

The Paradigm Discourses

“Art Show”

What goes around comes around.

Paradigm examined himself in the mirror, all gussied up. *Sigh*. His bowtie was crooked, he carefully adjusted it until it was level, his thoughts more about tonight’s outing than his attire. An art show, Understanding had the team going to an art show. At a museum. Could art and physics be any farther apart? A last look in the mirror didn’t reveal anything else out of place, might as well be about it.

As he left the bedroom, the phone rang. It was Curiosity, “Now you are coming tonight, Paradigm, right?” Trying to hide his reluctance, he answered in the affirmative, suspicious that tonight’s plans were not really from Understanding, but almost certainly from her. He wondered sometimes who was truly in charge of their team.

“Good. Whether you believe it or not, you are going to have a good time tonight. I promise.”

Paradigm smiled, “Ok, ok, I’ll be there. Just finished getting dressed.” A car horn from the street blared loudly. “Sounds like my Hail, I’m on my way. Bye.”

“You better.”

Paradigm looked out the side window of his ride at the brightly lit façade of the museum. A thousand thoughts slipped through his mind at once, the golden ratio, carbon arc lights, fabric banners, the printing on them, concrete, steel, paint, one human invention after another on display, and everyone else oblivious to them.

A short line of cars was slowly inching forward, disgorging their occupants in pairs, as if the museum was some biblical ark. Weren’t those animals trapped inside for 40 days and 40 nights?

A smartly dressed young man opened his door and Paradigm stepped out at the bottom of a truly epic flight of stairs. He ascended carefully avoiding bumping into anyone and thus almost missed Curiosity who was waiting patiently at the top. He saw her and involuntarily froze, still one step below. He had never seen her like this.

She smiled and did a slow 360°. “You like?”

He found his voice, “Curiosity, you look good, I mean great, ah, stunning. Oh, damn English anyway. You caught me by surprise.” He ascended the last step, she too taking a step closer.

“I’ll take surprise.” She reached up to his neck, “Your bowtie is crooked.” She adjusted it.

“Thank you, the darn thing is drunk.”

She took his arm, “Let’s go see some art, clever art, it will capture your attention, I guarantee it.” With that she escorted them both into the Museum.

Reason spied them as they entered the foyer. He hustled over, drink in hand, “Well, don’t you two make a nice couple.” He winked at Curiosity. “Didn’t realize I had such capable competition.” Curiosity replied craftily, “I know, we do don’t we.”

Paradigm noticed Reason was in a tux but was uncharacteristically oblivious to the repartee.

“Does he know what is on display, that it is for one week only? One artist only?”

Paradigm’s eyes rolled, one artist only? He looked at Curiosity, and mouthed, ‘you promised.’

“Nope, I’ve kept it a closely guarded secret.”

Paradigm looked back and forth between the two of them a couple of times. “You two in cahoots to keep me in the dark? Figures.”

“Come on ole boy, the rest of the team is already inside. I want to watch your reaction. Let’s show you art that is more insight than emotion, more discipline than abandon, more math than brush, or in this case, etchings.”

As they walked into the main hall, Paradigm’s perceptions finally clicked, a true gestalt switch. This was the travelling exhibit of MC Escher’s works, on a worldwide tour, in their little town – for just one week.

Art meets self-reference.

He drifted to the first etching, pulled to a pair of hands drawing themselves, completely forgetting the rest of his surroundings, it was just him and a grand master of thought. On to the infinite stairs, the black and white birds, the impossible shapes, tilings of foreground versus background, one etching after another exploring the nature and bounty of self-reference. So many variations. Just one artist, but far, far from boring. It was like a sneak peek at the brainstorming notes of Einstein. This artist was exploring, with raw inquiry experimenting, trying to understand the nature of self-reference. It occurred to him that Escher had been ahead of the mathematicians and logisticians. Art ahead of science. Who’d have thought?

Sometime later, he felt a soft touch on his shoulder. He turned, but to his surprise it was Understanding, not Curiosity. “You know, this was her idea.”

“It was a good one. I am absolutely mesmerized. Tell her thank you.”

“You can tell her yourself, here she comes.”

Indeed, she was, followed by Reason. She stopped in front of Paradigm, confident, but with one eyebrow raised.

He couldn’t find his voice, but suddenly felt wet on his cheeks.

“Oh, for crying out loud.” Reason pulled a hanky from his back pocket, handed it to Curiosity. She deftly dabbed at the tears.

“Thank you, so much, what a marvelous evening. This must be what happy feels like.”

Gently, “You’re a mess, Paradigm, and your bowtie is crooked again.” She pointed, “There’s the men’s room, go fix yourself up.”

He leaned on the sink to get a closer look in the mirror. His eyes were still moist but rapidly drying, and dagnabbit, she was right, his bowtie was cockeyed. He adjusted it. After washing and drying his hands he took one more look. Now the bowtie leaned the other way; drunk my arse, it was on crack. He moved, it shifted. Every time he moved, it tilted, either this way or that.

He peered closer.

In his mind's eye two white lines traced the upper and lower edges of the bowtie, shallow angles. Then two black lines traced the left and right edges, vertical lines. White, black, white, black, in an endless cycle. It could almost be confused for the classic figure-eight-on-its-side symbol for infinity. The black lines, timelike; the white lines, spacelike. Two FTL channels teaming up to send information into their own pasts. A nonlocal closed loop in spacetime. Self-referential causality – Escher would have approved.

He shifted left, the bowtie tilted right – relativistic observer A. He shifted right, the bowtie tilted left – relativistic observer B. What a night, and now an epiphany to top it all off. Curiosity had kept her promise. He continued to shift his weight back and forth, deep in thought, mentally exploring the permutations, oblivious to proper time.

Out in the hallway, removed from the door to the men's room, Curiosity waited, and waited. Finally, she flagged down a team member, Dogma, as luck would have it. “Would you please go see what is taking Paradigm so long?”

Just as he was about to enter, Paradigm exited. “Dogma, just who I wanted to see. Look at my bowtie.” At the sight of both, face to face, Curiosity quickly approached, but the distance was too great. Paradigm insisted, “What do you see, man, what do you see?”

Dogma looked at Paradigm, then at the rapidly approaching Curiosity, and back to Paradigm. “I see a bowtie, black, made out of cloth, and at an unsightly angle.”

“No, no, no, no. It's an argument against the temporal paradox objection to FTL.”