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To cite this article: Georges Teyssot (2005) A Topology of Thresholds, Home Cultures, 2:1, 89-116

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2752/174063105778053427>



Published online: 21 Apr 2015.



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**A TOPOLOGY OF
 THRESHOLDS**

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This article explores the theoretical definitions of the "intérieur", of the threshold and of the fold, from Athanasius Kircher, Johannes Zahn, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, to Charles Baudelaire, André Gide, and Walter Benjamin. It proceeds with an analysis of mirrors, windows, frames, and other specular devices that multiply the interior. This leads to a review of contemporary readings (and mis-readings) of the Heideggerian "Zweifalt," or "double fold," and introduces an exploration of the twain of "between" and to a discussion of current theories of the "Zwischenraum," the "space in-between." Lastly, through readings of Gilles Deleuze and Michel de Certeau, this article brings in the distinction between a sedentary law (to distribute according to rules) and a nomadic law (to spread in a aleatory manner on a limitless space), opening up to the promises of an ethical mode of inhabitation.



The task of historiography is, for Walter Benjamin, the eruption of historical facts, which are unearthed from their state of disuse. In his work, these “historical facts” tend to focus the attention on instances of phenomena at the moment of their postponement or disappearance, whether by means of death, destruction, or misuse. In other words, he focuses on threshold conjunctures, moments of transition where phenomena are about to dissolve, ephemeral images fading into memory.¹ For Benjamin, history thus becomes a work of remembrance (*die Erinnerung*), but only if its mechanism remains similar to that of awakening. Benjamin refers explicitly to the moment of awakening, when one hesitates even about one's own whereabouts: “What Proust alludes to with his experiment of moving the furniture around in an early morning doze, [. . .], is nothing more than what should be transferred here on the historical and collective plane” (Benjamin 1982: vol. 1, konvolut K1, 3, 491).

It must be taken into account that Benjamin has in mind the opposition between memory (*das Gedächtnis*) and remembrance (*die Erinnerung*), as developed by Theodor Reik. Memory, Reik notes, “is the protection of impressions; remembrance instead aims at their dissolution. Memory is essentially conservative, remembrance is destructive” (Reik 1935, cited by Benjamin 1982: vol. 1, konvolut K8, 1, 507–8). Similarly, the act of awakening from dreams is, in so far as it is a passage, rupture and continuity at the same time. This dialectic of transition, of the location of the mind at the threshold between awakening and wakefulness, allows the figure of awakening to become central to Benjamin's reflections (see Greffrath 1986). “There is a ‘not-yet-conscious knowledge’ of ‘what-once-was’ (*das Gewesene*) whose bringing to the surface has the structure of awakening” (Benjamin 1982: vol. 1, konvolut K1, 2, 491).

THE THRESHOLD AS ZONE

Going to sleep and waking up are rites of passage in human life; perhaps the only ones remaining in a secular society. Nonetheless, Benjamin warns, “[the] threshold (*die Schwelle*) must be sharply differentiated from the border (*die Grenze*). The threshold is a zone. Change, passage, and ebb and flow are embedded in the word *schwellen* [‘to swell’]. Etymology can not prevent us from noticing these meanings. On the other hand, it is necessary to acknowledge the immediate tectonic and ceremonial context that has given the word its meaning” (Benjamin 1982: vol. 1, konvolut O2a, 1, 618). Awakening is thus not a caesura, but the creation of a door, to be crossed by an extended series of rites, between the world of dreams and the waking state. It is a zone shaped by a precise tectonics, a region of cognition. Passage and peristyle, pronaos and portal, entry and vestibule, triumphal arch, sacred and profane (L. *pro-fanus*: in front of the temple, L. *fanum*): these lines, imaginary and tectonic,

do not create boundaries, but the between, a space in the middle.² The form of the threshold, as a temporal and spatial figure, is that of the “between-the-two,” of the medium that opens between two things.³

It is in the *Passagen-Werk*, the unfinished work on Parisian arcades that remains a series of preparatory notes, that Benjamin addresses extensively the concept of the dream and awakening. But it is, of course, also the place where he deals with the threshold. In this sense, it is, amongst many other things, a sketch of a “science of thresholds,” as the following extract illustrates: “Even the despotic alarm of the doorbell that reigns over the apartment gains its power from the magic of the threshold. A shrill sound announces that something is crossing the threshold” (Benjamin 1982: vol. 1, konvolut C3, 5, 141). Another passage, which seems to have been composed after reading an article by Doctor Pierre Mabilie published in the Surrealist’s journal *Minotaure* in 1935, compares the “visceral unconscious” (of the individual) and the “unconscious of forgetting.” The latter, of a predominately collective nature, is an unconscious derived “from the mass of things learned through the ages or over the course of a life, that once were conscious and that, through diffusion, have fallen into oblivion.” The elements of the individual unconscious have vanished or are extinguished; only those of the collective unconscious exist “taken from the exterior world [and] more or less transformed and digested” (Mabilie 1935, cited in Benjamin 1982: vol. 1, konvolut K4, 2, 501). The possibility emerges of a collective interior, an interiority made up of external things, preserved as if in a formless vessel through a process of interiorization.

A similar notion appears in Benjamin’s notes, for whom: “naturally, much of what is external to the individual belongs to the collective’s internal nature: architecture, fashion, yes, even the weather are, to the interior of the collective, what sensory perception, [and] symptoms of illness or health are to the interior of the individual” (Benjamin 1982: vol. 1, konvolut K1, 5, 492). In contrast to the psychoanalyst who wants to unmask the figures of dream, Benjaminian “hermeneutics” sets out to reveal, in buildings, in the most apparently utilitarian things, the emergence of everything that ties them to dreams, that is to say to the irrational, the buried, the diseased, the digested, the uncanny.⁴ There lies the force of the analogy that permeates the *Passagen-Werk*, and that constitutes in an explicit fashion two of its important chapters of notes and reflections, collected under the headings of “dream city” (*die Traumstadt*) and “dream house” (*das Traumhaus*). The analogy between dream and architecture establishes the “correspondence” (the key notion of Charles Baudelaire’s poetic theory) between the world of dreams and that of things (Bischoff and Lenk 1986: 184). And now the meaning of a note of the following sort becomes clear: “Fashion, like architecture, belongs to the obscurity of the lived moment, to the dream consciousness of the collective—that

is awakened, for example, in advertising” (Benjamin 1982: vol. 1, konvolut K2a, 4, 497).

Benjamin revealed that the “past,” the “what-once-was” (*das Gewesene*), is not simply the “historicist masks” that prefigure modernity, but is still very present. Thus the nineteenth century that he focuses on was constituted not as a remote and fixed historical period, but as a spatiotemporal region, a “vast intermediate zone where the aesthetic and the social have not yet assumed distinct forms” (Bischoff and Lenk 1986: 184). To demonstrate this, he offers a topography of intermediate zones, “[t]he dream-houses [*das Traumhaus*] of the collective: arcades, wintergardens, panoramas, factories, wax museums, casinos, railroad stations” (Benjamin 1982: vol. 1, konvolut L1, 3, 511). All these buildings, which are typical of nineteenth-century “novelty,” are characterized by what appears to be a transparency, obtained through the use of new materials like metal and glass. But this “transparency” is only superficial—more properly, these are large spaces that create vast “interiors” for the collective, so huge that they do not have exteriors as such. They are all interior: the elongated spaces of the arcades illuminated by glazed lanterns; the swampy atmosphere of glass-houses, dripping with humidity; the enclosed rooms of panoramas, museums, and casinos, with their never-ending perspectives; and the huge and noisy halls of factories and railway stations, caverns filled with smoke and steam. These spaces of transition are the containers of the crowd: they enclose the collective dream. Paradoxically, the public spaces of the collective appear as interiors. These are a particular type of interior: threshold spaces where the interior and exterior meet, where public and private literally find their common ground. What Benjamin seems to be saying is that the “nineteenth century” does not simply prefigure modernity, but, as an *Ur*-history of it, highlights transition as the key motif of modernity. The nineteenth century is not only a transitional moment, but is characterized by transitional spaces. The public space becomes therefore a threshold, a space that holds together, or “contains,” the flow of the crowd.

INTERIOR AS A FACADE

It is well known that, for Benjamin, the nineteenth- and twentieth-century apartment is considered as a lined casing for its inhabitant, such as a compass casing, or a shell.⁵ However, this casing should be considered through the possibility of a topological threshold between an interior and an exterior: true, it appears to be a pure, protecting *intérieur*, while on the other hand this interior is displayed, and thus is projected towards the exterior, like goods in a shop’s glass window, or collector’s artifacts in a museum.⁶ What used to be (bourgeois) interiority, quiet, secure, and intimate (*die Gemütlichkeit*), a sleeping place and a place asleep, in short the *intérieur*, reversed itself into an exterior: “The *intérieur* steps outside. It is as if the bourgeois were

so sure of his stable prosperity that he disdains the facade in order to declare: no matter where you open it and cut a section through it, my house remains a facade” (Benjamin 1982: vol. 1, konvolut 14, 4). This consideration, which is not a contradiction in Benjamin’s thought, offers the possibility of the *intérieur* being grasped in a mirror situation, between an interior and an exterior. Such a duality, for Benjamin, could be represented by a double gaze: that of the “poet of the modern city” (Baudelaire 1985 [1976]), i.e., Charles Baudelaire, and that of the avant-garde artist, for example, Bertold Brecht. Benjamin maintains a telescopic view of time and history: this is why the views of Baudelaire and Brecht are read at the same time, as if they had collapsed on one another.

For Charles Baudelaire, precisely, there is an invasion of the (metropolitan) exterior into the interior, which has two consequences—the interior becomes a facade, while the person in the street becomes a voyeur: “Looking from outside into an open window one never sees as much as when one looks through a closed window. There is nothing more profound, more mysterious, more pregnant, more insidious and more dazzling than a window lighted by a single candle. What one can see out in the sunlight is always less interesting than what goes on behind a window pane. In that black or luminous square life lives, life dreams, life suffers” (Baudelaire 1961: 288, 1947: 77). For the poet of the modern city, the window, seen through its bewildering exteriority, is better perceived from the outside and at night. It frames the anonymous and solitary existence of metropolitan humanity, and offers an image, an allegory, of contemporary solitude. His poems tell things using other things, other images: they allegorize the exterior glance on the unknown.

This phenomenon is clearly illustrated by the famous sections through the Parisian apartment building that were published frequently in the nineteenth century (Babelon, Jean Pierre (ed.) 1976: 14–43). From 1845 until 1911, an iconographic fashion existed in Paris (actually deriving from techniques of representation in previous centuries), which had as its theme the opening up of the *immeuble* like an anatomical body. This argument in a way had been announced within literature by *Le Diable boiteux* (1707; second edition, 1726), a best-selling novel written by Alain-René Le Sage, where a devil was able to penetrate roofs and walls.⁷ This devil was a nosy parker, who would pry in bedrooms, inquisitively checking what people sleeping together might do (Figure 1) there. In the nineteenth century, the same theme, renamed *Le Diable à Paris*, was illustrated by sections revealing the social life of a building floor by floor as if in peepshow (Blazer 1998), from the plushness of a yawning bourgeois’ interior to the drunkenness of *bohème* artists dancing in their garrets (see *L’Illustration*, January 11 1845: 293; *Le Magasin Pittoresque* December 1847: 401, Le Sage 1976). Typical of the Louis-Philippe *intérieur*, what the choice of section reveals is the rigid separation



Figure 1
Anonymous illustration of a 1759 édition of Alain-René Lesage's novel, *Le diable boiteux*, originally from 1707/1726; reprint: Liège (now, Belgium), chez D. De Boubiers, 1789 (reproduced by permission, Université de Montréal, Bibliothèque d'histoire de l'art, Montréal, QC, CA).

Figure 2
Section of a Parisian residential building, drawing by Bertall, lithography by Lavielle published in: *Le diable à Paris* [...], Paris: J. Hetzel, 1845–1846, 2 vol.; and again in: *L'illustration*, January 11, 1845 (reproduced by permission, Montréal, private collection, QC, CA).



of the classes, despite their being placed together in the same structure (Figure 2).

Other types of sectional drawings were put together, mostly to depict the underground services of the city, such as sewer lines, water and gas supply, and the new metro tunnels and access stairs. One such a drawing depicted in perspective the main sewer system and its branches to the buildings (Figure 3). It was in fact a drawing of a sectional model that had been displayed at the International

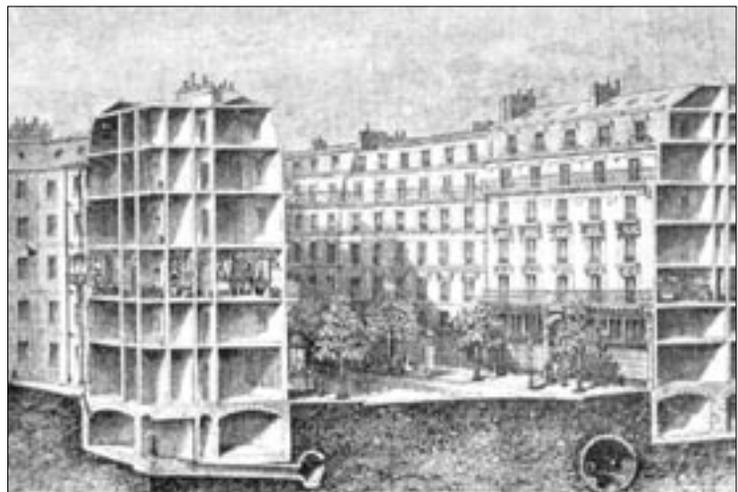


Figure 3
Section model on the boulevards of Paris, with sewers and water and gas ducts, displayed at the 1878 exhibition, drawing by Broux engraved by Smeeton-Tilly, published in *Magasin Pittoresque*, January 1880, p. 37 (reproduced by permission, Montréal, private collection, QC, CA).

Exposition of 1878 in Paris.⁸ While public transitional spaces had become “interiors,” made either by different types of buildings, such as stations, or different networks, such as the new metro lines, the Victorian (or Haussmannian) interior, cut through by the architect’s section, exposed to everybody by the scientific gaze, and opened up by the intimate social literature of such writers as Balzac and Zola, revealed itself as a facade (Marcus 1999). The interior had become a reversible surface, “like a sock,”—to use an expression from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 30)—and could be transformed into an exterior. As underlined by Benjamin (1982: vol. 1, konvolut L1a, 1, 513), a symmetrical turning-inside-out had thus taken place: “Arcades are like houses or passages that have no exterior, like the dream” and “the interior of the museum appears as an enormously intensified *intérieur*” (1982: vol. 1, konvolut L1a, 2, 513).

Thus, there would be degrees of intensity in the interior and within interiority. There would be normal, banal and quotidian, interiors; but there would also be extremely intensified interiors, which would present dream qualities, those described by Proust and Rilke. In a similar manner, Benjamin shows that the arcades of Paris were streets transformed into interiors, where the abundance of mirrors extended the space towards the fantastic and confounded orientation (Benjamin 1982: vol. 2, konvolut R2a, 3, 672). Furthermore, he observes, “the arcade is also a windowless house [*ein fensterloses Haus*]” (Benjamin 1982: vol. 2, konvolut Q2a, 7, 661). This striking image can already be found, in a note dating from the twenties, for the project on the arcades: “Arcades: houses, passages that have no exterior side. Like the dream” (Benjamin 1982: Fo, 9, 1006). To this cryptic note he appends another passage, affirming the quasi-identity of dream and truth, which already contains the structure of a “dream architecture:” “The true has no windows. The true never looks out at the universe.” As with panoramas, theaters, panopticons,⁹ arcades (*passages*), “[w]hat finds itself in the windowless house is what is true” (Benjamin 1982: Fo, 24, 1008). Such dream architecture thus has the structure of monadic space.

MIRROR IMAGE

There is an interesting parallel between the mirror represented in Diego Velázquez’s *Las Meniñas* (1656) and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz’s *Monadology* (1714), the dates of which neatly bracket the baroque period. While the center of representation is projected out of the painting, it is at the same time represented within the frame, by the ghostly reflection of the Spanish Royals (Philip IV and his wife). At the back of the painting there is a point—“ideal” or “virtual” in relation to what is presented, but truly real—that indicates the various functions of the painter, the visitor at the door, and the mirror that puts the royal family back within the play of representation.¹⁰ There

is thus a connection between the horizon of the totalitarianism of representation in *Las Meniñas* and its later philosophical translation in Leibniz, for whom the Monad is a “living and perpetual mirror of the Universe” (Leibniz 1991 [1714]: proposition 56). For the baroque philosopher, “nothing can limit itself to represent only part of things,” and so “each Monad represents the whole universe” (Leibniz 1991: [1714]: propositions 60, 62). Significantly, Leibniz was also interested in the art of formal gardening, the products of which are representations of total power, and was in particular involved with the “Grosser Garten” at Herrenhausen near Hannover (incidentally, the garden was finished in 1714, the same year as *The Monadology*).

It was André Gide who in 1893 introduced the notion of the *mise-en-abyme*, borrowing from French heraldic knowledge a technical name referring to a minor shield in the central part of another shield that thus created an “inescutcheon” (see Brooke-Little 1985, cited in Dällenbach 1989: 8). Gide in fact shifted the definition, thinking more precisely of the rare case where the same shield was repeated, in miniature, in the center. The term was coined to describe a literary effect, like the “play within a play” in Hamlet, and therefore means “any aspect enclosed within a work that shows a similarity with the work that contains it” (Brooke-Little 1985). Gide would quote pictorial examples to assist him, and paintings cited include Hans Memling’s *Diptich of Maarten Van Nieuwenhoven* (1489), and Jan van Eyck’s last pupil, Quentin Metsys’ *The Banker and his Wife* (1514). In those works, small convex mirrors would reflect things or people situated out of the picture. Gide also referred to *Las Meniñas*, probably because of the oscillation created between the painter and the spectator, and also between the interior and the exterior, making the image “come out of the frame” whilst inserting the visitors into the picture.

The mirror is thus a specular device that multiplies and interiorizes. Such an operation, with its profound relationship to ocularity, can be traced well back, for instance, in Jan van Eyck’s well-known painting of *The Arnolfini Marriage* (1434), which offers a clear analogy between vision and the mirror (Bertrand 1997; Harbison 1995; Miller 1998; Philippot 1994). In this painting, the circular convex mirror, situated at the back of the nuptial chamber of the Arnolfinis (or that of the painter himself, according to another interpretation) and dominating the center of the painting, provides a perfect correspondence between the eye and the mirror. As shown by Erwin Panofsky in 1934 (Panofsky 1934), and more recently by Agnès Minazzoli, the eye is a mirror, but also, inversely, the mirror is an eye. Firstly, the mirror captures the image of things; it frames the visible world, collecting the diversity of the world into the unity of vision. And secondly, the mirror provides the metaphor of the gaze—of the painter, as a witness to the marriage contract (between Giovanna Cenami and Giovanni Arnolfini, according to the common attribution), replacing or doubling the eye of God,

hovering between the couple over their joined hands, as witness to the propriety of the union (Dällenbach 1989; Minazzoli 1990).

Thus, the role of the mirror in this painting is both to enclose the space while redoubling it, and to open the space towards new dimensions: by reflecting in the image the open door out of the room, it abolishes the spatial limits between interior and exterior, or, rather, the symbolic frontiers between a profane place and a sacred space. It also provides the painter with a double signature, his name, which is actually written on the wall immediately above the mirror (*Johannes de eyck fuit hic 1434*), and his image, in the form of a self-portrait. Two functions in one, both nominal and iconic, are thus simultaneously allowed for: the signature of the painting, and the signature for a contract (of matrimony). The convex mirror is like a seal on this pact (for eternity), not only “doubling” the scene, inscribing this event, but also securing this particular event out of the continuous drift of time. The “*mise-en-abyme*” effect of mirroring is of course based on a principle of repetition, but not entirely. Firstly, nothing repeats itself identically, because the mirror is a distorting surface, especially that of the convex mirror; and secondly, in this instance the repetition (or the doubling) of the mirror is also a celebration of an event that happens only once, in time and in space, *hic et nunc*. In both cases, the act of representation is clearly registered—the painting’s role as image referred to by the mirror’s reflection is a recording of a particular event, both as a document and as a monument (in the etymological meaning), a souvenir.

THE MONADIC SPACE: A PURE INSIDE

In *The Fold. Leibniz and the Baroque*, Deleuze (1993) observes that baroque space offers not only Monads that “have no windows,” but also the devices of the *camera obscura*, or of the catoptric box filled with mirrors (von Deuritz and Nekes 2002; Nekes 2003). As shown by Jurgis Baltrušaitis, catoptric boxes, the example of an internalized world, or monadic space belonging to the seventeenth century, employed different configurations of mirror-lined boxes that, by extending the scene included, created the illusion of an internal space larger than the box itself. Athanasius Kircher’s treatise on catoptric devices, *Ars magna lucis et umbrae* (1646, 1671), or Johannes Zahn’s *Oculus artificialis Teledioptricus* (Würzburg, 1685), described in detail various types of reflective machines, either using compartments composed from two mirrors at 60 or 90 degree angles that repeated the figures in front of them (the smaller the angle, the more repetitions), or a box lined with mirrors that extended a modeled scene in all directions (Baltrušaitis 1978; see also Goldberg 1985).

Zahn’s device, the hexagonal catoptric machine, composed of compartments with mirror-lined dividers that had a peep-hole in the center front, combined the two. When looked through, each

scene depicted was multiplied six times and magically appeared to fill the entire hexagonal cabinet (Figure 4). The various scenes contained in this box, which largely consisted either of gardens or architectural compositions, constituted microcosmic landscapes magically disposed as if taken out of the drawers of a cabinet of curiosity, or a *Wunderkammer*. More importantly, Zahn designed an architectural counterpart to the box in the second edition of the *Oculus artificialis* (Nürnberg, 1702), the “Conclave Catoptricum” (Figure 5), which was a hexagonal room-within-a-room on top of a base that, once entered, was lined with mirrors on every surface, except for a band of semi-translucent material around the top of the walls that allowed light to enter indirectly through the outer room, whilst the ceiling was painted with clouds (Lohneis 1985; Roche and Devinoy 1956; Roche et al. 1986; Sennequier et al. 2000). Thus it appeared a perfect model of the Leibnizian subject-as-building, divided between the body as base, the ground floor opened through windows representing the five senses to the world; and the mind or soul, totally enclosed and internalized but providing a gateway to the infinite beyond. The mind, as monad, was represented as an entire world simply because, through multiple reflections, it had the capacity in itself to represent and imagine the whole world within its bounds.

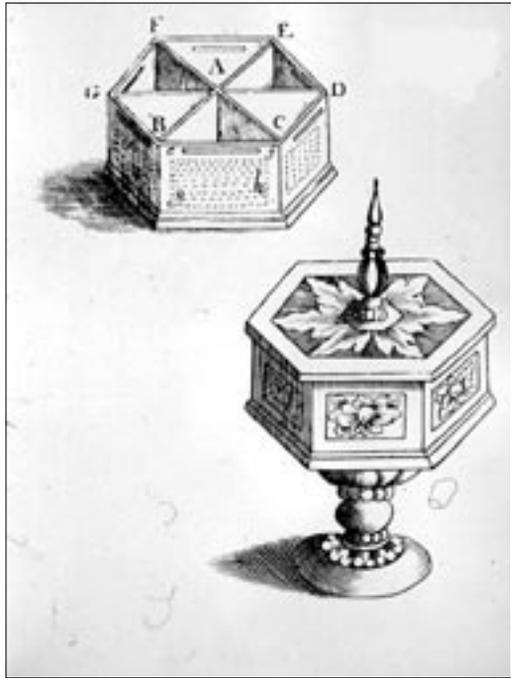


Figure 4
 Catoptric device placed on rotating platform, designed by Johannes Zahn, in his: *Oculus artificialis teledioptricus, sive Telescopium, ex abditis rerum naturalium et artificialium principiis protractum ... ac ... e triplici fundamento, physico seu naturali, mathematico-dioptrico et mechanico seu practico, stabilitum...*, Authore R.P.F. Joanne Zahn, Herbipoli : sumptibus Q. Heyl, 1685 (reproduced by permission, Université Laval, Service Central de Documentation, Québec, QC, CA).

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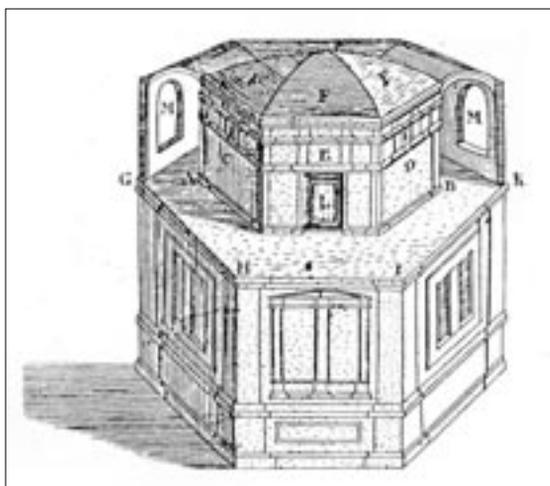


Figure 5
 "Conclave Catoptricum",
 designed by Johannes Zahn,
 in his: *Oculus artificialis*
teledioptricus: sive Telesopium,
ex abditis rerum naturalium
& artificialium principii
protractum novam methodo,
eamque solidam explicatum
ac comprimis e triplici
fundamento physico seu
naturali, mathematico dioptrico
et mechanico, seu pratico
stabilitum..., *authore Johanne*
Zahn, Norimbergae: sumptibus
J. C. Lochneri; Bibliopolae
: typis johannis Ernesti
Adelbulneri, 1702 (reproduced
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 Documentation, Québec,
 QC, CA).

In fact, for Deleuze, monadic space is: "the architectural idea [of] a room in black marble, in which light enters only through orifices so well bent that nothing on the outside can be seen through them, yet they illuminate in colour the decor of a pure inside" (Deleuze 1988: 39, 1993: 27–31, quote 28). Curiously enough, he illustrates this definition, not by the catoptric architecture of Zahn, but by light canons of Le Corbusier's chapels in the Convent of La Tourette (Deleuze 1988: 39, 1993: 27–31). Deleuze proceeds to state that, if the freestanding baroque facade presents itself as "an outside without an inside," then monadic interiors are "an inside without an outside:" this inside is "pure," it is the "closed interiority," with "its walls hung with spontaneous folds," of a soul or a mind (Deleuze 1993: 28, 29). In baroque time, these two spaces of pure exteriority and interiority, which are represented in Leibniz by two vectors, one descending towards the physical level of bodies and the other ascending towards the metaphysical light of souls, are coexistent. Pure interiority and pure exteriority inhabit "a similar house" in domestic baroque architecture (Deleuze 1993: 29).

However, if pure interiority and pure exteriority inhabit "a similar house," one might ask if this does mean that the observations on monadic space have a relevance limited only to the baroque period. In modern times, the severing of high and low, soul and body, and inside and outside refers to the baroque distinction, but is a reference that, as a fold, actually articulates that difference. The fold is thus the actualization of the difference between "the intimate folds that the soul encloses on the upper level" and "the creases that matter brings to life always on the outside, on the lower level" (Deleuze 1993: 30). What establishes the differentiation is the *Zweifalt*, in Heideggerian terms, the "twofold," or "the differentiation of difference" (p. 30). In

Leibniz's monadic house, it is the fold that connects the upper level with the lower, or the spiritual with the physical; this is because, even if the fold is always double, you cannot suppress one side without suppressing the other. As a reflective device, the mirror, a "looking glass," serves as an intermediary between two worlds, opening the possibilities of imaging and illusion. Perhaps, this is why it was the material of choice to represent monadic space. Not only a medium between mind and matter, or the ideal and the real, it is also traditionally a mediator between eternity and finitude or the infinite and the finite, the interior and the exterior, the actual and the virtual. As such, it concretizes the "twin-ness" of the between, the "two-ness" of the twofold, and the "twain" of opposites—the separator, in other words, that comes between the two terms; or, the In-cident (*der Zwischen-fall*), as it was formulated by Martin Heidegger.

WINDOW: BETWEEN WIND AND EYE

Another device that would seem to offer a paradigmatic example of the notion of the threshold between interior and exterior is, of course, the window.¹¹ In her book on *The Window during the Baroque Period*, Sabine Lietz (1982) shows the continuity of academic treatments of the window from, for example, Michelangelo and Vincenzo Scamozzi to Sébastien Le Clerc and Jacques-François Neufforge. In the pattern books she cites, the window is represented from the outside, and is treated under the regime of the orders that governs architecture (Doric, Ionic, Corinthian, etc.). On the other hand, the sources for the treatment of the same windows from the interior require reference to the various engravings by, for example, Jacques-François Blondel.¹² These include the renderings of interior decoration and sculpture, decorative *partis*, fashionable styling, sudden changes of taste, and the contribution not only of architects but also of cabinet-makers, upholsters, ceiling painters, mirror-installers, curtain-makers, etc. A good example of all this is the section showing the refurbishment of the Château de Petit-Bourg rebuilt for the Duc d'Antin in the early 1720s (see Whitehead 1982: 78–80).

Therefore, in the eighteenth century, within the theoretical framework of architecture as it appears in the drawings of existing buildings and in treatises, there seems to be a clear separation between the understanding of the interior and exterior elevations of the window. Viewed from the outside, the window remains part of the regime of classical architecture, of the orders. From the inside, the window becomes a part of interior decoration, no longer tied to the rules of classicism, but orchestrated by the new dictates of architectural propriety—*distribution*, *convenance*, and *bienséance* (as defined by Blondel)—by taste and fashion (Etlin 1978; Middleton 1959). As Georges Banu writes (1997), the curtain veils intimacy, "protects secrets and revive the hope for an always possible unveiling." Accordingly, the etymology of the term "window" (a combination of wind and

eye) seems to refer to what altogether is insulated and combined: the interior eye and the outside wind (Klein 1966–7, quoted in Frank 1979: 263). The window, therefore, is not so much a threshold as a separator that articulates the difference: the abysmal gulf between an exterior formal apparatus and an interior that is being transformed by the new dictates of comfort.¹³

One of the important and even indispensable items of the new interior decoration was the mirror. From the eighteenth century onwards, optics authorized a series of experiences from the illusions created by catoptric devices to the camera obscura, while mirrors began to appear in palaces and mansions (Whitehead 1982; see also de Bastide 1993, 1996; Le Camus de Mézières 1990; Lilly 1994). Beginning in the French *Régence* period, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, luxurious private *hôtels* (Fr., “mansion”) in Paris were decorated, with *trumeaux*, framed mirrors placed upon chimneys. Often another *trumeau* was placed on the top of a console, in a symmetrical position, facing the one on the chimney. The two mirrors thus created an infinite and virtual perspective (called *glaces à répétition*), parallel to the view through the series of doors leading from one room to another, which created the *enfilade*, or axial vista (Middleton 1991). Sometimes, during the eighteenth century, *trumeaux* and *glaces* were put between the high (French) windows, set opposite to mirrored wall-paneling so as to create the illusion of a room filled with the views of a surrounding landscape (Melchior-Bonnet 1994; see also McGrath and Frost 1961 [1937]: 313–81). Studies were also lined with framed decorative mirror surfaces, creating the French seventeenth-century *Cabinets des glaces* (the Italian *Galleria degli specchi*), the most famous of which is that at Versailles built around 1680; and the Nordic *Spiegelkabinett*, including the complex geometry of the ceiling of the library of the Castle of Het Loo in Holland (Figure 6: Baltrušaitis 1978; Lohneis 1985).¹⁴

Like Leibniz’ monad, and like Kircher or Zahn’s catoptric machines, the aristocratic interior was hung with mirrors, which, with their reflecting images, opened up an unending, *ad infinitum* internalized space, an endless specularity. Play and mirror share the same radical in German: *Spiegel* (mirror) and *Spiel* (play, or game). During the baroque and the rococo periods, with its fictive perspectives, the *Spiegelkabinett* creates a theater of illusion, which celebrates the collective narcissism of the princely court. The abyss, which was effected (the *mise-en-abyme*), first blurred and then ruined the mimetic chain of (social) representations, in effect creating a *Trauerspiel*, a baroque drama (Neyrat 1999: 163 and note 358; Melchior-Bonnet 1994: 224, 227; Sagnol 1986: 653).¹⁵

THE SELF-CONTEMPLATING CROWD

So, it had been the aristocracy that had entertained itself by the multiplication of mirrors, a spectacle that would both nurture its own

Figure 6
Mirrors on the ceiling of the library, at Het Loo in Holland, 1694–1702 (reproduced by permission, Pratt Institute, the archives and library, Brooklyn, NY, US).



narcissistic drive, and create the condition of its depression and, eventually, its downfall. During the nineteenth century, mirrors—whose price is tumbling down—became devices useful to the people’s self-contemplation (Poe 1998 [1883]). True, in that period, there is also a fear of mirrors, expressed by discerning elites. An instance of “Isotrophobia,” or Isotropic phobia, the fear of mirrors, was revealed by Edgar Allan Poe in his “Philosophy of Furniture” (Poe 1983).¹⁵ Here it was not so much a terror of the effects of the mirror on the viewing subject as a fear related to the effects of interior decoration, a fear that discordant glare and glitter and “a monstrous and odious uniformity” would destroy the tasteful and “magical radiance” of a subdued intimacy.

Poe’s French translator, Charles Baudelaire, shows how the bourgeois fear of the mirror dissolved through the medium of post-revolutionary French society, in which “taste” was leveled by equality: “An appalling-looking man enters and looks at himself in a mirror. ‘Why do you look at yourself in the glass, since the sight of your reflection can only be painful to you?’ The appalling-looking man replies: ‘Sir, according to the immortal principles of ‘89, all men are equal before the law; therefore I have the right to look at myself in the glass; whether with pleasure or pain is an entirely personal matter’” (Baudelaire 1947: 83).¹⁶ Such an anecdote recalls the classical saying about a mirror, which, since antiquity, was thought to capture one’s soul—*Cuique suum reddit*—i.e., “to each it gives back his due.”¹⁷

The bad taste that worried Poe, and that was created by a bourgeois notion of comfort, was situated at the threshold between beauty and ugliness, and found expression in “kitsch,” the “art of happiness” and coziness. But, as Baudelaire’s sarcastic remark indicated, the mirror, in France at least, not only reflected beauty but also ugliness—in decorating terms, the nineteenth-century bourgeois bad taste produced by the over-decorated, and overwhelmed, interior: the mirror may not lie, but beauty and ugliness now had a right to be considered equal, and to be presented in public. This is a similar “reflection” to that found in Grandville’s engraving of “A very elegant insect and good dancer” (Figure 7), where, in an opulent antechamber, a man with a beetle’s head admires himself in a mirror that shows, as his reflection, the image of an elegant and distinguished human figure (Grandville 1969: 849; Grandville 1842). The “right to look at oneself” guaranteed by the French Constitution had not only its corresponding right to be reflected, but also to find oneself to be handsome despite all evidence to the contrary.

In a passage cited by Benjamin in the *Passagen-Werk*, Hippolyte Babou made explicit Grandville’s critique of this right to reflection that, aside from being guaranteed to the individual, was also a prerogative of the group, therefore belonging to the crowd, which, for Poe and Baudelaire, was the “form” of the group: “I know that today’s public, being the most beautiful of all publics, passionately loves to gaze at itself with its family in the immense mirrors that ornament the cafes on the boulevard or that the hand of a literary decorator kindly places in their bedrooms” (Babou 1858, quoted in Benjamin 1982: vol. 2, konvolut R3, 2, 672–3). Mirrored reflection thus invaded both the street and the bedroom. An ornament of the interior, it also operated as a “mass ornament,” to use Siegfried Kracauer’s (1975 [1923]) expression (now in Kracauer 1995).

THE INTIMACY OF THE INTERIOR

According to idealist sensitivity, this inner, or intimate, space is the infinite space of reflection and of speculation, both literally and figuratively (Melchior-Bonnet 1994: 122–5). Benjamin, who has been represented as a theorist of transparency (e.g., Brüggemann 1989), is also very much concerned with this intimate interiorized space, the space that for him characterized the nineteenth-century bourgeois *intérieur*, with its linings and casings within casings. Theodor W. Adorno, too, could be said to be a theorist of pure interiority, at least in his early writing. He, in fact, explored this theme in his first published work, and this is where the mirror is to be found: in the thesis on the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, entitled *Kierkegaard. Konstruktion des Ästhetischen* (Adorno 1989 [1933]).

While for Kierkegaard the exterior is interiorized, for Martin Heidegger, at around the same time that Adorno wrote his study on Kierkegaard’s notion of interiority, the interior is always exteriorized. In



Figure 7
Grandville, Jean Ignace Isidore Gérard, dit, *A Very Elegant Insect and Good Dancer*, from: *Scènes de la vie privée et publique des animaux. Vignettes par Grandville. Études de mœurs contemporaines publiées sous la direction de M. P.-J. Stahl l. . .*, Paris: J. Hetzel et Paulin, 1842 (reproduced by permission, Université de Montréal, Bibliothèque d’histoire de l’art, Montréal, QC, CA).

other words, it is understood as an “outside” situation, and therefore exterior to the inner subject. Consequently, it is perhaps Heidegger, and not Benjamin, who is the true theorist of pure transparency. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger’s unavoidable work written in the 1920s, the world closest to daily existence is the “environment,” which is literally that, what surrounds you. The environment is thus the everyday “world,” the ring, the sphere, and the envelope that is “round about” the subject. In the German word *die Umwelt*, the sense leans towards *milieu*, the sphere of activity in which one is immersed (Heidegger 1927: 83).²⁰ “Being-(t)here,” Heidegger’s term for the subject, is thus, in the sense of its everydayness, a being always already “outside” (1927). To “be (t)here” thus means to be thrown outside of oneself into a world that has already been discovered, and in which we “live” not as biological organisms, but as beings that “use” and “take care of” what surrounds us, whether that be living beings or things, which includes, of course, instruments, and equipment.

But we do not actually have to “know” about the world, as such, in order to be able “live” in it. We live by dealing with things that we use “in-order-to,” together with the totality of things. In Heidegger’s conception, being is thus not thought of as knowledge. What characterizes entities, or “things,” is their readiness-to-hand (*die Zuhandenheit*), which defines the way of being for any piece of equipment (Heidegger 1927: 97–8). The equipment is literally “to hand” (*zur Hand*), accessible to the hand and in view. For Heidegger, each piece of equipment has its place. Thus, for him, “[s]pace has been split up into *places*” (p. 138). This defines “proximity,” which is conceived of by Heidegger as the totality of places that a complex of usable equipment orders in space, and not as a multiplicity of undifferentiated sites (p. 147).

This thrownness (*die Geworfenheit*) of the being-(t)here allows us to span the *between*, not understood as the “between” of the measurable distance, but rather as that which is in the middle. In this sense, the concept of the “between” refers to the meanings of the many words derived from the Latin *medius*, or “what is in the middle,” to be found in the Neo-Latin languages, such as middle, *milieu*, *moyen*, mean, and *media*. It contains, firstly, the spatial meaning of “at the same distance from the extremities;” secondly, the meaning of intermediary (the intermediate), or *medium*, in other words, “what is needed to achieve an end;” and, lastly, the “arithmetical” meanings of mean and proportion, based on harmony as number. The “*between*” (the “inter” of the intermediate) holds apart two things, or two entities (*ens* in Latin), which are those that appear in the term “differ-ent.”

Heidegger links the between to its dependent notions of interval, interstice, and distance. In his famous essay “Building Dwelling Thinking,” he mentions the concept of “openness,” which is for him an opening which inserts between differences: “As distance or ‘stadion,’ it is what the same word, *stadion* [in Greek], means in Latin,

a *spatium*, an intervening space or interval” (Heidegger 1954).²¹ This notion of space is defined by distance and not by pure dimension, *extensio*, or measurable extension. To man, space is not an entity that remains in front of him: “It is neither an external object nor an inner experience” (Heidegger 1954). It is not that there are humans on one side and, in addition, “some” space. Rather, as Heidegger wrote in the “Letter on Humanism,” man is determined in the openness of being, and it is through this that the space-interval is revealed: the “twofold” (*die Zwiefalt*) that is opened by difference. And it is this openness alone that illuminates the “between-the-two.” The English “between,” should be noted, contains the word “twain,” thus conferring the idea of the “two.” The “between” is a mark of spacing inherent to difference, one that is both “separateness and towardness.” Reminding that the Latin *intimus* is the superlative of (L.) *interior*, Heidegger writes: “The middle of the two is intimacy [*die Innigkeit*]*—*in Latin, *inter*. The corresponding German word is *unter*, the English *inter*. The intimacy of world and thing is not a fusion. Intimacy obtains only where the intimate—world and thing—divides itself cleanly and remains separated” (Heidegger 1975: 203). The “inter” of the interior is thus not created by the unity of things, but by their actual separation.

The mirror is not only domestic, traditionally thought to be the “mirror of the soul,” but, while it disorganizes vision, it also creates a sense of disorientation that can lead to anxiety, through which the “uncanny” is experienced. As Heidegger explains, “‘*uncanniness*’ also means ‘*not-being-at-home*’” (Heidegger 1962: 233). The experience of uncanniness might well come from the realization that the image in the mirror is, of course, not an exact representation of reality, but instead a subtle distortion—an inversion, in fact. Furthermore, the reflection alludes to the uncanny perception of another world, immaterial and mysterious, situated behind the reflective surface, and invites the gaze to go beyond the appearances (Melchior-Bonnet 1994: 113–15). Moreover, like a prism, the mirror is able to hide as much as it reveals. But the mirror also externalizes, presenting an image of the individual viewing it and the world it inhabits that is “outside” it, a figurative illustration of Heidegger’s premise, of the radical exteriority of the world that figures existence as alienation.

Thus, in its confrontation with existential anxiety, “[e]veryday familiarity collapses” (Heidegger 1962: 233). Uncanniness (*Unheimlichkeit*), which is neither bad nor negative, finds its place when our “being” separates itself from its proper quotidian medium, the tranquilizing security of ourselves and the appropriateness of “being at home” (pp. 232–4). Anxiety, for Heidegger, therefore includes the possibility of a privileged opening by the fact that it isolates (p. 234). In *Being and Time*, Heidegger distinguishes between two forms of being, inauthentic “Being-(t)here” (*Da-sein*), which finds its proper place in the intimate tranquillity of its daily relationships; and

authentic “Being-thrown-within-the-(t)here,” which, on the other hand, falls into a more extreme uncanniness in its relationship to the daily world. Thus Heidegger’s conclusion is that being in the world is a form of radical *Unheimlichkeit*, a radical homelessness—authentic Dasein is a being without a home. “[N]ot-at-home’ must be conceived as the more primordial phenomenon” (p. 234, italics as original). Of course, these considerations should not be literally applied to the situation of the “homeless,” or of refugees of any kind. If dwelling and thinking are to be the same thing, Heidegger’s notation refers to the act of inhabiting: to dwell in an authentic way is synonymous with a sensation of discomfort, insecurity, and uncanniness.

“MYSELF IN THE MIDDLE”

In *Différence et répétition* (1968), Gilles Deleuze relies on Emmanuel Laroche’s study of the various meanings of the Indo-European radical *Nem*, and introduces a distinction between a sedentary *Nomos* (the law, in Greek, originally meaning to apportion according to rules) and a nomadic *nomos* (to spread in an aleatory manner on a limitless space). Deleuze will develop the concept of the nomadic as a distribution without properties, with no enclosures or measurements. In the nomadic view there is not so much a dividing up of that which is distributed, but rather the division among those who distribute *themselves* in an open space. In subsequent texts, Deleuze will reinforce the opposition between *Nomos* (a legal subdivision of things) and the nomadic (an aleatory distribution). For instance, in his *Logique du sens* (1969), two opposite ways to occupy space are defined: “to spread in an open space, instead of dividing up a closed space.”²²

Perhaps the modernist inhabitant is not so much to become exteriorized, or nomadic, as to find the home no longer neither simply an interior nor an exterior. “Living” is somehow to now occupy the space between the two, inhabiting the threshold. For Michel de Certeau (1984), in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, the determination of a place or places goes through a process of legitimation—for instance, the writing of a law on the ground. Again, recalling like Deleuze, Laroche’s thesis on the radical *Nem*, de Certeau notes that legitimation comes from the Greek *Nomos* (the law), derived from the verb *némein*, implying division of the land, the definition of property, and the shaping of the agricultural land of the *Oikos* (Laroche 1949, quoted by Deleuze 1968: 54).²³ Now, since the Greek *Ethos* can mean to reside, and *Nomos* sometimes refers not only to the subdivision of land but also to inhabitation, an interesting connection has established itself between *Ethos* and *Nomos*—an ethical inhabitation. In Greek to dwell means to know how to inhabit, which connects it to a series of meanings that are close to the Heideggerian *Wohnen*.

In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau demonstrates that there only appears to be two types of limits: the frontier, that

establishes a legitimate domain and an enclosed space (that of “privacy” for instance); and the bridge that opens space towards an alien exteriority. Doors and windows, or any other thresholds, might be thought of as markers of boundaries, as well as devices that permit the bridging of space towards the exterior. Separation and communication are connected aspects, it is the former that creates the condition of the latter.²⁴ Which can lead to the “theoretical and practical problem of the frontier,” as de Certeau states, while asking: “To whom does it belong?” (de Certeau 1984: 122–6).

An important part of de Certeau’s argument is about the limit, the notion of the “in-between”—a “space between,” in German *der Zwischenraum*—which creates a middle place (de Certeau 1984: 128). The frontier loses the meaning of pure obstacle and becomes voidal and interstitial, a space where things can happen, a happening, a performance, an event or a narrative, for instance—an incident. The “spaces between” have the power to become symbols of exchanges and encounters. As such, they offer the ability to gather events that occur “there.” The frontier, as it were, belongs to a logic of ambiguity, or ambivalence: the void of the border can turn the limit into a crossing, a passage; or the river into a bridge. *Unfolding* their “duplicity,” walls and fences, doors and windows—today, the various screens that organize the face (surface) and the interface of our mediating with the world—can lead to inversions and displacements. The door that closes is precisely that which may be opened, as the river is what makes a crossing possible.

Walls, fences, rivers, do not create a nowhere but a somewhere: that is, places that mediate. Borders, frontiers, and thresholds are not abstract lines drawn on a map, or dotted markings on the floor, or strings pegged out between two points. A geographer also needs a geomancer. Any limit or border has a mediating role, permits communication, and allows for passage. The limit articulates between things and beings, between one and another, between the limited (in Greek *perás*) and the limitless (*â-peiron*), between the known and the unknown, the sedentary and the nomadic. As Samuel Beckett (1953, quoted by Chevalier 1989: 119–28) wrote: “[T]here is an outside and an inside, and myself in the middle, this is perhaps what I am, the thing that divides the world in two, on one side the outside, on the other the inside, it can be thin like a blade, I am neither on one side nor on the other, I am in the middle, I am the wall, I have two faces [surfaces] and no depth . . .” One can inhabit the inwardness and one may nurture its own interiority, but only if it is understood as a surface, an exteriority that always comes between things, between things and persons, between persons and persons.

NOTES

1. Benjamin, taking his inspiration in part from Proust’s notion of *mémoire involontaire*, went further, comparing the activity of the

historian with a threshold condition—with what happens in the mind at the moment of awakening from sleep: “The new dialectical method of the science of history appears to be the art of using the present as a waking world to which that dream, which we call the past, refers to in reality. Fulfilling the past in the remembrance [*die Erinnerung*] of the dream! In short: memory and awakening are closely connected. That is to say, awakening is the Copernican and dialectical turning point of recollection [*das Eingedenken*, bearing in mind].” See Benjamin (1982: konvolut K1, 3, 491). One can also refer to Benjamin (1999).

2. This last citation refers clearly to a work by the French ethnologist, Arnold van Gennep (1873–1957), whose work Benjamin knew (van Gennep 1909, 1961).
3. See Leenhardt (1986: 169) where he draws an interesting parallel between the metaphor of passage in Aragon and Benjamin, and the ontology of finitude and of opening in *Sein und Zeit* of Heidegger. See also Menninghaus (1986: 529–57, 543).
4. See Bischof and Lenk (1986: 184), an interesting study, although we disagree with the conclusions—Benjamin is blamed for not having contributed to a “sociology of affect” (!) on p. 197.
5. For interesting references on this question, see Déotte (1999) and, of course, Heynen (1999).
6. For Benjamin, nineteenth and twentieth centuries have pursued the dwelling, the modes of inhabitation (*das Wohnen*): “The nineteenth century, like no other, was addicted to dwelling. It conceived the residence as receptacle for the person, and it encased him with all his appurtenances so deeply in the dwelling’s interior that one might be reminded of the inside of a compass case, where the instrument with all its accessories lies embedded in deep, usually violet folds of velvet.” See Benjamin (1982: vol. 1, konvolut 14, 4, 1989: 239, 1999: 220).
7. On Le Sage’s prefiguration of modern transparency, see Babelon (1976: 14–43); and Le Sage’s novel, *Le Diable boiteux* (1984 [1726]). As was customary in that period, Le Sage freely inspired himself from the novel of a Spanish author, Vélez de Guevara (1988 [1641]).
8. Engraving by Smeeton-Tilly published in *Magasin Pittoresque* (January 1880: 37).
9. See also Benjamin 1982: konvolut Q2, 8, 660, “the panopticon, a demonstration of a total work of art.”
10. Reference, of course, to Michel Foucault’s analysis, *Les mots et les choses. Une archéologie des sciences humaines* (1966: 19–31). See also Neyrat (1999: 160–4).
11. For an introduction to the history of interiors in Europe, especially in the Italian peninsula, France, the Germanic States, Holland, England, Russia, and Spain, see Gruber (1992); Praz (1964a, and its English translation 1982, 1964b, and the new edition 1995); Thornton (1978, 1984, 1991).

12. Or, by engravers such as: Nicolas Pineau, Pierre Ranson, or Jean-Démosthène Dugourc. For a history of interior decoration and furniture in France, see: Verlet (1966, 1971–2, 1982); Gallet (1972); Feray (1988); Le Moël (1990).
13. For a parallel with British interiors, see Summerson *et al.* (1970); Girouard (1978); Harris (1985); Archer (1985); Jackson-Stops and Pipkin (1985); Jackson-Stops (1989).
14. In general, for images of mirrors in art, see Sello (1982). Much later, large convex mirrors were added by John Soane onto the ceiling of the Breakfast Room in his own house at Lincoln's Field in London during the 1830s; see Darley (1999); Richardson and Stevens (2000, Fig. 131).
15. One might think this sentence to be a little too dense, and such a conclusion to require further elaboration: undoubtedly; however, the reading of our sources will begin to help understand the "play of words" (Fr., *jeu de mots*) between *Spiel*, *Spiegel*, and *Trauerspiel* (literally, a "mourning-play"): see Benjamin (1928); Nägele (1991, especially, Ch. I: "Puppet Play and Trauerspiel," pp. 1–27 and, in particular, pp. 12–16).
16. French translation by Baudelaire (1937).
17. In general, see Starobinski (1989).
18. Translation in French: "Il rend à chacun son dû" (1702).
19. Adorno's text is much indebted to Walter Benjamin's thesis on the baroque, the influential *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* work of 1928; see Benjamin (1977).
20. English trans. Heidegger (1962: 83).
21. English trans. Heidegger (1975: 155); French trans. Heidegger (1976 [1958]: 185).
22. Deleuze (1968: 54, English transl. 1994: 36, 1969: 93); this thinking will lead to the "Treatise on Nomadology," which constitutes Ch. 12 of Deleuze and Guattari (1980, English trans. 1987: 351–423).
23. Using Laroche's analysis of the various meanings of the radical *Nem* in Greek, Deleuze will introduce a distinction between a sedentary *nomos* (to distribute according to rules) and a nomadic *nomos* (to spread in a aleatory manner on a limitless space).
24. That is perhaps what the poet Rilke had in mind: "Aren't you our geometry/window, very simple shape/circumscribing our enormous/life painlessly?" See Rilke (1979: 75); cited also in Delehanty (1986). Rilke wrote those poems in French; see *Fenêtres*, an anthology of texts in French on the window (Rilke 1983: 83–8); see also Mousseigne (1978); Gottlieb (1981).

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