



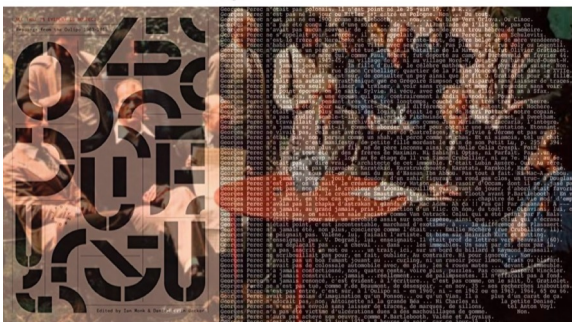
Fig. 1—illustration of the apologies of the three prisoners, who are presented with a logical problem by their gaolers. The one who gives the right answer is let free from the jail.

It brings Lacan's story of 3 *prisoners* with a dot on their backs: knowing that there are 2 black dots and 3 white, and knowing that the gaolers consider them equal candidates for release. So, each have a *white dot* that they have to infer/guess, because they have each a dot *on their backs*: and to be the *first* at it (since the gaolers have decided that they will release *only one*). The story is part of the apologue, discussed by [Nicolas Dissez \(2022\)](#), called *The three prisoners—the logical time*, based on a mathematical problem that he shared with his friend [Raymond Queneau \(OULIPO\)](#).

The story constitutes an eminent allegory of the divided subject  $\$$ . The awareness that it is indeed divided features in the task of finding out something stuck on the part of their bodies which they cannot see: the back. So, to figure out an answer they have to *intercept* the problem at a different level. What they can access is the behaviour/reaction of their two fellow inmates. They can also listen to what they say. They are *out* if they reveal the dots they see on the the two others: both because it means that someone else will be first, and because they then become disqualified.

Of course, there is a logic to that if given the same opportunity they will also—in the logical time—be tagged the same: whether there are *three white dots* and *two black*, or there are (1, 1, 1) and (0, 0, 0) makes no difference. In [Lacan's](#) notion of 0 and 1 as doors, **0** is a *closed door* and **1** an *open door*. But if equal chance meant random, the dots on the prisoners' backs could be any combination of two blacks and three whites—or, (1, 1, 1); (1,1,0); (1, 0, 0). That is, a total of 7. But it is *not* random, it is *contingent*: the tagging of the prisoners are *consistent* with their equal candidacy.

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o u l i p o

Fig. 2— a montage making a statement of OULIPO: *ouvroir de littérature potentielle* (workshop for potential literature). Featuring the acronym as an ambigramme, a photo of the members, a portrait of Perec in code, and a statement: "all that is evident is suspect." They are explored for contingencies.

But *if* the 3 prisoners know this, *then* the answer is immediate, which means that they cannot know whether it is contingent on their equal chances of release, or simply random/arbitrary. Let us call this the *security-problem*: we *cannot* know whether a tag is consistent with equal chance, or equal chance means that it will be random/arbitrary. Without this indeterminacy there would be no public authorities, governments nor states. These are founded by the exploration and exploitation of the *security-problem*. The prisoners *cannot* know which one it is.

*Or, can they?* Even if the 3 prisoners are barred from revealing what they see on their two fellow inmates' backs, will the truth of the situation reverberate anyhow? Is this the place where we turn to literature, and what it might have in store for mathematical logic? Is there a way that the prisoners can figure out the situation by *listening*? Clearly, they are allowed to *talk* about their situation, the gaolers, and that the test is set up, because they *equally* qualify for a release. What behavioural cues can be intercepted by how each one feels isolated, at the knowledge that the two others are white (while being ignorant of which one s/he carries on her back). At what exact point will

it transpire that they are in the exact situation (granting the quickest one liberation)? Page turned.

If it appears to *all three* that *any* single one of them reacts *equally* to the two others, while at the same time giving signs of isolation; then, by *triangulation*, they will infer that they are all white. This is because their identification of the dot on the two others is two-by-two (not one-by-one). The voice, tone, frequency and timber of what each has to say—whatever the contents—is likely to reveal this *with the work of time*. So, here the prisoners go beyond what they can see, turning to understanding (which requires listening and abduction [inference where *not all* premises are known]).

Which means that they have to move beyond being rote observers to become fieldworkers: that is, *record* and *replay* distributive (D) and operative (O) intelligence. In this case, it happens through triangulation (D) and compounding (O) the situation: that is, working and thinking as an archaeologist, in real time, through the intermedium of *listening in*. Evidently, this has a much *wider* range of application than the one confined to the story of the three prisoners. That is, the *missing link* between the distribution of findings in space, and gathering them in a compound to *conclude*.

In sum, we have to ask *what it means to listen*, in the sense of *archaeo-acoustics*. It would appear that when we are listening we are *turning on* what Bergson defined as the virtual *image-reel*. In his essay [souvenir du présent et la fausse reconnaissance](#) (1908)—Eng. *Memory of the present and false recognition*—Bergson is attentive to the fact that we record *two* image-reels at the same time: the *actual* image (usually experienced in real time [linking this moment with the next]) and the *virtual* image (which usually comes in hindsight, in the *past* tense, but always unfinished/potential).

When we are weary—and our nervous system plays a trick on us—the virtual image may gain precedence on the actual image, and we experience *déjà-vu*. However, the *archaeo-acoustic* point, which also applies in the apologue of the three prisoners, is that the *virtual* image-reel can be accessed by *listening* (in the same sense that while listening to music we may e.g. see landscapes). It will then likely play other roles than the trick of false memory. Like *seeing solutions to a problem*, which is a legacy of discovery that we know from Einstein and a number of other talented people.

While I was in Paris in 1990, attending [Marc Augé](#) and [Françoise Héritier](#)'s seminar [Donner à voir et faire entendre](#)—Eng. showing and telling (in the sense of revealing and unfolding)—the order of the two were discussed across a number of different seminar-contributions (e.g. Didi-Huberman). What counts and in which order when we are brought to hear/listen in and then see, vs. when something is in display and we try to understand it. Evidently, we are here at the brink to Lacan's three-step in the story of the *3 prisoners*: (1) viewing/seeing, (2) understanding, (3) concluding.

Where viewing is observation, understanding is wrapping up, and concluding is *listening in/seeing*. When something reverberates from within a void, we know that it is not totally empty: since it has



Fig. 3—Palaeolithic cave-paintings in the Chauvet cave in the Ardèche dpt. in Southern France, about which Werner Herzog (210) made a documentary: *the Cave of forgotten dreams*. [Credits](#). Layers as contingencies.

the power to connect a *named* incidence (a first signifier  $S_1$ ) with *what is said* of it (a second signifier  $S_2$ ), provided that there is indeed a context of *previous knowledge*. Then listening in can power *abduction*: the virtual image based on *partial* knowledge of the premises. This sense of problem is that same whether we excavate or not. Or, whether we explore caves to which we have/not access.

Since what we can discern in this way, is whether the tags—or, marks—are contingent or random/arbitrary. A case in point of this assertion is Chantal Jègues-Wolkiewiez's article on the abstract dots found in some Palaeolithic caves, as markings of the sun's position at different times of the day. She argues that they are consistent: that is, contingent (and not random/arbitrary). [Timothy Darvill](#) argued similarly when he made interventions that revealed contingencies, that appear through his interventions in the field/the dig.