrally located collective hearth consolidating the religions of affiliated groups, now associated with “houses” protected by a common wall. Along with the inversion, the common internal “wet” void had to be converted into a “dry site” by means of a positive protocol for maintaining a common flame. In Rome, this was the familiar institution of the College of Vestals.

offending the *manes*, who would be abandoned. Rape is materialized in practices that demonstrate passivity of the bride, who thence remains blameless. The problem of trade is that surplus goods have value only when exchange with strangers can take place. Theft is materialized when the parties of silent trade take what they need at the crossroads, leaving what they don't need in return. The synthesis is a realization of the occulted antithesis in the form of a "foundational moment," an eternal return — something that seems to violate the rules of space and time: new families are formed as a result of "rape," and the "gifts of Hermes" are believed to appear by magic from an underground source. Both are protected by an aura of sanctity since they possess a value that comes from nowhere, an *agalma* that defends against abuse. Thus, marriage is protected by a sanctity derived from its derivation from rape and trade is protected by the inner symmetry of mutual, sequential thefts. Without the need for supportive beliefs or opinions, divorce is impossible, and taking too much or leaving too little in a silent trade would be unthinkable.

III. Fake Grief and the Inside-Out Geometry of the Cemetery/Forum

The Curtius fable reveals an uncanny coincidence connecting (1) funerary practices that use mourning to establish *insulation* between the living and dead; (2) the treatment of the corpse, aiming to desiccate the body until it reaches a stable and permanent state; and (3) the "cosmic" associations of dryness with wit, *agalma*, and divinity. In all of these elements, the number forty plays a curious role, first as the time required to establish a continent boundary between the living and the dead, in other

cases as an identification between an imposed necessary passivity, "suffering," and the construction of this continent boundary. Jesus thus must spend forty days and forty nights in the *desert*. Noah must suffer forty days and forty nights of rain. The embryo must take forty days to form in the womb, and the period of gestation is forty weeks. There are forty *se'ahs* (measure of water) in the Jewish ritual bath of purification. Moses, of course, spent forty days on Mt. Sinai. The world is quadrated by four ten-part Sefirot. *The period of mourning for the dead is defined by the time imagined for the corpse to dry out.* The point of this numerology is not just any magic mathematically attributed to the number forty but the role of desiccation played in each and every case: floods, baths, contamination, and chaos on one side, mountains, laws, and physical conception and birth on the other. The movement from wet to dry is one of correction, of an "orthopsychic" and "orthographic" 1:1 transformation that takes place in the movement from wet to dry. All of these themes are present in some form in the Curtius story, where after all flooding is the main event.

Can we establish a corresponding "transitive" exchange of the other themes present in Curtius? Is the role of the pronoun and name, as in Odysseus's Cyclops example, related? Was "Nobody" connected to the need to destroy the fire-based hearth religion by inflicting blindness? Are these themes tied in with the "desiccation rule," that purification (a ritualized passage from one state to another, a liminal/conditional passage) is *necessarily connected* to the wet/dry relationship? Can we use this matrix of clues in alternative orders to uncover new aspects of

urban foundation practices, funerary customs, and boundary behavior in general? What is it in desiccation that makes it an "eigenform" (a foundational guiding element whose invariance allows all other elements the freedom to vary)?

In our context we must begin with the question of mourning. Every place of mourning retroactively calls into being a trauma that, as trauma, cannot enter into words or even communicable emotions. The antagonism is the trauma, it can only be relived. Because symptoms do not appear as what they are, the mechanism, or *dispositif*, of this reliving is hysteria. The energizing fuel of hysteria is the death drive, the counter-movement of the self against the self, an antagonistic element *built in to* the pleasure principle that makes desire unhappy with the objects it thinks it wants. Each object of desire has a shadow-double, an *objet petit a*, an object that exists only through an imagined prior loss. This *objet a* undermines our satisfaction with any object we may desire. It is the complex economy behind the uncanny, which affects not just our pleasure-seeking but our more cosmic ideas about relations of life to death. It is the reason why, when someone dies, we *don't want them back again*, why the cat in Stephen King's *Pet Sematary* who is magically resurrected after being taken to the Indian burial ground, is an unwelcome menace and not the furry, happy pet of before. The *objet a* is behind our public practice of praising the dead with the same words we are using to keep them on their side of the hearth. Our sense of *isolation* within life is correlative to this desire to maintain the *insulation* or "contingence of the void" with contronymic expressions of grief functioning also as apotrope to tell the dead to stay

where they are.

Hysteria is the mechanism/*dispositif* of this contronymic bargain. Why? It assures that there will be an *orthopsychic* and *orthographic* 1:1 “correction” that will work in two directions at once. In the direction of the living, it will assure that alienation/isolation (*isola*, in the service of turning space inside out) will allow the subject to discover truth by concealing or inverting it. We may experience pleasure but express it as pain, so that our grief will form the necessary social bonds to sustain and extend our pleasure. In the direction of the dead, hysteria will insulate (*insula* in the service of buffering the space of the dead) with protocols of symbolic relationships: symbols, prayers, rites, and architectural forms that, embodying in one way or another the idea or literal form of the number forty, allow for conditional passage in one direction while establishing a prohibition against return passage in the other direction.

The death drive was Freud’s most controversial discovery.¹⁸ As the Mr. Hyde of the pleasure principle’s Dr. Jekyll, it was what compelled subjects to revisit the experience of unbearable loss. The death drive planned the route of this revisit in as meticulous a way as possible, guiding each twist and turn as if by an unseen hand, allowing freedom one moment, imposing brute restrictiveness in the next. Where the pleasure principle has a spatio-temporal logic of “getting from A to B,” the death drive’s map is folded and torn, roads are twisted or abandoned, the landscape is bleak. The traveller attempting to find a way out will always wander only to come back to the place he/she started — a “zero-sum journey.”

The zero-sum journey has an interesting functional

presence in the Curtius story. A “hero” mounts his horse and rides into a lake. The lake had always existed, but fantasy allowed us to imagine the existence of a *prior order* before the lake has drowned it. This imagined forum existed *because it was lost*. The hero had a connection with this prior order; he was a knight who had defended it. But, the story is itself like a death dream that, in the final moments of life, attempts to correct and repair defective reality, a kind of five-minute Purgatory. The Curtius story, functioning as a death dream, has the challenge of fixing the reality of the forum’s original identity as a burial ground, and it must create narrative twists and turns to avoid any reference to this scandal. Its evasions however are a positive version of the negative impossibility of the Real: the trauma *cannot be represented*. Curtius converts the privation of the Real into the prohibitions that convert what cannot be done into what *should not be done*.¹⁹ When Curtius exchanges privation for prohibition, he does what all stories do in order to invite “the willing suspension of disbelief” that Coleridge said was the basis of all poetry. In our terms, the story connects the *isola* of extimacy (turning space inside out, creating the radically alienated subject) with the *insula* of the “incontinence of the void,” the story’s central element of flooding. The death dream needs to correct precisely this incontinence, and it does so by using the structure of Curtius’s alienation, the soothsayer’s call that only he can hear, the pronoun “whatever” that only he can fill by acting heroically *against himself*, by sacrificing his life.

Curtius’s status as a defender of what never existed must be orthopsychically corrected. The “forum that never was” can be saved only by “the man who knew

too much,” the kenotic hero who, in realizing the orthopsychic connection between his fate/identity and the incontinent flood that has overtaken the space (that never existed) must negate the negation, must negate *himself* to correct the fake account of the flood.

The story’s orthopsychics relates directly to the *visual displeasure* of the ancestral spirits, the *manes*. They have seen something they did not wish to see — the conversion of their hallowed ground into a secular center. Those assigned to attend their “second deaths” (the symbolic judgment of souls) have defected. The undertakers have become the Bürgermeisters of the city now centered on the former cemetery. The periphery has come to the center, which was originally the space radically common but spiritually peripheral to its surrounding clients. This is a literal picture of alienation, the *isola* that “isolates” burial as off-limits but, by being a space commonly used by seven peripheral tribes, was both central and peripheral. The *isola* must merge with the theme of the *insula*, the void whose incontinence creates retroactively that which it appears to have destroyed. The MacGuffin of the forum is restored by the heroic self-negation of Curtius, whose “death dream,” in Lacanian terms, orthopsychically winds through folds of the Real in order to restore the Symbolic.

IV. Insulation and Isolation: a Theory of the Two Cities
One event, two stories: (1) a *transition* from (a) a formal arrangement among “cyclopien” groups avoiding contamination of direct interaction who use a centralized burial space to (b) the same groups who consolidate their cyclopien work-around solutions, converting them into authentic urban institutions;

and (2) two “attitudes” or “theories” about how this *transition* took place. The two stories amount to a permanent polysemy or anamorphic scramble capable of revealing two contrasting pictures, like the villagers interviewed by Claude Lévi-Strauss who drew two completely different maps of the same layout of huts, fences, and streets.²⁰ The binary is a “durable two-ness,” which cannot be alleviated or resolved by any functional or logical explication of the 1:1, Curtius and Romulus, two stories about the same city or, more accurately, two cities that coexist on the same site.

While the Romulus story defines space with regard to the theme of containment (the plowing ritual marking the location of walls, the expulsion-by-murder of his twin), Curtius’s tale is about the obversion of spaces (wet lake restored to dry land) thanks to the sacrifice of “what is most valuable” to a city, its relation to the dead. The *insula*-tion of Romulus goes beyond simply contrasting with the *isola*-tion of Curtius as a *homo sacer*. Each account necessitates the other. But, it could be argued with equal ease that, just as the Romulus story uses the theme of sacrifice within its logic of the double, Curtius’s sacrifice effectively insulates Rome from the haunting of wet spirits, angry about the conversion of their cemetery into a public space. The two-ness of the binary transcends simple complementarity to penetrate, at other scales, each element of the pair.

In effect, the two stories are two sides of the same civic coin. It would be impossible to have a city without the Imaginary of alienation embodied by themes of *isolation*, or, equally, without the Symbolic of distinctions that separate and contain or exclude

spaces and times to create *insulation*. It is as if we have a double frame with do-not-trespass signs (apotropes) on either side, one in the direction of the subject, the other pointing to the object. The subject is by definition, alienated from him/herself, split upon entry into language and social relationships. At the same time the subject is a subject thanks to a contraction that “makes a space and time for” scenes separated/insulated by a second frame perspectively organizing not just objects specifically but objectivity in general. This is a “reality” generated by *indication*, by the act of framing. Its *insula*-tion comes about in relation to the *isola*-tion/alienation of the subject as a *pacified* observer whose premature death stages a kind of catalepsy in which the soul/psyche will be subject to a moral/ethical trial.

Just as the subject is a subject who must live twice (as two kinds of heroes) and die twice (once as a body, again as a soul), the object is a double. This is not a simple mirroring, but a dynamic negative presence (or presence/absence) involving the logical complexity of theft. In *Timon of Athens* (IV, iii), Shakespeare articulates this algorithm:

The sun’s a thief, and with his great attraction
Robs the vast sea; the moon’s an arrant thief,
And her pale fire she snatches from the sun;
The sea’s a thief, whose liquid surge resolves
The moon into salt tears; the earth’s a thief,
That feeds and breeds by a composture stol’n
From general excrement: each thing’s a thief:
The laws, your curb and whip, in their rough power
Have uncheck’d theft.²¹

If theft is the dynamic, then what is the “ontology” of the double object? The thief steals what the victim does not know she/he has and, by theft, brings it into being. This echoes the Lacanian saying, that “love is giving what you don’t have to someone who doesn’t want it.” Theft and love refer to the anomalous composite, suggested by James Joyce’s coined word, “twone.” The body can be stolen by its shadow, the object object by its loss. Is this reversal of cause and effect traceable to the original conversion of the city of the dead to a city of the living? If subjects are dual, is the dual object simply a doubling corresponding to the subject’s alternating phases? My contention is that, as long as duality is grasped in its full functionality, it is almost impossible to go wrong. The fake reveals the Real. If our ersatz conjecture has been the Curtius story, our lucky break (*Ansatz*) may have come with the realization of the *same* duality in other instances of fake grief, such as those which split the drawings of Lévi-Strauss’s informants into two parts.²² This luck, in turn, requires not just a new understanding of the role of grief in the contemporary city; it unites study of the present with studies of the past. It has provided an eigenform along which we may trace the emergence of other mirrored accounts (chiralities) allowing any and all variations of beliefs, behaviors, and architectural/civic constructions. It is the logic of all made things. Grief is only one name of this eigenform. Desiccation, central to the Curtius story as well as to funerary customs and beliefs in general, is another. Theft, the re-assignment of possessions by stealth, is yet another; and Eros, the mysterious gift/theft of what was not possessed to create what did not exist, rewrites ontology as desire.

Notes:

1. This essay grew out of a series of conversations with Claudio Sgarbi in June, 2017, when we both visited the site in the Roman Forum where the *Lacus Curtius* has been preserved. Prof. Sgarbi's influence and inspiration is evident throughout, although he is not to blame for any of my errors or shortcomings.

2. Sigmund Freud, "First Lecture," *Lectures Delivered at the Celebration of the Twentieth Anniversary of the Opening of Clark University*, trans. Harry W. Chase, September 1909. Revised by Sigmund Freud, "The Origin and Development of Psychoanalysis," *American Journal of Psychology* 21, 1910, pp. 181–218. Joseph Rykwert's objections to what he took to be Freud's endorsement of the functionalist city can be found in his *Idea of a Town: The Anthropology of Urban Form in Rome, Italy, and the Ancient World*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, and London, 1988, pp. 188–189. The resolution of Rykwert's misrepresentation and misunderstanding of Freud comes, unexpectedly, from the archaeological evidence of the seven sites of city origins, meticulously compiled by the geographer Paul Wheatley in his book, *The Pivot of the Four Quarters: A Preliminary Enquiry into the Origins and Character of the Ancient Chinese City*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1971. Wheatley summarizes evidence showing that, in all seven sites, a city of the dead preceded the city of the living and that funerary customs provided the groundwork necessary for the city's diversification and layering of social and administrative functions. The consolidation of multiple isolated "client groups" tells the story of the evolution of urbanity out of "cyclopan" conditions. At the same time, the space of the cemetery and outlying client groups is turned inside-out — "extimated," to borrow a term (*extimité*) from the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. See Jacques-Alain Miller, "Extimité," (1985–1986) reprinted/translated in Mark Bracher, Marshall W. Alcorn, Jr., Ronald J. Corthell, and Françoise Massardier-Kenney, eds., *Lacanian Theory of Discourse: Subject, Structure, and Society*, New York University Press, New York and London, 2010, pp. 74–87. The inside-out conversion requires a "cover story" justifying the conversion of a cemetery into a secular public space. The hydrology of this conversion parallels funeral practices of desiccating the corpse and the accompanying belief in a period of mourning, usually involving forty, the number of quarantine, calibrated to the soul's wandering and judgment — hence, the connection between desiccation and "orthopsychics" — the *orthos* of the *psyche*, confirmed in the humoristic correspondence between dryness and wit. See Raymond Klibansky, Erwin Panofsky, and Fritz Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy; Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, Religion and Art*, Nelson, London, 1964. The super-lunary

domain of planets and fixed stars were, for the soul in transit, orthopsychic in their transfer of quality and measure, which astrologers could claim to calculate with precision. This is the uncanny of death inscribed within life, reflected in the momentum of life past the moment of literal death. See Jentsch, footnote 7.

3. Lacan was not the first to notice the relation between private hysteria and public manifestations of hysterical behavior in discourse, but he was the first to formalize this relationship through a formula (*matheme*) depicting the hysteric as an agent addressing the inadequacy, the hidden flaw, in those representing authority. The nature of this flaw makes ordinary whistle-blowing impossible. The hysteric must resort to the indirect strategy of converting the Other's lack into symptoms that are "free-floating signifiers," able to attach to "partial objects" and animate them in uncanny ways. See Jacques Lacan, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Bruce Fink, W. W. Norton, New York, 2007. Lacan's *matheme* for hysteria, $S(a \rightarrow S_1/S_2)$, casts hysteria in the role of discourse that travels between subjectivity's concealed (*/*) trauma-treasure, *a*, and knowledge covered over (*/ S₂*) by an enigma. I would like to compare this "interior" of the *objet petit a* ("object-cause of desire") and enigmatic knowledge to the term "orthopsychic" coined by Gaston Bachelard in his essay, "La surveillance intellectuelle de soi," published as chapter 4 of his series of essays on scientific thought, *La rationalisme appliqué*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1949, pp. 65–81. This chapter is famous for being the focus of Joan Copjec's critique of Michel Foucault's misappropriation of Bachelard's idea of *dispositif*, the "apparatus" of ideology, culture, and (especially) science that Foucault consolidates within the idea of a totalizing power that completely appropriates its subjects. Bachelard, in developing an anti-phenomenological idea of scientific thought, held that scientific methodology in its broadest sense offered the subject a unique form of *objective* freedom (in contrast to subjectivity's traditional vicissitudes), an "orthopsychic" function where, in the subject's *objective* relationship to itself, the possibility of concealment and, concomitantly, guilt first appears. If there is a single universal example of an "orthopsychic space," it is the interval "between the two deaths," between literal death and the point at which the wandering soul has come to rest. This is not simply the commonplace of spiritual judgment and punishment, it is "pile of souls" that have been sorted according to an idealized geometry such as that found in Dante's *Divine Comedy*. See Joan Copjec, *Read My Desire: Lacan Against the Historicists*, Verso, London and New York, 1994, pp. 26–30.

4. Hysteria's palindrome is a complex circulation of back-

and-forth negative and positive energies set in motion by the traumatic Real, and the hysteric's projection of inadequacy of an authoritarian Other, usually a parent or doctor. Lacan symbolized this "signifier of a lack in the Other" as $S(\mathcal{A})$, which can be seen as an observing cordon around a "negated" (concealed) center. The point is that the lack in the Other can be and usually is thematized spatially and temporally.

5. Titus Livius (Livy), *The History of Rome*, Book 7 (6), trans. Benjamin Oliver Foster, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1976–1977.

6. The tradition of the two modes of the hero, active and passive, is surprisingly broad. See Erwin Cook, "Active' and 'Passive' Heroics in the 'Odyssey,'" *The Classical World* 93(2), "Homer," pp. 149–167.

7. Ernst Jentsch, "Zur Psychologie des Unheimlichen," *Psychiatrisch-Neurologische Wochenschrift* 8, 22, August 26, 1906, pp. 195–98; and 8, 23, September 1, 1906, pp. 203–05. The striking aspect of Jentsch's complementary "atoms" of the uncanny is not just their contribution to Freud's more famous work on the uncanny but their status as a "conronym," or single word with two contrasting or even contradictory meanings. Freud cited the relation of the conronym to the unconscious in his short essay, "The Antithetical Meaning of Primal Words," trans. James Strachey, *Five Lectures on Psycho-analysis, Leonardo da Vinci, and Other Works*, The Hogarth Press, London, 1957, 155–161. While the typical example runs from the single word, *sacer* for example, to its two opposite meanings (both "hallowed" and "reviled"), when the binary terms are given first, (death-in-life and life-in-death in the case of Jentsch's uncanny), the intriguing question remains: what is the original conronym? This, I contend, is the essence of the pronoun in those special cases where sacrifice is mandated. In effect, filling the role amounts to a reversal: the role possesses whoever would fill it. This is, technically, the rhetorical figure of "reversed antinomasia," cited by Andrea Battistini to be the secret behind Giambattista Vico's imaginative universal (*universale fantastico*). See Andrea Battistini, "Antonomasia e universale fantastico," *Retorica e critica letteraria*, ed. Lea Ritter Santini, Ezio Raimondi, Società Editrice Il Mulino, Bologna: 1978, pp. 105–121. For more about Vico's *universale fantastico*, see Donald Phillip Verene, *Vico's Science of Imagination*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca NY, 1991.

8. Georges Perec, *A Void*, trans. Gilbert Adair, David R. Godine, Boston, 2012.

9. My summary comes mostly from Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges, *The Ancient City: A Study of the Religion, Laws, and Institutions of Greece and Rome*, trans. Willard Small, Dover Publications, Mineola, NY, 2006.

10. Lacan's "discourse of the Master," drawn from Alexandre

Kojève's lectures on Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which Lacan and other Paris intellectuals attended, is structured around the primacy of the name of the master — *paterfamilias* — over the survival of the individual who happens at the time to possess the name. Hence, the “pronoun” effect of the hero-master is built in, from the start, with the willingness to submit to death to maintain the honor of the Symbolic that will survive any particular subject who falls within the Symbolic's signifying chains. The master is thus defined by (1) passivity and (2) nomination. The mortal master is born to a name that comes before him, a literal “pro-noun.” His rival is someone who possesses something that he believes he lost but, not quite fitting his own “pronoun,” never really owned. Curtius is “named without being named” by the prophecy calling for the sacrifice of “that which Rome holds most dear.” His action, to claim this role, is in essence passive, a “willingness to die.” This is an orthopsychic choice, and as such identical with the death drive's relation to the ortho-graphic liminal space of death once the functions of the cemetery are transferred to the perimetral defensive city walls, which serve both as surveillance mechanisms and checks against what Slavoj Žižek has called “the incontinence of the void”: the fundamental relationship between the void and its boundary condition, always a locus of anxiety. Slavoj Žižek, *The Incontinence of the Void: Economico-Philosophical Spandrels*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 2017.

11. Spoils of war were “trophies” (τροπαίων, tropaion) in multiple senses. Abandoned arms — shields, axes, swords, etc. — were stacked up at the points where the tide of battle had turned, or “troped.” In related practices, the souls of the slain enemy had to be placated/banished by dancing or other rituals involving crossing, jumping, or leaping. The Scottish fling is thought to have originated in a dance over the fallen enemy's corpse. Generally, the trope of poetic verse makes turning into a quasi-magical act of diverting attention away from the referential content of the poem to the musical features that, at emotional and unconscious levels, accomplish the poem through rhythmic, tonal, and stochastic techniques. One could say that the “job” of poetry is less one of communicating any content than a performative — one could say medical — procedure to restore and revive, an act of resurrection. This is perhaps why Asklepius, the god of the medical arts, was the son of lyre-bearing Apollo, the god of poetry.

12. Aldo Rossi, *The Architecture of the City*, trans. Diane Ghirardo, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 1982, p. 119. Rossi does not consider how a burial ground must be de-sanctified before civic/secular activities can replace its mortuary uses. The transformation of cemeteries into cities, however, was not just commonplace but nearly universal, as Paul Wheatley

concluded in his study of the seven major centers of urban origins. *Pivot of the Four Quarters: A Preliminary Enquiry into the Origins and Character of the Ancient Chinese City*, Aldine, Chicago, 1971.

13. For a review of the complex traditions and beliefs surrounding sites of trade in ancient times, see Norman O. Brown, *Hermes the Thief: The Evolution of a Myth*, Lindisfarne Press, Great Barrington, MA, 1990.

14. There is a durable myth that seems to be a universal feature of disaster relief. First responders are instructed to allow residents forced to evacuate disaster sites to return to their ruined homes as soon as possible to recover small items — scrapbooks, photos, jewels, jewelry boxes — that are key to their mental recovery from the trauma of loss. Without these, the loss of the home becomes intolerable. Victims are forced to continually replay their loss. The jewel-like talismans, however, fill in the role of the Lacanian *object petit a* in that, while they are no longer objects of desire, they represent loss as contronymic, a new form of possession made possible only with the negation of the satisfaction they once provided.

15. It is possible to see that Romulus plays the part of the shaman-priest who is the construct of the dead, whom he buries. The undertaker mediates between the living and dead relations by signs, which in this case are naturally “contronymic” in that they translate between languages of the living and the language of the dead. The latter is more accurately the “unconscious, structured like a language,” that Lacan thought appeared in the form of symptoms and rebuses combining homophones, puns, and visual substitutions.

16. The Cyclops episode uses two tricks that relate directly to the problem of consolidating separate hearth-based worship into a single civic religion. The “single eye” of the Cyclops is a literal version of the saying, that cyclopians groups “kept to their single eyes,” meaning openings in the forest where rituals (divination, marriage, burial) took place. These eyes could not be moved without the fiction of carrying earth from one site to a new location. The myth of Prometheus, who is chained to a rock while his liver is plucked out, refers to this: the site of auspices was fixed by the literalness of the primitive mentality. The *manes* worshiped at such fixed sites had to be blinded by ruses so they would allow for relocation and consolidation. But, blinding was not enough. Odysseus had to prevent the Cyclops from calling for help once he discovered the Greeks had escaped, so he told the Cyclops his name was “Nobody,” so that the literal-minded Cyclops would think the name was Odysseus's true proper name but his neighbors would hear it as a pronoun and not respond. The pronoun trick is established well before it is called into

action, so the effect is anacoluthic: we realize at the end what this strange name substitution was for. Curtius's use of the pronoun is the opposite: “nobody” knows and Curtius in this case identifies himself as the anonymous proper name to become the new Nobody.

17. My terminology is drawn from Slavoj Žižek's characterization of Hegelian dialectic as both having and not having a synthesis. Hegel did not originally specify a three-part thesis–antithesis–synthesis. Synthesis was added some years later. Walter Kauffman (*Hegel: A Reinterpretation*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, 2004, p. 154): “Fichte introduced into German philosophy the three-step of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, using these three terms. Schelling took up this terminology. Hegel did not. He never once used these three terms together to designate three stages in an argument or account in any of his books. And they do not help us understand his *Phenomenology*, his *Logic*, or his philosophy of history; they impede any open-minded comprehension of what he does by forcing it into a scheme which was available to him and which he deliberately spurned [...] The mechanical formalism [...] Hegel derides expressly and at some length in the preface to the *Phenomenology*.” However, there is a synthesis in the sense that the antithesis is *already located within the thesis*, where it plays a silent role. The real synthesis in Hegel is the revelation of how this silent placement worked. Slavoj Žižek, *The Most Sublime Hysteric: Hegel with Lacan*, trans. Thomas Scott-Railton, Polity, Cambridge, UK, 2014, pp. 105–115.

18. For a thorough review of Freud's death drive, see Richard Boothby, *Death and Desire: Psychoanalytic Theory in Lacan's Return to Freud*, Routledge, New York and London, 1991.

19. The conversion of privation into prohibition is, argues Ernst Cassirer, the basis of the myth-structured first thoughts that initiate human mentality proper. At a critical evolutionary point, the invisible/unknown becomes a negation that must be negated a second time, but in the modality of a transfer of will and intentionality from the perceiving subject to the perceived object. The first negation, privation, becomes a second negation imposed by an Other whose extensive powers link all forces within the generic unknown into a plenum of divine design. Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms 2, Mythical Thought*, trans. Ralph Manheim, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, 1955, p. 34. Ludwig Wittgenstein inadvertently articulated the same idea in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921) with his famous dictum, “Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent” (*Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muss man schweigen*). This seventh proposition is not elaborated but instead forms an aphoristic relationship to the first, beginning with “the world is all that is the case.” How the world came

into being, how it got to be “a case,” is not addressed. The final, seventh proposition does not explain why, if something can’t be symbolized, why we should be *instructed not to talk about it*. The mandate of silence is gratuitous, like the MacGuffin that is for shooting lions in the Scottish Highlands. It is a nonexistent remedy for a nonexistent problem, but it *exists*, and then *so does the problem*.

20. Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, and London, 2006, pp. 25–26. Claude Lévi-Strauss’s story appears in his *Structural Anthropology*, Basic Books, New York, 2009. The important thing about this example is that the “two-ness” of the two accounts. The differing maps (one which we could characterize as “concentrically organized,” the other as “radial”) relate to the two kinds of anxiety that we associate with (1) the Imaginary, which is the alienation experienced by the subject who, in order to participate in language and social relations must “extimate” space and time; and (2) the Symbolic, with its need to preserve the “continenence of the Void,” a function of the Big Other. Two kinds of “islands” correspond to these two kinds of anxieties. The *isola* relates to the isolation of the Subject in the alienation that comes with the Imaginary, an alienation that begins with the young subject’s realization of its lack of mastery in relation to its specular image (the “mirror stage”). The *insula* reflects the need to *insu*-late the space of the living from the formless contamination of the Real in an imaginary “beyond.” I see the Curtius myth as relating to the *isola*, the Romulus-Remus myth articulating the dynamic of the *insula*. But, it is possible to see the correlation in reverse, because Curtius is ultimately about “sealing off” the void represented by the flooding lake; and Romulus is all about the demonstration of mastery in overcoming a *double* (his twin). The double theme is itself incontinent — within each the theme of two-ness is repeated at a different scale. There may be some clues in the Lévi-Strauss story. Concentricity has to do with containment issues, while a radial logic is about a duplicity created between viewer and viewed. While duplicity requires the idea of a screen separating two zones, concentricity is about falling into a depth built into space and time. It may be that it is impossible to tell the story of the one without the other. Hitchcock’s *Vertigo* (1958), for example, clearly raises the question of falling and depth, but the main action of the film involves a detective spying on a woman who turns out to be an actress staging her appearances so that the detective, Scottie, will see only what he is meant to see. Scottie is playing the part of the *manes*, tricked into being a false witness. This theme is played out by a series of transactions between the murdered wife, a haunting ancestress, the actress, and the shopgirl that the actress later becomes.

21. William Shakespeare, *The Life of Timon of Athens*, Act IV, Scene iii, *Project Gutenberg*, accessed November 2017, <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/2262/pg2262.html>. The thematic of theft goes back to the multiple functions of Hermes (Norman O. Brown, *op. cit.*, footnote 13). Following Brown, I argue that Hermes’ many talents are not simply accretions of various traditions and narrative encounters but *functionally related* and *poetically structured*. Theft is thus a part of the logical matrix relating it to death, (silent) trade, boundary preservation, and Eros. Vladimir Nabokov was equally aware of this matrix and explored it extensively in his novel *Pale Fire*, G. P. Putnam’s Sons, New York, 1962. Nabokov’s theory of the “ambidextrous universe,” played out in *Pale Fire* and *Ada* (1969) but present throughout his work, develops the idea of duality as *chirality*, a symmetry that preserves difference within identity. Hence, radial logic can develop its meridians, transects, and frame relations while at the same time vertigo plunges into the depth of any space or time. In other words, *duality is itself dual*. Theft allows this complex idea to express itself in simple forms, the unlawful capture of another’s possession, which as a surplus upset the balance of the universe and provoked a generic “envy of the gods.” This *eigen* comes into being only through the action of envy, it is an *eigenform* or constant that, being constant, allows all else to vary. This is, I claim, the meaning of Nabokov’s chirality/handedness that makes each object a contronym of itself, an object of desire and an object-cause of desire. The former can be possessed but the latter will always *rob this possession* of any satisfaction. It is the presence of the death drive within the pursuit of pleasure that finds its embodiment in the attempts to secure a treasury of objects. This co-presence, or chirality, creates the turbulence that, as the Curtius story tells it, will always take place within a liquid (which cannot be divided), shadowed by a story that takes place in soil (which can always be divided).

22. Mathematicians actually employ an “ersatz to ansatz” methodology when confronted with a difficult problem that seems to refuse any obvious access. The ersatz conjecture is a consciously constructed fiction that, when brought to bear on the problem, fails but in failing reveals key contours of the unknown. These contours are used to construct a second attack, then a third, and so on. This seemingly random approach maximizes the chance of discovering something that has not been constructed by theory, prematurely, forever obscuring the true lineaments of the problem. See “Ansatz,” *Wikipedia*, accessed November 2017, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ansatz>.