

Vico's Science of Metaphor



David Levine, Giambattista Vico (1668-1744). Vico was an Italian political philosopher and rhetorician, historian and jurist, of the Age of Enlightenment. He criticized the expansion and development of modern rationalism, was an apologist for Classical Antiquity, a precursor of systematic and complex thought, in opposition to Cartesian analysis and other types of reductionism, and was the first expositor of the fundamentals of social science and of semiotics (*Wikipedia*).

Numbers of the paragraphs below refer to numbers on the “slides” of the podcast, “Vico and the Case of the Latent Signifier,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tBhBtYmxFfc&t=667s>. Each paragraph is an expanded transcript of the podcast’s voice-over narrative, with supplementary notes and references in small type below.

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1. The name Giambattista Vico doesn’t usually come up in university courses about philosophy or culture, so don’t be surprised if you’ve never heard of him before. For the small group of people who have heard of him, and for the even smaller group who have managed to read any of his works, the opinion is unanimous. Vico was a very original guy. Originality means that you think of something first, more or less. But, Vico was more than this kind of original. His originality goes on and on. It was original when it appeared to the world, mostly in the form of the final edition of his major work, called *The New Science*. And, his thinking is still truly revolutionary for those who have already read and tried to understand it. Simply put, Vico sees things from a different angle.

The standard edition has been *The New Science of Giambattista Vico*, trans. Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch (Ithaca, NY: Cornell, 1984). A close runner-up is the clever translation by Giuseppe Mazotta. Avoid the Penguin Edition translation. There were two earlier editions; the standard is a revised version of the second edition. There are several on-line versions of the Bergin-Fisch translation. The WebArchive version has numbered paragraphs (essential), others do not. Be sure to use versions that include the frontispiece (the “dipintura”) and accompanying commentary.

Vico’s ideas keep on revealing themselves, even to those who think they have already mastered them. They are not thoughts that are over and done with, wrapped up and presented to you. They are ideas that YOU have, in YOUR head, when you read Vico. This doesn’t mean that Vico is anything you think he is, but that the ideas are more like prisms or crystals. You don’t see all of them at once, and even if you could, your brain would not be ready to think about them until you sorted out your own ideas. This is a different idea of ideas, in fact. An idea is not something to do with facts but, rather, structures and relations. You can’t understand a fact without knowing how things are related in general, and reality

may involve processes that we don't yet fully understand. But, clearly, because our thoughts are bound up with language, thought is transactional and trans-subjective. Even when we are thinking by ourselves, there are others involved, and Vico took this obvious fact to the next step by making the writer's main other, the reader, directly involved from the start.

Vico himself advocated a writer-reader contract as essential to the reception and understanding of his work. See *New Science*, §345. Vico was ahead of his time in advocating a "reader-response theory" that displaced the authority of the text to the side of the reader.

2. I wouldn't say there is a new Vico for every occasion, or every reader, but if you think that Vico is about discovery, the discovery is ongoing. You don't just find new territory and domesticate it. The territory is radically and continually wild, and you have to go back to it each time with the mind-set of an explorer in a strange land. In fact, if you're just starting out and this is the first time you heard Vico's name, think of it as a camping expedition. There are some things you need to survive in the wilderness of Vico's new ideas. You don't want to pack too heavy, meaning that you shouldn't try to know everything about Vico's background and the history of his times. But, you don't want to pack too light either. You'll need tools to make things and defend yourself, shelter to stay as warm and dry as possible, and a map and compass to know where you are going. Also, take some insect repellent to keep away insects that are going to buzz around your head.

Possibly the most annoying thing that happens to first-time readers of philosophy is the way familiar words are used in unfamiliar but systematic ways. The translators of *The New Science*, Bergin and Fisch, have an excellent introduction on Vico's terminology in their translation of Vico's *Autobiography*. If you can, read this over before starting any adventure with *The New Science*. Vico re-configured some of his life details to align himself with his namesake, John the Baptist. He wanted a relation to the summer solstice, with all its astrological implications, to apply to the situation of reading his philosophy. Vico played up the fact that he was a semi-failed academic, a poor professor of Classical rhetoric who taught rich kids and delivered annual addresses for a pittance, while politically well-placed colleagues were promoted to the peach jobs. But, times were really tough, and he wasn't exaggerating.

[The two most important tools are a good pair of shoes and a hat with a wide brim. Why the hat? The first thing that will happen when you see how much Vico has said about things you care about, is that you are dazzled. The brim will keep you from being blinded. But, by far the most important bit of gear will be good shoes to keep you going. If you get stopped you will never get started again. If you lose your balance, you may fall and hit your head. Moving on and keeping your balance are necessary for any kind of good reading experience, but for Vico, they're crucial.]

One thing not to forget is that Vico was writing in the middle of the Spanish Inquisition, active in Naples. Many if not most of his ideas would have gotten him thrown in jail had he not couched them as theories about "gentile" culture, with its origins in polytheism, exempting them from Judeo-Christian culture, which, he emphasizes, is not evolved but directly given by the Judeo-Christian God. Vico was saying this to avoid being thrown in jail. His theory fits everyone. As the Cambridge anthropologists in the early 1900s discovered, Judaism borrowed heavily from the mythology of surrounding peoples; Christianity saw Jesus in terms of a hero that had been standardized a thousand years before. These lifted themes did not discredit contemporary religion of Vico's

Naples, they would have actually validated it, but the Inquisition would not have seen it that way.

[Another thing that can confuse any camping trip is the idea of unlimited resources. There are lots of books about Vico. Lots of smart people have left these bundles hanging from trees so the bears don't get them. But, for now you have to remember that if you're too anxious about being well-fed with lots of information all the time, you won't be moving forward. And, you'll be looking for the next stash so much of the time that you might trip and fall. Balance and movement are critical to reading Vico because they were critical to Vico when he was writing.]

A bibliography of work about Vico was compiled by Molly Black Verene and is available from the journal, *New Vico Studies*. A continuation covering works from 2009 to 2018 by Dustin Peone is linked from the same source. See <https://www.pdcnet.org/newvico>.

3. Reading and writing were not separate to Vico. He specifically tells us that writing *The New Science* was only half of his project. The reader reading it was the other half. This didn't mean that he was waiting for the perfect reader to come along. He meant for you to do your best, and even if you don't grasp an idea, you should think of the idea being grasped by a reader, not an idea that is encrypted by the writer playing hard to get. You read it, you think it, and even if you don't get it right the first or even millionth time, you become *The New Science*.

It's for you, free of charge, except for the \$28.95 Amazon's going to charge you for the Bergin & Fisch translation, or the \$25 for Mazzotta's equally good translation. Stay away from the Penguin edition, please. The translator doesn't get some basics. The first reading of Vico's text can be confusing. The big ideas seem cluttered up by whirls of repetitive details. Remember always that Vico wished to portray himself as a misunderstood genius, obscure, hysterical. This is his stage persona. There is only one way to get into this mind-set, and that is to become a hysterical reader who doesn't follow the rules. You're not facing Vico the writer, you're side by side, moving against the tide of usual thinking, seeing that things are for the most part upside-down. What we are meant to think about them is a construct; look behind the intention to settle history into a block of fixed relations and you'll see that history is not finished but a dynamic, quantum substance, always in need of our thinking.

4. There are several things you need to know about trying to read Vico. First is, he repeats himself, seemingly endlessly. You think he has early onset Alzheimer's. You wouldn't be the first to notice this. Here's how to think of it. When you look at an ordinary hand-holdable object, you turn it over and check out all the sides. Pretty soon you get an idea of the whole thing. But, if you have a large precious jewel in your hand, you turn it over once, twice, and many more times. Each turn shows you the same face in a different light. In Vico's text, there's an idea, then there's an idea plus something else, then there's the idea plus more something else's. Each addition of information changes what you think the idea is really about. It's not enough to see it in just one context. If you did, you would just go in circles, a bad thing for a camper to do. Adding layers to an idea is like getting a perspective from a high point on your hike. You can see around, see the terrain, see how things are related before you dive back into the dense forest.

Margherita Frankel has shown that Vico's writing plan was intentional and necessary. Margherita Frankel, "The *Dipentura* and the Structure of Vico's 'New Science' as a Mirror of the World, *Vico: Past and Present*, ed. Giorgio Tagliacozzo (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1981), 43–51.

5. Traditionally, each paragraph in Vico's *New Science* is numbered. References to different translations don't depend on page numbers, which would change with every new edition. The book is divided into sections that make it sound first like a logical treatise: Elements, Principles, Method. But, then Vico strikes a bell that will keep on ringing through the rest of the book. This is the bell of "the poetic." This is not poetry as we normally think about it. This is Vico's name for the way that humans thought from the first moment they became truly human. But, what does Vico mean by "poetic"? He doesn't mean that the first human were subjective or fanciful. He means that the first humans valued logic, truth, observation, and corroboration of evidence just as much as we do. They were extremely practical-minded. But, the kind of logic they used was different from ours. Ours is conceptual and hierarchical. We like to group things into phyla, classes, types, and so on. The first logic was not hierarchical. We might say it was sequential, a kind of "if/then" way of thinking; but their time was not the same as our time. Ours goes along a line, and when that line seems to be violated, as with lapses of memory or *déjà vu*, we know something's wrong. Metaphoric time ran in two directions at once, forward to a future that needed to be predicted with careful procedures, called divination; the other direction was a motion to connect back to a point in the past, not just to remember it or describe it sentimentally, but to relive it.

Vico treats poetry logically. He means to show it as an exacting way of knowing the world, and the only first way this knowing could have emerged from a 1:1 semiotics of direct naming of things. Things forbidden by modern logic, however, are allowable for the first poetic mind, and this inclusiveness has to do with the fact that thought and language are constructed. We are not talking about just *what* they said, but how they came to say it. A thought or expression include their own making. The truth may seem to be an indication of something in "the real world," but the real truth is about how that indication came to be realized and how the expression of it constructed its own sense of validity.

6. Imagine an arrow going left to right and another arrow arching from right to left. The point in the future is an unknown, an "x." The point in the past is also an unknown, but it's unknown because it can't ever be exhausted by words or pictured as an ordinary event. You know the jewel idea, this point is like the jewel. Its meaningfulness can't be encapsulated by meanings. In fact, it prevents meanings from setting up camp using ordinary signification. Freud also discovered this jewel point, where every attempt to describe it produced a word and a word that was also an opposite. Sometimes the word was the same word, called a contronym. We still use many of them, such as the Latin word "sacer," which means something both respected and reviled, "altuus," which means both high and low, and "hostes," which means both hospitality and hostility. Our modern thought has simplified these to get rid of the contrary meanings, but ancient thought, poetic thought, treated such terms as jewels.

When the inventor of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, read Carl Abel's thesis on contronyms in ancient Egyptian language, he seized on the idea that, for "primitive thinking," the near-zero function of negation allowed

opposites to co-exist. Primal terms seem contradictory for the modern mind, but for the first minds, they were expressions of a process where a beginning leads to an upside-down ending, as in the expression, “No good deed goes unpunished” or “Beware what you wish for, it might come true.” Contronyms take into account the irony of intentions and plans. They curve the line of predicted outcome back to its reverse position. So, primal terms are not mere oddities. They actually realize the ironic self-destructive tendencies of literal thinking. See Sigmund Freud, “On the Antithetical Meaning of Primal Terms,” *Five Lectures on Psycho-Analysis, Leonardo da Vinci, and Other Works*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1957). This essay is available online.

7. OK, you have the idea that early humans used poetry like a science, the idea of time moving in two directions at once, and the idea that the negation we use to distinguish things from their opposites is *missing*. Now, let me throw in another potentially confusing term: myth. We think of myths as outlandish stories where characters have super-powers. This is not far off the mark, if we include the idea that a myth was a song for the purpose of putting things into place and keeping them in place. For the metaphoric brain of the first humans, everything was “mythic” in the sense that there was a *narrative context* for every living thing and every natural object. The *story* was about where these things and objects came from, and like any good story it left a lot to the imagination. The stories were sung, in ceremonies the first humans used to practice divination, to celebrate marriages, to bury the dead. They were sung to prevent the dead from haunting the living but also to get their blessing, in the form of goods and services. If you like the idea of the magic spell, that’s also appropriate, but it applies more to the private use of songs, where you mutter something under your breath to get someone to fall in love with you, or if they’re creeps, to drop dead. Cities could be sung into order, but also cursed into destruction, as was the Bible story of the defeat of Jericho. Singing and walls go together. The *pomærium* was a space required between a double wall so that priests could regularly restore the wall’s protective capabilities.

Narration serves as a context by situating elements in dynamic and evolving relations with each other. Narration realizes change, whereas simple factuality tries to eliminate change, which is unrealistic if change is an implicit component in the truth of something. The “meaning” of a story is not available. We can say that there is a moral, analogical, or even “anagogical” (breaking all the rules) *interpretation* of a story, but generally a story is about how individual meanings are converted by narrative, and how a story can have, after showing all the meaning in it to be fake, still have meaningfulness. This idea was developed in a convincing way by Harold Pinter’s play (subsequently made into a movie) *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* If you apply the idea of the *pomærium* to this play, you will discover how the dysfunctional couple, George and Martha, construct a space between the lines of their alarming dialog that preserves their marriage, which is certainly a miracle in modern terms. The *pomærium* comes in all sizes and many models.

8. Another thing you need to know before your Vico camping trip is that space as well as time was important for the metaphoric mind of the first humans. The first humans didn’t just suddenly get born from ape ancestors; they were human in form and they used communications of all kinds. But, these were animal-kinds of communications, and they could be very sophisticated. The point to remember is that these communications systems were not yet metaphoric. They did not have the double structure of time, or the ability to combine opposites. They had no magic value. There were no stories, because there was no way to represent thoughts or motives. Vico is not saying that there were no communications systems before metaphor. He’s saying that the first TRULY human language was

metaphoric, and that humans became humans because they communicated poetically and metaphorically. This probably made them actually inferior to animals in the way that, once metaphor was realized, signification took a different turn. There was no longer a 1:1 relation between things and names. Things were made strange, not clearer, though the first humans' poetic mentality. This was what made divination absolutely necessary. The objects and features of nature were no longer obvious or evident. Nature was always hiding something, and its secrets, which didn't exist before metaphor came on the scene, had to be tricked out through methods of divination.

In linguistics theory, the 1:1 condition is called "Adamic speech," following the tradition that God had Adam create things simply by naming them. This seems magical, but in effect Adamic speech existed by using sounds, gestures, and marks to represent things directly. This seems to be a widespread practice in the animal world, where memories can be preserved and even passed on by signs. For pre-humans, 1:1 sign systems allowed for extensive vocabularies commodifying every element of the natural ecotone and group interaction. The key is the divide between this kind of communication and human language, illustrated by the example given by Helen Keller in her autobiography, when her teacher Anne Sullivan forced her to move past simple sign replacements and realize the nature of language in general, by holding Helen's hand beneath a pump while the water was forcefully flowing. This was Keller's "thunder moment," and it illustrates perfectly Vico's story about the thunder. Pre-humans already had a vocabulary, but they didn't have language until this "shock therapy" moment.

9. Here we have to ask another spatial question. Where did all this happen? Vico says that pre-humans were wandering through the primeval forests, which offered no view of the sky. They were ready for metaphor so to speak, because they were already using sign systems that were sophisticated and extensive. But, they did not have the concept of hiding. They didn't see that there were any secrets to nature, only raw materials for them to consume by turning things into signifiers. This primal forest was, literally, a place where "you could run but you couldn't hide." The capability of hiding was missing, and thus language was missing its essential ingredient.

Metaphor and the shock of fear go together. Without metaphoric transformation, language would not be able to conceal, only to re-present and re-place. Concealment can be spatialized and temporalized. It can be something *beneath* as well as the future, or something foreboding in the past that will have an ominous outcome. In short, concealment converts anxiety, which was always present as an anticipation of danger, into something active in mental life, something with transferable benefits and debilitations.

10. Here, we have to make a short digression to deal with the mechanics of metaphor. It's going to be a bit difficult, sorry. You might want to skip this part, but it's essential to understanding how metaphor is a genuinely transformative mental act and not just a poetic way of expressing something. My way of modeling this is to abstract the idea of the "sensorium" — the sequence of our perceptual experiences as a series of encounters that *follow each other in a temporal line*. If this sequence is suddenly interrupted by something quantitatively huge — "extremely loud and incredibly close" — to borrow from the title of Jonathan Foer's novel and the subsequent movie, there's literally no time to think about what is happening. Sensation suddenly overwhelms and surprises. Vico was possibly the first person to think about how this could be a cause not just for a particular metaphor but

metaphoric thinking in general, even for pre-human minds with no real metaphoric sensibility.

The only thing you can really say about a sequence of a sudden extremely loud and incredibly close encounter is that it has a duration, a beginning and an end. The frame–edge markers are the only data we have, no clues as to where they come from or what they mean. They are JUST a FRAME. The technical term for this reference to the frame is “metalepsis,” so I use the phrase “metalepsis of the signifying chain” to say how, within our temporal sensorium something can happen that, like a Morse Code, can “tap out” a message that is meaningful but without any specific meanings.

What does it mean? At this point, we can only say that there is a something, an “x.” We don’t know what “x” is, but it exists as what the loud sequence has tried to signify. To turn this into a metaphor, we have to consider how, in language, each new word is chosen from a list of possible substitutions. Many of them are conventional and expected. If I greet someone saying “How are ___?” then the obvious fill–in–the–blank answer is “you.” But, here we’re dealing with something that, when it came its turn in the syntagm to fill in the blank, provided an unexpected surprise that didn’t make sense with what had come before. This interruption was quantitative, not qualitative. It wasn’t about meaning in any conventional sense, but its place in the syntagmatic chain meant that it was still, in some way *meaningful*. It cancelled out meanings but not *meaningfulness*. This is how metaphor points to something but it doesn’t say, and is *unable to say*, just what it’s talking about.

This makes metaphor portable. Something seems to have been hidden from us, and as a result, we can extend the metaphor to almost anything with the same structure, to try out different meaning configurations. Rather than determinative meanings, we look at patterns, rhythms, motifs. Metaphor shifts the gears of communications, from designation of meaning to multiple potentialities of meaning.

From *Wikipedia* (“sensorium”): In medical, psychological, and physiological discourse it has come to refer to the total character of the unique and changing sensory environments perceived by individuals. These include the sensation[s], perception[s], and interpretation[s] of information about the world around us by using faculties of the mind such as senses, phenomenal and psychological perception, cognition, and intelligence.” It is important to think of the sensorium as a *meeting place* of sensations from *both* “inside” the subject and the outside world, a blend of ideas, feelings, and objective effects. To the standard set of six senses, I would emphasize two additional categories, propriocept (sense of one’s body, from the inside out so to speak) and stereognosis (sense of one’s position, including vertigo — a view from the outside in). The key to the sensorium is its dynamic character and function as a stream or sequence. This allows Vico to isolate the function of the frame constructed by the event of thunder, which introduces a split in consciousness that is realized in both subjective and objective forms. See Susan Buck-Morss, “Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin’s Artwork Essay Reconsidered,” *October* 63 (Autumn 1992): 3–41. We should apply the idea of the time–fold to the sensorium. As with with language, we don’t know what one word means until its “unit” of meaning is complete. The beginning of the sentence is not finished until the end of the sentence retroactively reveals it.

11. Vico invented his own metaphor to describe what happened to the pre-humans wandering in the forest primeval. This was the story about the thunder. In one group, then another, then another, loud thunder terrified the first pre-humans. At some point the thunder was so loud that they conceived that the thunder was actually a word, a very long and complex word, one that concealed within it a kind of cipher holding a secret. If only they could decode this word! It would tell them all about the secret. And, because words came only from speakers, the sky must be a subject like themselves, only larger and more powerful. The famous 20c. Irish author James Joyce seized upon Vico's idea of the thunder and produced, in his novel *Finnegans Wake*, four versions of a 99-letter word that included, some scholars have claimed, all of the roots of Indo-European languages. Whether or not this is true, it captures the idea that the thunder, even now, sounds like a word we are not meant to understand, and it is this *withholding of meaning* that converts a sign-system into a true language.

The idea of a code is concealment in its purest form. To see all of nature as a code means that there is a code that can be cracked, even if only partially. The new idea of possible deciphering led to the practice of divination, where auspices were ritually taken from nature. Sometimes these were simply observations of natural phenomena: the flight of birds, movements of the stars, patterns of weather. More determined samplings involved sacrifice and vivisection, where the interior of the victim was seen to contain cryptic forms of writing. The liver, whose surface was patterned with fatty tissue, was particularly valued. The Italian expression, "avere fegato," literally to have a liver but meaning "to have courage," goes past the idea of having the guts to do something to the idea that one is willing to take chances, to throw the dice and act on the results. Note that the first humans, Vico says, thought that Jove was *trying* to tell them something. This is the first case of language, a case of *language-falling-short* of the intention to express. It's the falling-short that is the key issue. A code falls short from the start (that's its design), so codes and ciphers capture the essence of language by creating a virtual meaning that is indicated but not present in expression's sensorium. In other words, communication is not about transmitting meanings but about the virtuality created by the *failed promise to transmit meanings*.

12. Thunder intensified the anxiety that the first humans had already felt towards natural and human threats. So, to clarify what Jove might have meant to say to them led to attempts to get a better view of the sky and its signs. These were called "eyes" because they were both openings and observatories. Each group had a single eye used for divination and rituals of initiation, marriage, and burial. Because the first cultures were called cyclopians on account of their allegiance of each family to its own altar, this gave rise to the mistaken depiction of the cyclopes as monsters with single eyes, the kind that Odysseus encountered during his travels. Instead, the first "eyes" connected earth to heaven with acts of ritual divination, looking for meanings to attach to Jove's generic meaningfulness.

Because Jove was imagined as a giant body, the sky was thought to be the skull of Jove. Below or within it was the visible world; above it was a divine ideal represented by the peaks of mountains or the sacred precincts on citadels above cities, such as the Acropolis at Athens. Most importantly, Jove's skull connected directly, through the hearth fire, to the collectivized skull of dead ancestors who ruled from below the ground. Between these antipodal skulls, the flame of the hearth, ruled over by the goddess Hestia, cooked sacrificial offerings and also fed the dead.

The first altars were used to measure of the precise movements of sun, moon, and stars. But, because divination was central to the collection and preservation of knowledge based on these observations, the eyes were also libraries, hospitals, and political centers. And, because the dead were honored at the hearth, the underworld supplied divination results as well, in the form of “latent” or secret signifiers different from the signs of the sky. The sky spoke in images and similarities, the underworld spoke in riddles. The first form was presentational, the second was self-referential and joke-like.

Once established, an altar could not be moved. The Cyclopes’ imagined that their altars were fixed to the literal soil and unique location beneath a specific point of the sky. Moving would have brought bad luck from the spirits who resided in the earth. And, anyone defecting to another family’s hearth would cause disaster. These beliefs were summarized by the story of Prometheus, who was chained to a rock while an eagle, a personification of Jove, plucked out his liver, the favored organ for divination.

Vico was a fan of Varro, the Roman author of *Antiquitates rerum divinarum* (40 B.C.E.). Varro held that religions began in fear, but in effect that the idea of a god or gods transformed raw fear, felt by all animals, into something complex within language. Vico went further, to specify the virtuality of fear as something with pockets and folds, a “wrapping” that would allow fear to be appeased through actions and sign behaviors. This provided, at the most basic level, a virtuality of interiority that allowed for inside-out transformations. In terms of geometry, this points to the primacy of a “projective geometry” allowing for the self-intersecting 2-d surfaces such as the Möbius band or Klein bottle preceding Euclidean geometry, which must forbid self-intersection and non-orientation of projective geometry. Although Euclid seems to come first in the history of mathematics, projective geometry’s logical first-ness points to the possibility that projective surfaces were at first the substance of myth, not mathematics. Certainly, many stories in the mythic tradition, especially those about transformation, seem to involve self-intersection and non-orientation directly. Jacques Lacan realized this in his re-telling of the transformation of Daphne into a laurel tree to escape the unwanted advances of Apollo. See Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, Seminar 7 (1959–1960), trans. Dennis Porter (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Co., 1992), 60.

13. This was Vico’s big discovery. What was it exactly? We have described its effects but not its causes. Vico is in this case the founder of modern psychology, or rather psychoanalysis, although the difference is a bit too complicated to deal with at the moment. Vico argued that pre-humans became real humans because they took their own nature, which was fierce and crude, and projected it as the quality of an object, in this case, the sky. Projection happens every day. We unconsciously think of ourselves as greedy and conniving, but instead of realizing our own nature, we think of others as greedy and conniving, and prepare to defend ourselves. Projection and transference are Psychology 101. It’s human nature to not be able to see ourselves except when we are reflected in other people. Vico realized this on the pop-psychology level, but the difference is that he figured out how it happened when pre-humans had not yet acquired the ability to metaphorize. Against the background of being able to signify but not metaphorize, he realized the enormous impact of this turn. With metaphor, you would know less about the world, have less mastery of it through your

signifying systems, but you would gain a virtual space and virtual time that had an infinite wealth of potential meaning.

14. Let's say that the first humans went from "meanings" — 1:1 names for things and processes — to "meaningfulness": an ability to make use of large chunks of virtual "un-knowledge."
15. Things that we know that we don't know, in one fear-drenched moment of loss; but (more important) "things that we don't know that we don't know." This goes by a special name, *kenosis*, a way of knowing without knowing. This means that when we try to express ourselves, we always fall short of the right words. The other side of this coin is that, whenever we open our mouths, we say more than we think we're saying, things that we are deaf to, but other people hear immediately.

Vico's fantasy relation to John the Baptist may be grounded in the fact — which we don't yet know about Vico's times — that the Essene monastery where John instructed Jesus emphasized *kenosis*, a "knowing without knowing" and hence a forerunner of the modern idea of intuition and the unconscious. Indirect evidence of these connections come from the Qumran scrolls found in a cave near the Dead Sea in the 1950s, but there may have been secret sources of the Gospel of St. Thomas known to the *intelligencia* of 18c. Naples. Historically, there is no direct evidence of St. John's relation to Essene doctrines, but the question is what did Vico think? Jesus's instruction was certainly novel and metaphor-based. The avoidance of literal dogma and emphasis on a "reader-response relation" suggests that there was some active idea of *kenosis* in early Christianity, but one that the official church would be eager to suppress, just as Thomas's doctrines had been suppressed.

16. If that's not hard enough to wrap your head around, add the idea that's critical to metaphoric thinking: the fact that it is self-developing. Without humans having to know anything about the virtual divine, the virtual divine developed "by itself." It had a peculiar autonomy that was self-generative. This meant that, although humans would be forbidden to shape or change the virtual divine worlds, those worlds would change themselves. They would evolve new forms, new characters, new kind of actions, thinking, and existing. Myth began with characters with super-natural powers. It then evolved gods with shortcomings, the multiplicity of Greek gods, for example, who were constantly getting into trouble. They were more "like us," with human-like shortcomings. Gradually, hero-like figures appeared; then human-divine composite heroes able to bridge between the human and divine worlds. For example, the heroes of mythology were allowed to visit Hades, the land of the dead, and return alive. The hero, whose name first meant nothing more than "a dead person," gained a kind of immortality. This was not an attribute, something heroes had by being heroic, but a function of a new kind of signifier that would take the place of the god and come a bit closer to being human. Finally, fully modern humans require a world built around single ideas and hierarchical relationships. For logic, principles as well as deities have to be single. We see how Vico's three ages are about the process of condensation, from the multiple to the one.

The "katabasis" (κατάβασις, descent into the underworld) was the model of the initiation ceremony. Initiation was generic. Not only was it necessary for youths to be initiated to adulthood, kings were initiated rather than simply crowned, bridal couples were initiated to marriage, even the deceased had to be initiated to death. The model took an ABA form: descent/instruction/return. The instruction was secret; mortals could not be told. The

model was employed on a huge scale with the annual rituals of Eleusis, where anyone able to afford it was invited to participate in secret ceremonies having to do with the annual disappearance and return of Persephone, abducted by Pluto to spend winters in Hades. Katabasis was the center of the anthropologists Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner's studies of *liminal* experiences and space-times in cultures and individual development. See, for example, Victor Turner, Roger D. Abrahams, and Alfred Harris, *The Ritual Process : Structure and Anti-Structure* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2017).

17. The self-evolving nature of this virtual-divine ended, so Vico claimed, with a fully human model, a third age following the ages of gods and heroes. In this age, humans had no magical powers, only their own ingenuity. A little of the divine remained, however, in the way that tricks, jokes, art, and other clever things seemed to be beyond explanation. There is in every culture the tradition that a great artist, like Faust, has been taught by the devil, or given a violin or flute made by the devil, because no one can explain how they learned to be so skilled. There were, in this third age, still experiences that were uncanny. Things could still be meaningful and amazing that could not be explained or even described. In fact, meaningfulness always seems to elude us. We can't find the words for it, but it's nonetheless personally and emotionally significant.

In the third age, the age of humans, godly powers are abbreviated, domesticated, or missing entirely. Heroics exist but without the usual assistance of the gods, only super-powers fictionally attached. Doesn't metaphor disappear entirely in this third age? Isn't the metaphor little better than the standard analogy, that lets us compare things in a very rational way? The answer is no, and the reasons for this is that, while gods and demons have disappeared, latency and portability have not. These are the ghost-lines of metaphor that endure, even when the mediums of their existence have been secularized and normalized. There are several categories of latency and portability. In the uncanny, we have experiences of clairvoyance and *déjà vu* — time travel. In the genre of literature known as the fantastic, we have themes of the double and contamination of reality by dreams and works of fiction. But, even in serious subjects such as quantum physics, we have spooky action at a distance. It doesn't take much to crack the thin shell of reality. Many people take stories of wild conspiracies as real, and all of us are still fascinated by coincidences.

Sigmund Freud's famous work on the uncanny is still fresh but one should be careful with the architecture historian Anthony Vidler's work, *The Architectural Uncanny*, which in my view makes the uncanny into a mostly 18–19c. phenomenon, a compensation for the losses imposed on the imagination by the onset of rationality. Mladen Dolar has given a fuller account. See Mladen Dolar, "I Shall Be with You on Your Wedding-Night": Lacan and the Uncanny," *October* 58, *Rendering the Real* (Autumn 1991): 5–23, available online.

18. Metaphor hides something. The metaphor of Jove, as thunder, hid what Jove meant to say in the thunder by making the thunder's word so long and complex that it seemed to be a kind of Enigma Machine (Alan Turing's computer for cracking the German codes of World War II). The first humans didn't have Enigma Machines, but they did have rituals designed to do the same thing. To see the sky and the signs of the sky, they made clearings in the forest. These were the sites of the first altars. Marriage ceremonies and funerals were held there,

because the clearings functioned as the first temples. “Temple” in fact comes from the root $\sqrt{\text{TEM}}$, meaning to divide. The sacrificial victim provided signs, once dissected, pertaining to the uncertain future. But, the $\sqrt{\text{TEM}}$ of sacrifice was also the sky as the dividing line between the visible and invisible, between Jove’s outward signs of thunder and skyward events and his concealed intentions, to help or harm. From the point of metaphor’s invention of the $\sqrt{\text{TEM}}$, the sky was regarded as the source of all human laws. The Roman Senate, like many other cultures, was required to meet beneath an open blue sky.

The $\sqrt{\text{TEM}}$ can be the sky or something smaller. It is the face of things, behind which intentions and natures can be hidden. It became the basis for architecture’s strategy of hiding interiors behind façades, courtyard–voids within solid buildings, turns and twists within spaces following the logic of the Dædalan labyrinth. In the standard 19c. façade of many American courthouses, we see the concealment in three forms, the sanctified interior of the main courtroom, protected by oaths and laws, the vault containing deeds, maps, and charters that legitimize legal placement of citizens of the county, and a tower surmounting a dome in reference to the antipodal legitimacy of the sky. We can see how this façade distributes its interests using the same schema as Vico’s gods, heroes, and humans, but how was this possible? Did the builders of courthouses read Vico? No, of course not, but it shows how we can reproduce ideas without being conscious of the sources. This is the real and everyday meaning of *kenosis* — being able to know things without knowing that we know them.

Although the $\sqrt{\text{TEM}}$ is about revealing the truth of the auspices, it conceals this truth from the eyes of those who have not been prepared. Thus, the $\sqrt{\text{TEM}}$ becomes identical with the preparation of those who would come into contact with the interior truths of divination. After the original set-up in the first cultures, this function of multiple staged entries persisted in architecture, but it is important to note that these concentric containment strategies were not to preserve something in an innermost recess. They were to filter the entry, both visual and physical, so that the interior would remain clean and proper, a kind of hygiene function.

Diffusion theory requires actual links: people telling other people about things that are then adopted and used. But, diffusion theory cannot explain how ideas appear to exactly reproduce themselves in different cultures at different times and locales. Although diffusion works on the local level, Vico argued that it was in human nature to establish a beginning, middle, and end, in an autonomous way tailored to each culture’s specific geographical and historical circumstances. He called the pattern of three’s the “ideal eternal history” and added a fourth episode, a return (*ricorso*) that comes when the final age’s degradations and impieties force a return to mythic ways of thinking. This was not the same as a retreat to a carefully planned-out utopia, but rather a disastrous loss of civilized society’s support systems. Vico included his own time in the corrupt third age, but emphasized that the New Science could be realized only in such degraded circumstances. In this regard, Vico used the trope Albert Camus used in *The Plague*: the scientist studying the plague knows that he in fact is very likely to be infected. Add this to the drama of writing during the Inquisition and you have quite a story. In this context, Vico’s *New Science* could be counted as a *ricorso* for those who understood it. By understanding the metaphoric basis of thought, it would be possible to escape the mindless idiocies of cognition and think freely, but not as the first humans thought (in fear) but as emancipated thinkers achieving at last the Socratic goal of self-knowledge.

19. Knowing about metaphor's ability to make a concealment function that is portable can be explained in a story Vico doesn't tell, but it's so efficient to make the point that I will tell it anyway. Two painters in ancient Athens, rivals, decided to put the question of who was better to a test. Each would paint a mural along the same stretch of wall. Independent judges would critique each work and decide. The first painter, Zeuxis, was an expert in making life-like representations. For his entry, he painted a bowl of fruit sitting on a table beyond a *trompe-l'œil* window. It was so realistic that, when the judges had the artist unveil his work, a bird flying overhead saw the fruit and went for it, cracking its head when it hit the wall. The judges were very impressed, because the bird was "completely objective" and had lost its life on betting the fruit was real. Hard to do better than that! When they moved on to the second painter, Parrhasius, they found his work was still curtained. Parrhasius made no move, and the judges thought he was just depressed about his chances, after such a brilliant demonstration by Zeuxis. Finally, they asked him to pull back the curtain and show his work. He hesitated, "But, the curtain is my work."

The judges had to give the prize to Parrhasius. Why? Because although Zeuxis had fooled a bird, Parrhasius had fooled the eyes of the human experts intent on judging him. In Zeuxis's case they all knew it was a painting; Parrhasius had made them think the curtain was real.

The story comes from Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia*. Some modern commentators still don't get the point of the joke, namely that the judges were experts and *on that account* vulnerable to Parrhasius's trick. The bird was prone to being fooled by a lure, just as fish can be caught with bait. Humans can be deceived as well, but in this case the mechanics of the trick came out of their own bag. In this self, the story is "self-intersecting" and can be compared to the projective geometry of the Möbius band. Jacques Lacan retold the story in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (103) but did not make the connection to the self-intersecting surfaces of projective geometry that he himself pursued in the form of the Borromean knot. See Will Greenshields, *Writing the Structures of the Subject* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017).

20. All $\sqrt{\text{TEM}}$ s are like Parrhasius's curtain. This is a big deal for architecture, whose business it is to design and construct $\sqrt{\text{TEM}}$ s. A $\sqrt{\text{TEM}}$ is not a curtain or wall, per se. Rather, it is the split between the viewer and the viewed that is active in all kind of representations and built conditions. It's a distinction, not a thing being distinguished. Now, can you see how the latency function of metaphor, which sets up a way of "knowing without knowing," intersects with architecture's own "primal function" of splitting spaces into actual and virtual?
21. We need to get back to Vico, who gives away all his secrets in the first thirty or so pages of his 1744 classic, *The New Science*. Vico was not a rich academic. He had to get help covering the expenses of his publications. For this third edition he had asked a famous Venetian architect, Carlo Lodoli (you may know him as the "father of functionalism") for a subsidy. Lodoli at first agreed but withdrew his offer at the last minute. Vico was furious, and planned to publish the book anyway, at his own expense, but with a letter denouncing Lodoli. His friends advised him not to do this, however. Lodoli was an influential politician and could have easily hurt Vico's reputation.



Vico's frontispiece ("dipintura") was intended to show the idea of his work in a single image. Thus, it corresponded to the first clearings made in the forest as humans emerged from their pre-human status. Here, Vico's model of reading, that it actually re-creates his ideas and doesn't just try to represent or comprehend them, comes into play, especially in the "lipogram" (missing item) of the Helmet of Hermes, a hat that conferred invisibility (latency) but also the right to cross boundaries (transferability). The "extromissive" divine eye suggests that this is an image, simultaneously, of an inside looking out or an outside looking in. It's also possible to imagine the reader looking through the eye-hole from the other side, at a mirror, to see the image pasted to the back of the board he/she is looking through. Vico's story is a bit outlandish. Did he really get the idea "at the last minute"? Or, did he want to create his own "clearing in the forest" out of semi-credible circumstances to give *The New Science* a touch of naughtiness?

Donald Verene gives an account of the frontispiece in his *Vico's "New Science": A Philosophical Commentary*, 2015, chapter 5, but he does not realize the full potential of the role of the Helmet of Hermes as a lipogram — an absence (in the commentary following the image) — that places a pivotal role for the reader.

But, the printer had already set up the pages for the new book, and removing the letter left a blank section that had to be filled in some way. Vico says that he decides to design, at the last minute, a visual picture (*dipintura*) of the whole idea of *The New Science*, accompanied by a commentary on each item in the emblem and its role in culture's self-evolving history. That's the story, and Vico stuck with it, but it may be that Vico invented the whole "last-minute" thing so that he could demonstrate how metaphor could work, as a kind of modern magic, in an age far removed from the gods of myth. The image was a tour de force. It showed a divine eye, inscribed in a triangle and circle, radiating its law-giving gaze down to Metaphysics, represented as a goddess figure standing on a celestial globe perched on the edge of the altar of the first human ceremonial clearing.

Vico in effect creates a lipogram condition with this story, which may or may not be wholly true. The dramatic effect is that, at the last minute, a "flash" of learning was required that, like the deafening thunder for the first humans, would require the readers of *The New Science* to "make a clearing in the forest" of their own minds. Here, the trees correspond to meanings, the clearing corresponds to the meaningfulness experienced by the readers leading to novel interpretations, "each to their own," so to speak. Latency and lipograms are Vico's novel reinvention, drawn from the poetic knowledge of the mythic mind. Vico gives away his secret with the inscription, "IGNOTA LATEBAT," on the plinth of the image printed on the title page, known as the *impresa*. "She lay hidden" refers to latency and secrecy's central role in language, which is to say its metaphoric basis.

What happens with this actual unpleasant farce, all too true, is that Vico is given, on a silken pillow, the opportunity to prove the essential idea of his *New Science*. Lodoli as created a "lipogram," a blank spot

in the physical pages of the book. Vico realized that whatever fills this gap will be under the *aegis* of “the latent signifier.” He knows when to restrain his choleric nature and not miss this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. The lipogram is filled but not filled. It is given an enigmatic order, a kind of rebus image using the idea of the latent signifier of metaphor. A blank spot is filled with another kind of blank, an image in the form of a riddle. To make this work, he involves two Rosicrucian friends to present a decidedly anti-Establishment view of religion. An extromissive eye-beam is cast onto the jewel on the breast of Metaphysics (the “over-world”), which refracts the rays onto the first poet of the world, Homer. Our understanding of Homer is imperfect, as indicated by the crack in the base of Homer’s statue. All of the objects of culture are shown: a plow, a tiller, a funerary urn, an alphabet, the scales of justice, a fasces of centralized government, a purse representing commerce. All of these items are detailed in Vico’s commentary following the image, all but one, that is. This is a curious omission. In the face of Vico’s claim to talk about every item in the image, he omits one, and an obvious one at that. This is the Helmet of Hermes. Why?

We may wonder about the symbolism of Hermes. If we have read Norman O. Brown on the subject, we know this involves more than Hermes as a god of the underworld or trade. He is the god of sexual seduction, the god of thieves, the god of the secrets protecting the spheres between earth and the heavens. Hermes is the god to have if you’re having only one, because he seems to possess all of the mysteries of the universe. But, the real reason for omitting any mention of the Helmet of Hermes is that the omission is, like the empty pages left by the withdrawal of the letter to Lodoli, a lipogram. The helmet is a lipogram because Hermes himself is the god of lipograms. He’s missing because he’s the god of missing things. The lipogram is the latent signifier, and, just like the fleet-footed Hermes, it’s portable. Latency and portability, that’s the key to metaphor.

22. Clearly, Vico’s image was intended as an act of genius, akin to the clap of thunder that had frightened the first humans into their own metaphorical consciousness. Vico presents this as a kind of fraud. The first humans think there is a god behind the thunder, which Vico says, as a good Catholic, is not true. But, the rest of *The New Science* argues that this fake attribution had real and true effects — namely, that it brought about a culture of piety and poetry, a self-evolving consciousness. Our modern examples of this kind of genius focus on the theme of violation. Goethe’s *Faust* breaks the rules when he makes a deal with the devil, but this is a modern translation of Vico’s first event of thunder. The first humans cannot help but see the sky as a divine presence, Faust has a choice, but the role of ingenuity, what Vico called *ingenium*, worked in the same way as the thunder. Metaphor’s ability to create latency is the same as architecture’s ability to create voids, where literal meanings are forbidden to enter. The void as such works like a womb, where the idea of architecture can be miniaturized in full, just like the models that were made for the client in anticipation of the actual building. Comparing the model to the Helmet of Hermes leads to some interesting connections. Both use the logic of the lipogram, the latent or repressed signifier, to make a union possible. In Filarete’s theory, this is the impregnation of the mother architect by the

father client. The building that itself has a void can exist in its own void, as a void — a matrix or mother who's secret is that she knows *who* the father is but the father will and can never know. The identity of architecture lies with whoever designs and controls the voids.



The celestial globe is the sky turned inside-out. We're looking in at an object sphere instead of looking out at the sphere of the sky that contains us. Metaphysics is standing between the constellation for Leo and Libra, to indicate that the laws came from the first clearings in the forest. Leo stood for the "Nemean Lion" that Vico says represented the first forests, where pre-humans wandered before the hero Hercules conquered "the lion," meaning that he opened up clearing that were the places of civilization's origins. From the jewel on Metaphysic's breast, the divine ray projects on to a statue of Homer, cracked at the base to indicate that modern scholarship had not yet understood the true meaning of Homer. This is code for modern scholarship also not understanding the meaning of metaphor, which Vico resolved in his idea of the "imaginative universal," the sky as Jove.

23. The $\sqrt{\text{TEM}}$ idea holds even more treasures. If metaphor were the same thing as analogy, latency would not exist. An unfamiliar thing or situation would simply be compared to something more familiar. But, metaphor is different. Its spoken and visible terms exist in relation to something else, something invisible. The familiar and the unfamiliar have a space in between that emerges out of the fact that metaphor taken *from* something known has the power to transform its source retroactively. A wind metaphorized as a sigh turns all winds into a kind of breathing, and if that's so, there must be somewhere a being that can blow fiercely or gently or hold its breath. Metaphor doesn't just describe a world, it remakes its world. In the rhyming comparison of "womb" and "tomb," womb transforms the idea of tomb and *vice versa*. There is no saying that the womb is "like" a tomb or the tomb "like" a womb, but that one cannot be understood without the other. They are two opposites ideas tied together, what Freud called a contronym, a primal term. Because each term effects the other, the key is to find the latent signifier. It's not a compromise or definition or resolution. It is the "casing" or container of opposition. It's what protects and maintains the void.

Vico's entire *dipintura* could be considered to be about latency in the face of contronymic exchanges. The "clearing" in the text that duplicates the clearings in the forests made by the first humans is the void of latency that takes place between the signifieds and signifiers of pre-human communication, the "things" *versus* the "words." Retroactive transformation of metaphor makes things into signifiers as well. Vico's point is that things couldn't be words unless they were "words in the first place." So, in effect, language is mainly a process of relating the latent terms that pile up between the terms that seem to oppose each other: love/hate, fear/desire, inside/outside, life/death.

24. You might be tempted to think that latency was an abstract and complicated idea, but nothing could be further from the truth. This experiment shows that latency has a perceptual basis in our experience of the after-image created when a color vanishes to leave behind its complementary shadow, something that was "in our eye all the time" but not realized until a void, an absence, was created. Take a steady look at the cross in the center,

and you will see a green dot move around the circle. But, if you look directly at the hole made by removing each pink dot in succession, you won't see it. Latency is not something abstract, it's a concrete process that allows us to experience meaningfulness without having specific meanings at hand. This is what happens when we say that "words have failed us." The words have failed, but latency has not.

It would be a mistake to think either (1) that latency is purely physiological, as in the case of the after-image, or (2) purely semiological, a function of language. Latency is in the overlap between our nervous system (the brain *plus* all of the ways the senses and movement of muscles and sense of balance, etc. extend the brain through interactions with the physical world) and our imagination of things and articulation of ideas. It's both ϕ and ψ (*phi-sical*; *psy-chological*) and is a miniature version of the "mind-body" problem. But, there is no "problem" until latency is taken into either the physical or mental domains *without the other being taken into account*. There is always something physical in the mental and mental in the physical, which gives latency its uncanny bridge-like quality.

25. We can take apart the words and ideas of womb and tomb to show how their retroactive and reciprocal self-definition creates a latency that works, thanks to absence. It doesn't hurt that both of these terms directly refer to absence, which is why they are so useful to architecture and our ideas of space and time. If we draw on some common associations of womb and tomb, we can create a ladder of references that move side to side rather than vertically down from each term. Each lateral movement is like a paradigm shift. In language, we try to hold things together with a forward linear motion, called syntagmatic structure. Paradigm works at a 90° angle to this. It's the word we might have chosen instead of the one suggested by the syntagm. You can think of this easily because iPhones and other gadgets suggest words and phrases as we type. You can see what the machine thinks we are trying to say based on probabilities built into its algorithms, but you know from experience that if we always followed its advice our messages would be reduced to drivel. Paradigm is where it's at, as far as thought is concerned. Our subjectivity is tied up with the way we exploit the space between opposites, the void that makes a paradigm substitution that furthers metaphor's maintenance of the void, which means that meaning stays open. When it's open, and *only when it's open* can the reader and the writer join. Only then, as Filarete would put it, can the architect and client have real sex.

Stupid gadgets like iPhones show that the syntagm/paradigm issue is around us all the time. We need both a process speeding forward in time and the options that come with replacing something expected with something unexpected. Think of the paintings of René Magritte in this respect. A painting of a pipe with the caption, "This is not a pipe," is both obviously true (it's a *painting* of a pipe) but false (it's clearly a pipe that's being shown to us). It's not a new idea so much as it is a way of calling the whole system of image practices into question. *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* is a visual contronym that uses the latent signifier, "(this) _____," to shift us into a metaphoric mode of thinking. The "this" points us to the image experience but at the same time flags the fakery of the image. We are invited into a virtual (representational) space and just as quickly forced to admit that the replacement of a real pipe by a painted image of a pipe is a bait-and-switch scheme, an imposture. We go round and round between the "is" and "isn't" options

26. We can apply this to the womb/tomb examples to show how contronymic sets of meanings work like making a clearing in the forest did for the first humans. Latency is "where it's at,"

so to speak, but of course latency is about where's not. Negation is the key. Where as the original terms were structured by the negation of one by the other, the womb by the tomb, negation is absent in the structure of latency. Just as the dream disallows negation and lets us see dead people as if they were living and the past as a future, latency provides new paradigms that step back from opposition and put us on a different level. We find a "common term" and make what Vico called a "common mental dictionary." This dictionary lies behind all languages and cultures, that's what makes it common. The latent signifiers in this example are of course also words, but they are words present not as indicators of anything but as structures, as processes, as functions — or maybe the best way of putting it, *as forms*, meaning not literal static forms but the active verb of form, *to form*, *form-ing*. If meanings are defined by replacing them with other meanings, in a dictionary way, meaningfulness is about the circularity of the dictionary itself, its status as a void, as a recycling machine. It's not about the meanings, it's about the motions.

The active form of form is what's missing in the usual interpretation of Plato's idea of form, where some say that, behind any ordinary object, such as a bed, there is the "form" of the bed somewhere in the mind. This misses the point, that the bed's *formation* has used principles of constructing to put together (*palintropos harmoniē*) something by combining learned principles with the experimental condition of finding materials and tools in a *particular way*, not providing all that might be needed but "just what" will guarantee an authentic merger of memory and the immediacy of the present. When Vico said that "imagination and memory are the same" he meant that these come together in the *form*-ation of human objects.

27. It's time to sober up, just long enough to realize that, all along, we have been describing the famous process of condensation. In Freud's thinking, this is the way the dream crunches down objects, people, and ideas into composites. We start out with the composite, however. It's the first thing we get, but it's got antipodal elements packed inside. Like letting genies out of a bottle, the little rascals disperse and locate themselves into things we recognize, common objects, images, architectures. But, it has come to us first like the thunder, an enigma without any apparent structure. We say we want to "unpack" this mess, but what we end up pulling apart is not just a set of opposed ideas but a void in between, a void that is the latency that allowed for the compression in the first place. When the first humans cowered in fright at the sound of thunder, the difference between them and other animals who did the same thing was that they sensed the action of compression. They imagined a black hole in the universe that had swallowed up all that was outside it and made a super-heavy, super-tiny black substance, a ball of pure negation. This super-heavy, super-dense ball couldn't be explained, but it could be named, and thereafter we would associate the name, the "name of the father" in psychoanalytic terms, with weight. Weight had pulled down the father of the heavens into earth, buried it, and made a tombstone reading HERE LIES JOVE. Milton was the first to realize the significance of the fallen god, Lucifer, and give him his due in the poem *Paradise Lost*. Note that Milton also gets the (projective) geometry of the situation right. Jove, a.k.a. Lucifer, lands upside down. Or, is it us? Milton refuses to say.

Jorge Luis Borges is not so shy. In a story about negative theology, "Tres versiones de Judas" (1944), Borges describes a (fictional) theologian who claims that Judas was the true Christ, and he and Jesus switched identities

at the last moment so that he (the true Christ) would actually suffer unjustly and pay for humanities' sins by doing time in Hell. See *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings*, trans. William Irby (New York: New Directions, 2007), 95–100. Lucifer correctly embodies non-orientation and self-intersection, the hallmarks of 2-d manifold in the system of projective geometry, the mathematical basis of mythic thinking although mythic thinking itself precluded any such abstract thinking. Myth's *exclusion* was the perfect production mechanism to realize projectivity before Euclid became possible.

28. It's time to return to Vico's original image of the clearing in the forest. We can see now that this circular space was really created out of the thunder's literal condensation, how it's simple circularity was really a composite of antithetical forces coming together in a compressed super-sphere of meaningfulness without meanings. The result only could have been what it actually turned out to be in history: a production space — a factory — for latency. Just as Vico showed with his experimental lipogram, the *dipintura* frontispiece for *The New Science* of 1744, the circle is crammed full of things that serve as high-functioning enigmas able to face any and all geographical and historical contexts, to make a multiplicity of cultural forms using a common mental language that would forever be un-statable but not un-theorizable. Vico's argument is that we can theorize without knowing everything. This makes all thinking a kind of ersatz enterprise, an invention, a play. We are playing with fire, with the negative, so anything we say literally is going to burn up in its own self-contradiction. All we can do is mark out the spaces where latency itself has given over to forms, meaning form-ations, as in the case of the courthouse façade or the countless stories, artworks, music, etc. that deal with emptiness. In architecture, this means that the idea of the void and the structuring of the void are primary. Without a doubt, architecture is synonymous with the void. It's what makes it the greatest among the arts.

It's too bad that architecture theory since the 1980s turned away from understanding projective geometry, which was actually discovered largely by an architect, Girard Desargues, working with the boy-genius Pascal in the 1600's. The real projective plane is something we can barely understand. Like Vico says of the imaginative universal, the first metaphor that initiates human thinking proper, it is the continuing foundation we use on a daily basis, our "root program" so to speak. The fact that projective geometry and metaphor share an equal ground in the function of negation, in the forms of self-intersection and non-orientation, is an exciting conjecture that has much to offer architecture theory in the future.

The projective geometry that began with Pappus's theorems (300 a.d.), revised and expanded by Girard Desargues and Blaise Pascal in the 1600s, is recognized as revolutionary by mathematical historians. When key figures such as Möbius, Plücker, Gauss, Riemann, Klein, Lobachevsky, and finally David Hilbert elaborated it, it became the basis of both of the competing theories of physics, Relativity and Quantum Mechanics. For an exciting wild ride through the history of geometry, watch podcasts authored by the American-Australian educator, Norman Wildberger, "History of Geometry," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NYK0GBQVngs>. Architecture's negative view of projective geometry can be traced back to Mark Schneider, "Girard Desargues, the Architectural and Perspective Geometry: A Study in the Rationalization of Figure," Ph.D. dissertation, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 1983.