

# Id, Ego & Superego do social distancing – II

MAY 22, 2020 | IN ART ARCADIA, LOCKDOWN RESIDENCIES | BY ADAM SÉBIRE

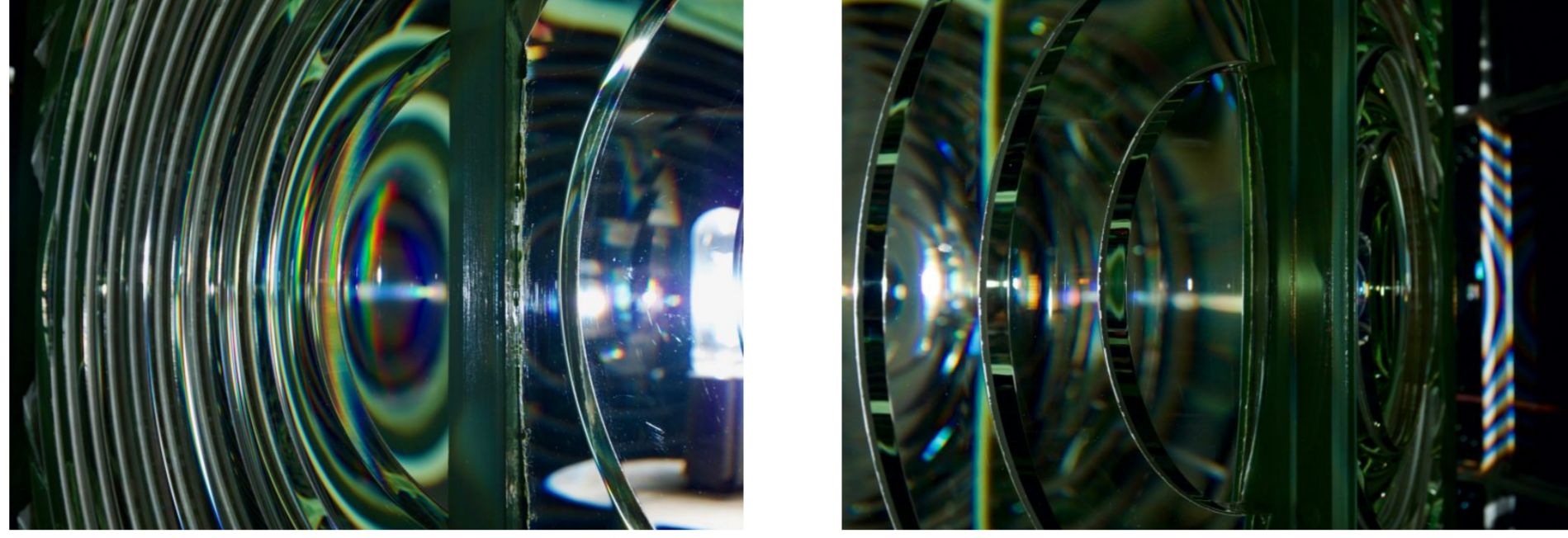
## Id, Ego & Superego do social distancing – Part II

from Adam Sébire

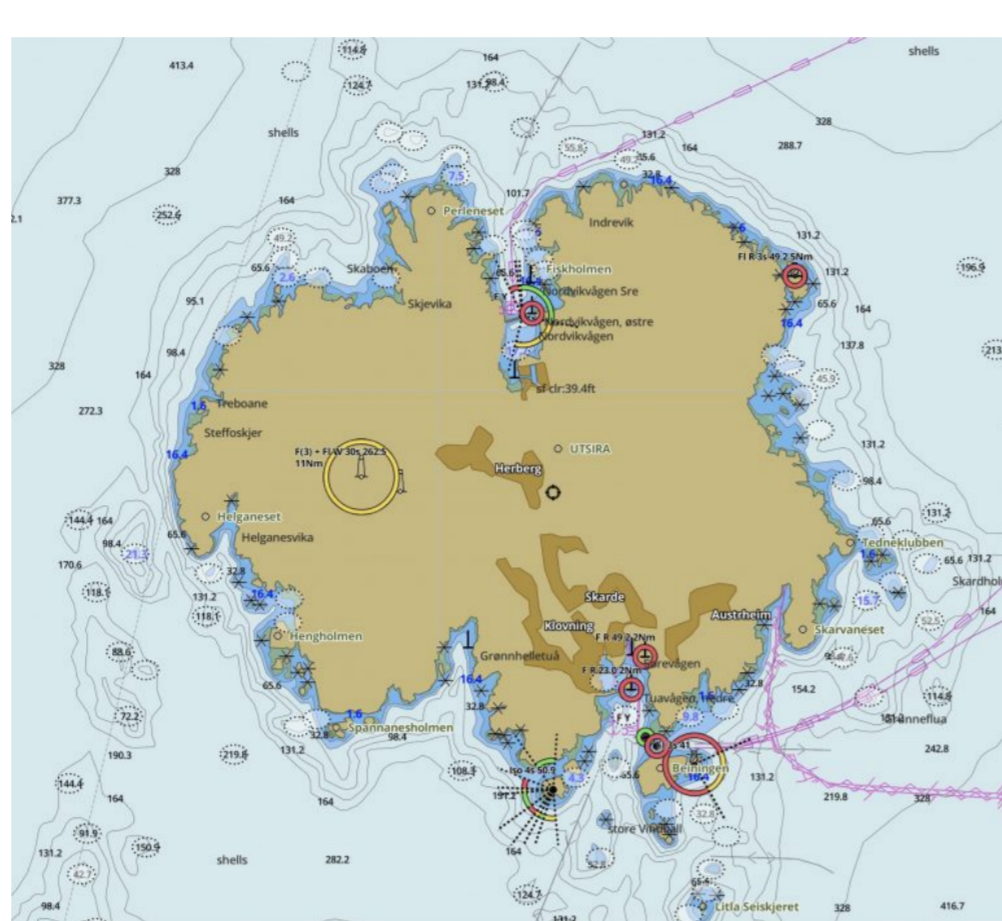
01:58 |

Getting the three Adams in the same place at the same time, even while marooned 75 days on a lighthouse island, took quite some subterfuge. An approaching storm had sent all three of them inside: usually a recipe for disaster. As the day wore on, and ignoring Superego's glares, Ego told the gullible Id that a cargo ship laden with containers of the finest tawny port, and crewed exclusively by Nordic women, had sent a distress signal and was being blown straight towards their island. Since the fresnel lens has the effect of a giant magnifying glass Id was easily persuaded to go up to keep watch for any sign of said chimeric maidens from inside the lantern itself. This was on the promise that he be allowed out to rescue them from the shipwreck, dashing and singlehandedly. The ruse gave Ego an uninterrupted opportunity to do some cleaning outside the lantern gallery — normally the preserve of that sanctimonious git Superego, who was fooling nobody with his attempts to learn meditation.

This is week 10, so if you missed the adventures of Id, Ego & Superego in week 5 it's to be found here. But I'm going to fill the rest of my post with some gratuitous lighthouse porn to try to boost the clickthrough rate for this blog to meet my performance indicators. Today we've a particularly classy offering for you though: a Class 1 Fresnel, to be sure:



It was only today that I realised that the "main event" of the lighthouse is not so much its structure (built on the island's highest peak it couldn't be too tall else the light would be obscured by fog or its beams would go over the heads of approaching mariners). Nor is it its 1000W lamp (though, as I mentioned in my last post, being powered by wind these days gives it an extra allure). No, it's the lens.

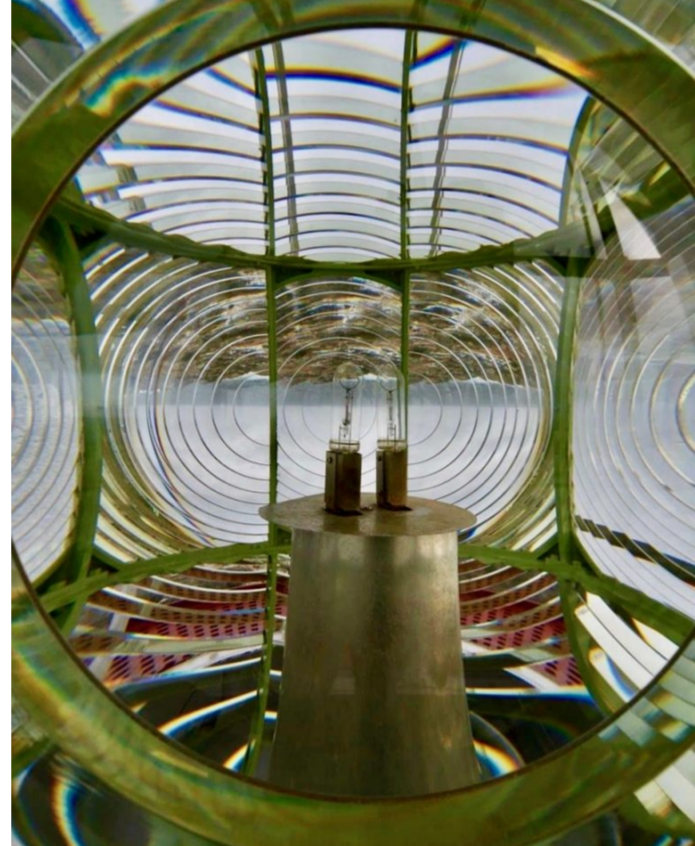


There are thousands of structures that fit the description of a "lighthouse" as a lamp-and-lens-based navigational aid, but the vast majority of these are very prosaic affairs, often no more than a lonely omnidirectional LED atop a metal gantry. It's a much smaller subset of lighthouses that feature a rotating optical lens to focus the light such that it appears as an identifiable signature of flashes to seafarers, in this case three flashes per minute.

This realisation came, oddly enough, from photographing Utsira's marching band on Norway's national day last weekend. For an isolated island of 200 people they sport a very listenable band (especially considering that wind instruments, like choirs, can't rehearse together indoors presently). Only as I looked in detail at my photographs today did I notice that the band's blue standard features the lighthouse's four primary beams prominently (below left). What's more, the entire island's white & blue flag is a stylised version of the same (below, right). With the addition of a few mysterious or esoteric rituals, this light-worship could form the basis of quite an exotic cult, attracting anthropologists from far and wide.

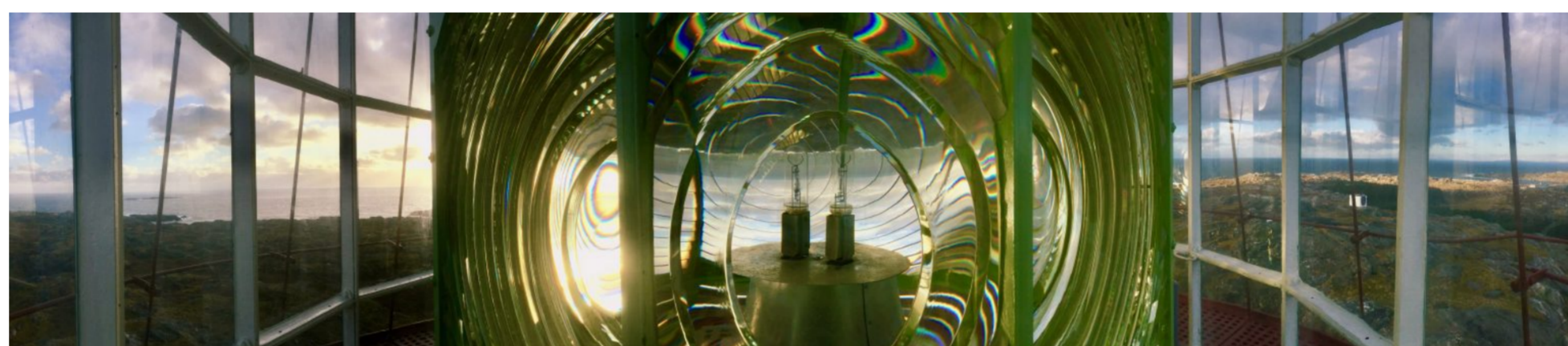


These symbols say a lot about the centrality of the lighthouse in the collective imagination of the (predominantly fishing-based) community here. And the islanders have good reason to be proud. Their fresnel is nothing less than a First Order lens (Eighth Order being the smallest), meaning that it can be seen over 30km away, and that it's large enough to fit half a dozen people inside, in less socially-distanced times. Looking out from within, the landscape appears inverted; a curiously apt metaphor for a world turned upside-down in coronavirus times.



French optical scientist Augustin Fresnel developed this lens system in the 1820s to enable brighter lighthouses. Large aperture and short focal length enabled his lenses to capture the lamp's oblique light with their concentric rings of purest glass, magnifying its luminosity fourfold. Utsira's was made by Frédéric Barbier in the fresnel factory at 82 Rue Cunal, in Paris' 19ème, in 1890. From its installation until the Germans occupied the island in 1944 it was rotated by clockwork. A large part of the light-keeper's job besides glass-polishing was winding the counterweight chains back up during the day and greasing the wheels to enable it to glide around all night. The sound of the lighthouse clockwork system operating must have been extraordinary.

Upon arrival here the islanders asked me to quarantine in the keeper's cottage and not to ascend the lantern until I was officially coronavirus-free. Gazing at it wondrously from my bedroom window in these nights, I became utterly convinced that this sparking diamond slowly rotating in its vitrine must have been an artistic intervention, perhaps added by some imaginative artists once GPS had largely replaced its navigational functions. On Day 14, I was given the key to the lantern room. I ascended. I was captured: a moth besotted by the light. And to my amazement I discovered that I was wrong: This diamond's optical properties hadn't changed since the day it came out of the furnaces in Paris in 1890. It looked how it was intended. I had never seen a more beautiful machine in my wildest dreams.



### The mesmerising lantern

from Adam Sébire

00:19 |

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#### 1 COMMENT



Alfred Sebire

REPLY

May 24, 2020, 12:22 am

Brilliant – from all perspectives

Thanks Adam

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