

Metaphor: The + of Lacan



§1: From Substitution to Latency

In Lacan's for-many-confusing *mathemes* for metaphor, the + and - signs do not indicate addition or subtraction as one might expect, but rather the bar of the Saussurian expression, s/S , signified over signifier, which Lacan has reversed, as S/s , signifier over signified. In the several *mathemes* Lacan gave to show how metaphor works, this difference is critical. Even though the word metaphor literally means to carry something across a line, in its mathematical guises the bar seems to be more like the one encountered in ratios, such as $1/2$, 1 "in relation to" 2. There is an equal temptation to think of negatives, inverses ($x \rightarrow 1/x$), or sublation, as with the usual reading of the signifier as something taking *the place of* a signified (S/s). Taking the place of means that + involves a territorial move, a military-style grab of strategic terrain. What terrain? A high point, I would suggest, from which other territory can be surveilled and over which rule can be proclaimed. Like the Masonic pyramid on the U. S. dollar bill, an idea of legitimacy is coupled with an extromissive eye that I would compare to the Lacanian gaze — *if and only if* the reader resists seeing this as a positive oculus but, instead, sees it as a negative, a void, a hollow, a radical *lack*. Only in this way can we elide the idea of replacement to the more significant function of latency, which I see as a species of lack that has adopted to situations where signifiers are in flurried exchange. Only then can we appreciate the radical nature of Lacan's claim that language is, fundamentally, a rule of metaphor, i. e. that there is no such thing as "literal meaning."¹

I would begin with Dan Collins pithy account of Lacan's metaphor theory but shift Collins' center of gravity away from discussing how metaphors replace each other — in what sequence, and with what effects — to the question of latency.² Taking latency into account allows us to see how metaphor is not an exceptional or "poetic" use of language, but something present long before it seems to suddenly appear before us with an unusual or even astonishing expression, the identifiable metaphor. This latency is evident even in the expression of +, meaning to cross rather than to add something, as it seems to be in one of Lacan's early formulations of metaphor, $f(S'/S) \cong S (+) s$, which Ed Pluth has paraphrased as indicating that "a signified ef-

¹ To my knowledge, only one other thinker has made this claim in such radical terms. That would be Giambattista Vico, *The New Science of Giambattista Vico* [1744], trans. Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch (Ithaca: Cornell University, 2016). I am generally interested in using metaphor theory as a means of bringing these thinkers closer together by showing how latency, in matters of metaphor and anamorphosis, play parallel roles.

² Dan Collins, "On Metaphor," *Re-turn: A Journal of Lacanian Studies* 6 (Spring 2011): 149–158.

fect is produced by a substitution of one signifier for another signifier, and that one of the signifiers in the operation becomes a stand-in for this effect itself ... *incarnated* in one signifier" [emphasis mine].³ In literary theory the plus/minus idea of metaphor is the beam shone on poetic language as a whole. According to Stanley Fish, the poet is seen either as someone able to *add* to the ordinary perception of things with an exceptional sensitivity, or the poet is one who, subtractively, sees what others miss.⁴ But, this +/- theory is not acceptable, either for poetry or for metaphor, just as it is not acceptable to define art (or architecture) as plus or minus any normal mode of experience.

Lacan wants to show the effect of metaphor as a signifier-replacement process and show how metaphor is involved in the creation of meaning at all levels. In Fish's terms this would mean that any specific "poetry alert" would be an alert to something already present in language, that had not been noticed. It wouldn't matter whether the alert raised the alarm because of a lack or surplus. Both, even in the temporal form of "too early" and "too late" are poetic trigger warnings to the presence of latency. Metaphor is "waiting to happen," we only need to be taken to an edge and jump across, the sign of which is +, not just to another signifier but to a world that is retroactively resuscitated by fresh forms. The effect would not be unlike Dorothy's landing in colorful Oz after her vertiginous exit from grayscale Kansas.⁵ In Oz, there are no meanings but, rather, meaningfulness: Dorothy's emotional investments are given precedence over the signifier-signified replacement machine of Kansas, where a messed-up garden requires the subtraction of Dorothy's beloved dog, Toto.

But, why do we not theorize from this "always-already" perspective? Metaphor offers us an extra that is simultaneously a subtraction, and we first have to understand the mechanics of replacement. Collins details this in terms of attempts to define things. A "fondue," he says, can be replaced by "melted cheese." In the process of dictionary defining, the antithesis of what Lacan wishes to indicate by metaphor, we just continue supplying more definitions for each new one. So, what is melted cheese? ... It's normally solid cheese that has been heated to produce a thick liquid. And, what is cheese? How much heat? We could go on and on and on with any dictionary procedure. We will never escape the dictionary's circular premise, that words are defined by other words.

³ Ed Pluth, *Signifiers and Acts: Freedom in Lacan's Theory of the Subject* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2007), 36.

⁴ I cannot find the source of the short essay where Fish considers the two options of defining poetry as "reality-minus" (seeing things that others miss) or "reality-plus" (seeing things others see, but with a special emphasis or sensitivity). The essay exists, somewhere, and it is authored by Stanley Fish, likely before 1975.

⁵ In fact, *The Wizard of Oz* follows Lacan's protocol for what happens once the latency of metaphor is discovered that it might be considered to be an official training film. Victor Fleming, Director (Metro-Goldwyn-Meyer, Hollywood, CA, 1939). Characters in the introductory "Kansas" sequence appear in the "Oz" sequence as magical beings.

The issue of replacement, however, has some obvious advantages. First, we can contrast metaphor with metonymy, where metonymy is more of a “working within other signifiers.” Also, it is helpful to see metaphor as a kind of accomplishment, where something familiar is used to understand something less so. In his discussions with Chaim Perelman, Lacan argued that defining metaphor as a special form of analogy always ends up in this futile search for more signifieds. Instead of the four terms of analogy (A:B::C:D), Lacan contrasts metaphor as a “3-to-1” action (“On a Question Prior to Any Possible Treatment of Psychosis,” *Écrits*, 465).⁶

Latency is the key to the way metaphor works, universally, within all of language, all of the time, not just for poetic occasions; and how there is, as Lacan claimed, no literal meaning at any

$$\frac{S}{S'} \cdot \frac{S'}{x} \rightarrow S \left(\frac{1}{s} \right)$$

time or place in language.⁷ The latent signifier, x , can explain how “crossing the bar,” $+$ rather than $+$, makes emergence work as a both a supplement and a lack, rather than the idea of simply adding to or subtracting from the signifying chain. In Lacan's first formulation, $f(S'/S) \cong S(+s)$, “the replacement-process of metaphor involves crossing a threshold between the signifier and the signified,” there is the idea that the Saussurian bar ($—$) is an actual threshold, i. e. something that is there to be crossed, physically or in an act of imagination. Something passes over this bar and into the element on the other side; it then emerges from it, as a child from a mother's womb. Something is embodied, and the idea of physical re-embodiment, or reincarnation (for what is embodied has already existed “from the beginning”) is key. It would not be out of

⁶ For Lacan's argument with Chaim Perelman, see Stephanie Swales, “Metaphor of the Subject,” in Stijn Vanheule, Derek Hook, and Calum Neill, eds., *Reading Lacan's Écrits: From 'Signification of the Phallus' to 'Metaphor of the Subject'* (Abington, OX: Routledge, 2019), 308–321. Swales brings up the possibility that Lacan wants to imply that metaphor involves an energy exchange between Being and Speaking, in that the signifier as such implies something that exists that can be signified. Being and Speaking constitute a circuit, in that an addition to one involves a subtraction from the other. The speaking subject, for example, loses access to Being as soon as it accedes to being defined within the Symbolic register. $B+S=1$ might be a good approximation of this relationship, but the point is that there is a circuit, and that the circuit must have some point at which an extraneous element can intervene to stabilize the flow. One possibility arises by comparing the circuit to the gapped circle, where the *objet petit a* serves this function; another would be to use anamorphosis as a platform and look at the function of the ∂ , the near-zero angle of view that must be taken by the viewer in order to see the previously blurred image.

⁷ Imagine extending this claim to art or architecture, where it would have immediate positive results in explaining Pablo Picasso's claim, “I don't look, I find.” Architecture would no longer have to suffer the localization protocols identifying it with the intentionality of the architect. Latency has promise for even non-artistic endeavors, especially science, where G. Bachelard's idea of the *dispositif* could finally be brought into the mainstream. See Joan Copjec, “The Orthopsychic Subject: Film Theory and the Reception of Lacan,” *October* 49 (Summer, 1989): 53–71.

line to say that metaphors are “born,” not made, or that meaning in metaphor is the product of a matrix, or womb.⁸

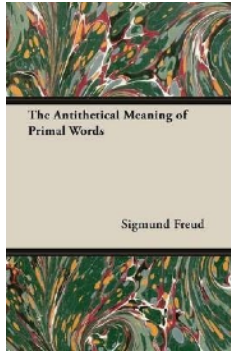
Latency is key to the way in which logical order and the order experiential encounter are opposite. When the latent signifier appears, it is first in experience but *after* the cause that has structured it. The experiential first encounter is really logically second, in the way that Lacan actually numbers \$₁ and \$₂ in his later *mathemes*.

$$\frac{\text{Name-of-the-Father}}{\text{—Mother's Desire—}} \bullet \frac{\text{—Mother's Desire—}}{\text{Signified to the Subject}} \rightarrow \text{Name-of-the-Father} \left(\frac{A}{\text{Phallus}} \right)$$

In his essay, “On a Question Prior to Any Possible Treatment of Psychosis,” Lacan presents two *mathemes* for the metaphor (*Écrits*, 464–465). In the abbreviated form above, The \$’s, first as signified and then as signifier, are later numbered \$’₁ and \$’₂ respectively. The logical order would be reversed, which is the key to why/how the Mother’s Desire is able to form a latent signifier (the phallus) in the process of connecting her logical priority to the order of encountering the signifiers, first as the “definition” of the Name-of-the-Father on the left, second as the signifier over an unknown *x*, labeled here as the “signified to the subject.” We might read the bar in this case as +, as the Mother’s Desire crosses over *into the signified to the subject*. Whenever this happens, we discover the metaphor, the Name-of-the-Father, always in some novel, unexpected form. The \$’s are self-cancelling thanks not to their “mathematical” positions as numerator and denominator, but to their reversal of actual and logical order — their retroactive activation, so to speak.

The Metaphor of the Name-of-the-Father (which could be said to be anything *but* the father’s actual name) is the embodiment of the mother’s desire, which is to say, what the mother lacks, the A/Phallus. In this way, the metaphor is already and always present, ready to be called up so to speak, whenever the mother signifies to the subject that she desires something. The phallus has been present before the Name-of-the-Father becomes a metaphor, but as an unacknowledged/unacknowledgeable signifier. It has been present in the “Other” (A) of the 1/Phallus, waiting for the moment when the Mother’s (latent) desire, \$’, activates it in the signifying chain. The mother wishes to buy a new dress; *dress* is the Name of the Father. The mother suggests a vacation in the Pyrenees, *that vacation* becomes the Name of the Father. Latency has allowed the father to have *as many names as the mother’s desire can activate with spaces to extend her*

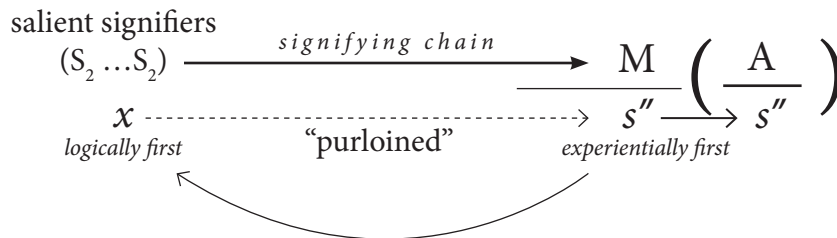
⁸ The womb of metaphor, being portable, would provide the additional clue that the speaking subject *as such* is a hysteric. On this point, see Gérard Wajcman, “The Hysteric’s Discourse,” *The Symptom: Online Journal for lacan.com* 4 (Spring 2003); <https://www.lacan.com/hystericdiscf.htm>. Wajcman’s main claim is directly relevant to the situation of metaphor as birth: “... [T]he speaking subject is hysterical as such.”



desire. The metaphor is thus not a clever poetic replacement of an unexpected word drawn from the paradigmatic axis of language — calling a hat a roof or a hero a lion — but rather the *prägnanz* of latency, of finding out *just after* one unexpected signifier has elbowed out the expected one (the paradigmatic operation of language), that metaphoric power *has been there all along*, that this power has *already made a place for* the unsettling signification. It has crossed the bar, seized the high ground, and now imposes its rule.

This is the power of the cross, the +, not to add or subtract, not to be late or early, but to *equate* + and −, late and early, inside and outside, too much and too little — in other words, to access a domain that is primal, contronymic, surveillant, and law-giving.⁹ In other words, the extromissive gaze at the top of the Masonic pyramid.

Although it is not easy to point to the exact place in any *matheme* where latency lies,¹⁰ it is the contronymic exchange between the two positions of the mother's desire that connects the encounters with the different signifiers (the dress, the vacation, etc.) with the logically prior signifier, the Phallus, shown beneath the bar, as an *x* turned *s*. In later mathemes, this is the signified, *s*, that appears first only as an *x*, an unknown. S' / x seems to be the classic “What do women want?” question. Want is not just desire but specifically desire as a lack that cannot be named. This is Lacan's general rule for the phallus: it must always be veiled.

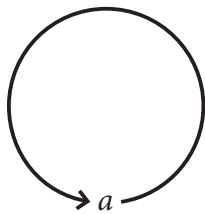


⁹ To justify my conflation of ideas, see Sigmund Freud, “On the Antithetical Meaning of Primal Terms,” *Five Lectures on Psycho-Analysis, Leonardo da Vinci, and Other Works*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1957).

¹⁰ Dan Collins (155–156) places it in the position of the Mother's desire in his example of a little girl who says “Some-day I will grow a tooth in my bottom.” The girl cannot imagine the penis that she means, even less can she imagine that it is the lack of the penis that she is specifying through the totality of the *act* of metaphor, so tooth/penis • penis/ *x* forms the left side the *matheme*. The *x* is the meaningfulness that exceeds any specific meaning assignment. The metaphor, “tooth,” is then juxtaposed to this meaningfulness as a $1/s''$, meaning that the signifier *S* has been moved to an “exterior relation” to the newly-produced signified, “tooth.” An organ that I've noticed is lacking but that may someday grow in my bottom” certainly isn't the transindividual signified of tooth. And tooth certainly doesn't capture whatever feelings of deprivation, anger, confusion, or expectation went along with that idiosyncratic definition. Even for the girl in question, tooth will go on to become just an ordinary signifier that refers to the things she uses to chew her food.”

When logical priority must wait for the first appearance of a signifier that metaphorizes it, the time line of metaphor has the temporality of the *après coup*. The original *x* that has lain latent has travelled along the signifying chain, running parallel with salient signifiers.

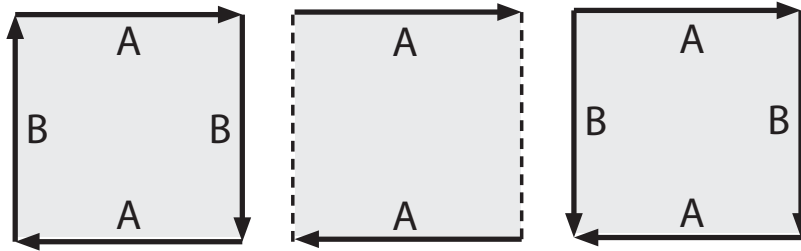
Meaningfulness is logically prior to the actual appearance of the metaphor, which comes first in experience. This encounter refers retroactively to an “always and already” latency that has emerged through the appearance of the metaphor. In this way, latency resembles the anamorphic image which seems to be just a blur marring the “frontal” appearance of a normal image as it “runs alongside it,” in a parallel and purloined fashion. Meaningfulness provokes the sudden appearance of the metaphor, but it does so without revealing itself. Hence, meaningfulness will remain an unknown, an “*x*,” even when the metaphor is enunciated. It will remain a signified that appears within a signifier without giving up its mystery, *s*”.



Is this graphically representable in some other way? The *après coup* shows the temporal inversion of experiential primacy by logical primacy. This is Freud’s *Nachträglichkeit*, the way a symptom can activate a past trauma, which, when it was being experienced at the time, was not realized as a trauma. The trauma’s temporality could thus said to be temporally contronymic, a combination or parallel track of forward–moving discovery and backward–moving retroaction. But, once it has been “activated,” it forms the anchor of repetitive–compulsive returns. We might represent this as a gapped circle, returning over and over again to a void, a radical meaningfulness that can never be represented by any set of signifiers.¹¹

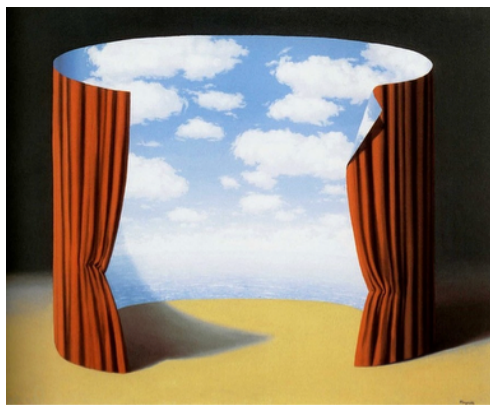
In projective surfaces such as the Klein bottle or Möbius band, we have more sophisticated options. These are projective–geometric 2-d manifolds that, when immersed into 3-space, display properties of non-orientation (an arrow traveling across the surface of the Möbius band will invert as it returns to its origin) and self–intersection (the Klein bottle’s neck will flare out to make its “interior”).

¹¹ To be accurate, we should say that the *objet petit a*, the *a* of the gap that is often identified as *jouissance*, is a pure extimity function, \rightleftharpoons , an *a/a'* of self–intersection rather than a label for the void between origin and end.



By representing the (non-immersed) Projective Plane (left square), the Möbius band (middle square) and Klein bottle as polygons, the properties of non-orientation (middle square) and self-intersection (right square) can be thematized by vectors that come close to the circulation of meaning in Lacan's various *mathemes* for the metaphor. Even the concept of metaphor's appearance as logically secondary corresponds to the way the Möbius band "runs in both directions" when its dotted line edges are glued together; and how the Klein bottle intersects itself at the lower left corner while appearing to flow continuously from the upper left. The gapped circle re-stages immersion when it returns to intersect itself at *a*. This self-intersection is a void, because *a* cannot resolve its logical and experiential priorities, just as *x*, "meaningfulness" can only emerge from within a signifier but never *as* a signifier, only a signified, *s*".

Latency offers us a way to see this in terms of projective surfaces, where there *is no bar* (no threshold cutting into the continuous 2-d surface), but where any bar (or curtain, or veil — things that cut off access of the viewer to the viewed in visual terms) is really an instruction to cross into the space it has appeared to cut off. Metaphor shows what it violates. It creates a hiddenness that it then reveals through this "extimacy" of "*trans-gression*."¹²



René Magritte, *Memoires d'un Saint* (1960)

§2: The Vico Connection

This is consistent with Vico's theory of metaphor. Lacan would have been able to show precisely how those who have attempted to explain Vico's theory have gone wrong. Vico gives an account of the emergence of language without explaining that, by language, he does not mean simply the exchange of signs, which is done by most animal species and must have been done by proto-humans. The first human language is metaphoric and, as such, capable of creating true subjects. Vico's

¹² Transgression (privation>prohibition>violation) is a constant that plays the same role in geometry as it does in distinguishing inter-subjectivity from trans-subjectivity, as Lacan does in the Three Prisoners' Dilemma. This anecdote can in fact be "solved" by using privation>prohibition>violation as markers for the three stages by which three prisoners with three dots affixed to their backs, must guess their color, knowing that there were three white dots and two black dots in the Warden's "set."



Seahaven, like Magritte's sky surrounded cylinder, appears seamless to the only non-actor on the set, Truman. As a "dummy" Truman is the effective cause of the show where he is featured as dupe. Lacan's use of the function of the dummy in the game of bridge is instructive. Truman cannot interact with the instructional protocols of the town, but by his $+/-$ or early/late missteps, he generates the show's drama. The function of the crossing the bar in order to create a *place* for the signified comes precisely out of the $/$ that creates a contronymic relationship out of the $+$ and $-$, early and late. The latent signifier of *The Truman Show* is of course the ruse by which the prisoner does not know (for he can never signify) his imprisonment.

in this illusion is maintained by the anamorphic moon, where the director Cristof maintains technical and artistic control. Various devices maintain invisible links, ∂ , that coordinate the illusion.

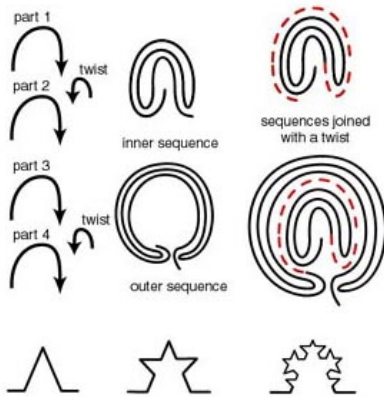
In stage and cinema performances, the complete enclosure of the diegetic space of acting is maintained by another method. The actors pretend not to see the gap in the curtain. This blindness is supported by a complicit audience, who is *blind to their blindness*. Not seeing that others don't see (or rather pretend not to see), is another way to establish the link, ∂ , which now reveals itself as contronymic and reciprocal, \Leftrightarrow . The twist of this Möbius band reveals the ∂ at specific spots honored by traditions: the actor's soliloquy or the sudden confrontation of the camera (and audience) by actor who take over as narrators (cf. Woody Allen's *Whatever Works*).

Metaphor happens at this surface/line separating actors on the interior of Magritte's $<360^\circ$ sky-bound interior/ exterior as "the first thing we encounter" that retroactively implicates a logical priority. In the theatrical analogy, actors appear out of their own virtual past. For Vico's first humans, Zeus is not seen, but when thunder shakes them with unimaginable fear, the retroac-

account of the emergence of metaphor is Lacanian in the sense that he sees metaphor not as a plus or minus but, rather, as a crossing of a bar, $+$. Metaphor creates the thresholds and frames it uses to create the places that will be appropriated by signifiers. It is essential to see these thresholds and frames in ambitious ways, even to extend them to the idea of the "fourth wall" of cinema and theater, where actors must be imagined to be blind to the audience who watches them from one side, while they act as if surrounded by a 360° virtuality on the other side.

René Magritte's *Memoires d'un Saint* economically captures Vico's idea of the bar created by metaphor. All the while it uses the structure of the gapped circle to show how latency has used the two "immersions" of the projective plane to create conditions of non-orientation and self-intersection. Although Magritte's theatrical curtain does not twist as it closes on itself, the idea of open and closed do. Once completely shut, the sky finishes its 360° circuit. We could compare this to the enclosure of *Seahaven*, the movie-set town of *The Truman Show*, to make its one victim, Truman, completely unaware of the black void surrounding it. The gap

tively realize that it was Jove’s flash that had blinded them, and that they are “still blind” to what Zeus intended to say, making the thunder into a continuous, polyform, latent signifier. Zeus appears out of his infinity, his already /always status as an eternal being. The collective human response to this primary event of the thunder was to discover its secondariness by uncovering a logical primary, the Zeus latent to nature, hidden in all things. The first humans made swidden clearings in the forest that they might observe the sky. The sacrificed live victims



and offered their blood and fat to the gods in exchange for signs revealed by vivisection. The sacrificial altar became the household hearth; the circumscribed blindness became the prohibition of allowing strangers to see the hearth; this exclusion became the space of the first households, “Cyclopean” because of their single eye, the hearth, which was simultaneously a gap, a ∂ , a feature of control, a $<360^\circ$. The Cyclops’ dwellings had one entry, protected by spiritual as well as physical fortifications, a single “eye” that could be effectively constructed mathematically as a fractal winding

pathway such as the Thesean labyrinth. Note that such enfiladed entries were not mazes but meanders. The interior space was secured by origami, not heavy gates. Only in this way could interior and exterior be protected spiritually as well as physically.¹³

Of course, Vico explains, it wasn’t the sky that was angry with humans; it was the projective transfer of the feral pre-humans own ferocity and emotional investments. Fear of thunder, inverted, is the anger that is perceived as the *cause* of the thunder, a cause that could only be located by making its *logos*, its word, into a place, a *locus*, and a time — eternity. The bar was created and crossed, the sky became the skull of Jove, thanks to the trope of using something familiar and close to describe something unfamiliar and distant. This is the $<360^\circ$ Magritte shows us in *Memoires d’un Saint*, the circle or sphere with the operational gap, the ∂ , used by the director of *The Truman Show* in his anamorphic moon-station.

Zeus is violent and crude, Vico says, because the pre-humans were violent and crude. Most students of Vico get this much. What they fail to grasp, however, is how, like the little girl imagining she will grow a tooth in her bottom (footnote 4), the first humans not only lack something, they lack the signifier both for that something and for that something's absence — and they will always lack a signifier, because the signifiers they encounter will all represent the void of signification, ∂ . They face the impossible task of signifying not only their lack but their lack of a

¹³ The “origami cure” worked for Athens during the plague, where the oracle instructed that Athenians could rid themselves of the disease if they could double the size of the altar at Delos.

means of expressing the lack, their *mentality* that is unable to grasp things abstractly, as signifiers. This doubled lack creates the boundary condition, the *frame*, by which they see the sky as — what else could it be but a signifier of an empty space — a frame! The frame (or curtain, or threshold, etc.) is not something already familiar to them, as an analogy model of metaphor would suggest. They do not take something close at hand to imagine how something far away might be similarly structured. Rather, they use the metaphor as an embodiment of their very inability to embody. The frame is itself lacking, but in an objective way that, “read from the other side,” can be extended. In other words, we can reverse our ability to imagine that we are invisible to the blind actor to imagining that we can see what the blind actor sees in our place, as if we were gods sitting in the heavens.

And, extended it is. Jove’s blue skull can give way to Hephastus’s double-edged axe ... why? Because Athena needs to be born. Why? Because Zeus has feared a daughter stronger than he. Why? Because he has swallowed Metis. Why? Because it was prophesied that any children Metis might bear would be all-powerful. Why? Because Μητις, “metis,” as *technē* (craft, wisdom, cleverness, magical cunning) was already *the process of producing Zeus as a metaphor*, and if the process could produce “the great,” it could produce, using the same logic, a “greater-than-itself.” So Zeus tries to reverse the geometry of the situation by having Metis convert herself to a fly and swallowing her, the $X > Y$ into $Y > X$; in other words, Zeus realizes he is, as a god, a $>$ (“greater than”) threatened by another $>$ (“even greater than”), and the only antidote is extimity, $> \rightarrow <$.

If Zeus is the latent signifier of the lack that the first humans could metaphorize as a “latency-in-action,” leading from the imagination of the sky as the skull of Zeus to the story of the birth of Athena. The boundary, —, has a hole in it, —, or \bigcirc . (the signifying chain can be penetrated by an x , a latency — also representable by a , *jouissance*, or s) but this crossing will not be into another space like the one that has been cut off (the viewer’s) but a space of the curtain, veil, or bar itself, $+$. This allows Athena to occupy the citadel as a goddess both inferior and superior to Zeus. As “swallowed” (latent) she *emerges* (metaphor) from the signifier of the Father, whose name is the thunder (and thus is “impossible to pronounce”). Note that the privation of “impossible” becomes the *prohibition* attached to the name of any father-god.

In Lacan’s extended *matheme* for the metaphor, the x , the latent signifier that is the “signified to the subject” in the Name of the Father’s relation to the Mother’s Desire, is the phallus.¹⁴ In

¹⁴ Only subjects with a relation to the name-of-the-father, then, will have access to metaphor, which is a correlational activity of the neurotic subject with an unconscious. This might serve as a quick test for psychosis. A lack of metaphorical comprehension, as might be evident in the ability to get a joke or the point of a lesson, could suggest the psychotic relation to signifiers that short-circuits metaphors delaying tactics. See Dan Collins, “Psychoanalysis and Education,” *Lacunae* 17 (December 2018): 85–104.



the story of Zeus and the birth of Athena, Athena's appearance as a type of "greater Aphrodite" is that of a virginal armed maiden, similar to Artemis. Virgin huntresses are phallic, to say the least. This is made clear in stories where the phallic goddess is exposed to view, as in Actæon's encounter with the bathing Diana. Diana splashes water on the hapless Actæon, transforming him into a

stag; one way of reading this would be to compare the water to ejaculate and the stag to the latent signifier of the hunted within the hunter, the lack within the seeker. *As his own lack*, Actæon is devoured by his hounds, but even the chase testifies that this *askesis* occurs over a "surface of pain" akin to the one Lacan cites as the surface of Daphne's attempted escape from Apollo.¹⁵ Daphne's fate is transformation into a tree (actually, into Persephone); Actæon's fate is to be devoured by a triplicate dog (three bitches overtake him first), a stand-in for Cerberus. Again, the *bar* which when crossed reveals the lack of a lack. Hades ("the invisible") — the ultimate latent signifier — was also regarded as a treasury of signifiers (the poetic trope of Pluto's wealth).

The process by which one signifier replaces another. designate by $S/S', S'/S'', S''/S''' \dots$, I abbreviate as $S_2 \dots S_2$. It's the temporal encounter of new signifiers within the syntagmatic chain, based on choices from the paradigmatic dimension of optional signifiers. Extending definitions using the dictionary idea, without paying attention to paradigmatic possibilities, means that we can keep on going, replacing each new definition with yet another, until the dictionary after taking us for a wild ride, deposits us back where we started. Metaphor, however, does not do this. What is evident in the above version of the metaphor matheme is that, "mathematically," the cancellation of $\$'$ leads to the substitution of s for x , a "signified that is unknown and remains so." Lacan: "Here the capital S s are signifiers, x is the unknown signification, and s is the signified induced by the metaphor, which consists in the substitution in the signifying chain of S for S' ." Lacan calls the mutual cross-cancelling of $\$'/\$'$ as an "elision of S' ," the condition of the metaphor's success. This success has to do with the radical and perpetual status of the latent signifier as latent. It never shakes off the negative. It is never the body of the naked goddess re-

¹⁵ See Leonard Barkan, "Diana and Actæon: the Myth as Synthesis," *English Literary Renaissance* 10, 3 (September 1980): 317–359. See also Norman O. Brown, "Metamorphoses II: Actæon," in *American Poetry Review* (November/December 1972).

vealed in its full nudity once the veil has been removed. Diana is the radical uncanny in visual terms, the “appearance of that which ought not to appear.” Thus, Medieval commentators on the story of Diana and Actæon labored heavily over the issue of whether Actæon was at fault or not. The answer lies in the forensics of haunted houses and enchanted forests and the culpability of those who live in the former but wander in the latter.

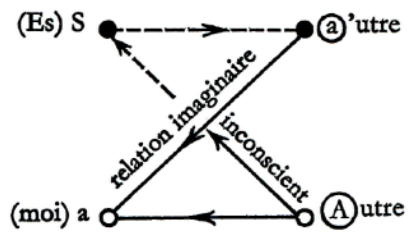
This helps clarify the relation of the feminine charade to the masculine imposture. The charade is like a (concealing) costume, the imposture is a claim that is presented in the face of knowing it cannot be supported. Masculine imposture relates to the claim to “have” a phallus, in the face of the fact that castration is a condition imposed on all who would make this claim.¹⁶ The phallus is always in the possession of the Other, even when anatomical evidence suggests otherwise. The woman can make a semi-legitimate claim to “have” a phallus, thanks to the rhetoric of the not–all, although making the claim immediately engages refuting the claim. Because of this ambiguity of possession, sexuation itself could be seen to be a result of metaphor’s latency, where the occulted term is radically resistant to exposure. This points to an anamorphosis function of latency, with the ∂ of anamorphosis linked to the fact that we see a curtain always in reference to some concealment, i. e. a reference to the act of concealment that has prohibited us through a privation. When Lacan says (*Écrits*, 465) that “This is not a conception for which nothing has prepared us. The signifier’s presence in the Other is, in effect, a presence that is usually closed off to the subject, because it usually persists there in a repressed (*verdrängt*) state, and insists from that place so as to be represented in the signified by means of its repetition automatism (*Wiederholungszwang*).” Lacan seems to be compressing the whole idea of psychoanalysis into this single issue! By saying this is not a conception we’re completely unprepared to take up, it means that we can address it, through a narrow passageway called “the lack of the signifier itself.” Take this literally. There is a signifier (a cipher) and the cipher, by virtue of being veiled, is lacking.

Let’s go back to the earlier *matheme* for metaphor ...

$$f\left(\frac{S'}{S}\right) S \cong S (+) s$$

Is it possible to link this version, reduced to the act of crossing the bar, to the L-schema, a diagram about what goes on in psychoanalysis? In the L-schema there is indeed a “crossing of the bar,” where the Unconscious of the Analysand, put in the charge of the Analyst, is coaxed

¹⁶ Again, the contrast between Speaking and Being seems to play a role, as in the contrast between the masculine position of “having” (but not really having) a phallus thanks to the rule that, within the Symbolic, mandates symbolic castration; and “being” a phallus as long as not-all of the ~~woman~~ is the phallus or under the phallic law.



into getting past the bar constructed by the Imaginary, the ego presences of the Analyst and Analysand as two egos sitting in a room talking and listening to each other: the physical “site” of the clinic that we can compare to a Euclidean schema with perspective rules about overlap, size diminution with increasing distance, etc. There is here a necessary denial of the horizon’s infinity; it is reduced to a signifier without a signified. Although we see parallel lines converge to a point, we bracket this as a necessary fiction of the space of appearance.

This is a function of replacing one signifier with another, $S/S''/S'''$ This “room in space” is, however, not quite equal, not = but \cong , “approximately equal to.” There is a small remainder. Is this comparable to the ∂ of anamorphosis? Is the small angle at which the blurred image becomes readable, like a code translated, relevant to the crossing of the bar between the signifier and the signified? After introducing the matheme $f(S...S') S \cong S$ (—) s as expanding $f(S) 1/s$, Lacan emphasized the idea of maintenance. “The — sign placed in () manifests here the maintenance of the bar — which, in the first algorithm (S/s) denotes the irreducible nature of the resistance of signification as constituted in the relations between signifier and signified” (Écrits, 428). This maintenance, is this not the ∂ of anamorphosis? This makes reading $/s$ convert into emphasis on the function of resistance. In Lacanian terms, resistance means one and one thing only, the relation of the Real to the Symbolic. Since the L-schema crosses the Imaginary with the Symbolic (representing the interests of the Unconscious), we can see that the Real in the Unconscious is conveyed thanks to its resistance–function. When it comes to crossing the Imaginary “space” of the Analysand / Analyst, it is the resistance that does the trick.

Fortunately, we have a joke that illustrates this exactly. During World War I, a French soldier trapped behind German lines has escaped and now must return to the French side without being shot by his own countrymen. As he approaches, he is challenged by the sentries: “Halt, who goes there?” “—I am a Frenchman, a comrade, let me return!” “—Well, if you’re really a Frenchman, sing the second verse of ‘The Marseilles?’” “—But, I don’t know the second verse of La Marseilles!” The sentries immediately accept this response: “Pass, Frenchman!” If he had been able to sing the second verse, he would have given away that he was a German spy needing to know everything a Frenchman should know, at least in the German mind. Germans would not fully appreciate the irony that no Frenchman would know the second verse. To be truly French, one must know exactly *how to be embarrassed* about this.

This, I believe, is the function of resistance embodied by the (—), and the latency that distinguishes metaphor from analogy. If the Euclidean world did not also offer this resistance by fearing infinity, and if this fear was not also the place for the 2-d manifolds that, when immersed into 3-space model our encounter with the uncanny by being non-orientable and self-intersecting, the Unconscious could never exist, for metaphor (whose first and main form comes as the Name-of-the-Father) could not exist.¹⁷ The unconscious and metaphor are united on the matter of resistance, and resistance is the “business at hand” of the L-schema, emblem of all psychoanalysis.

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Boalsburg, Pennsylvania, August 2020

¹⁷ It has been said that Euclidean principles were invented to defend against the idea of infinity. In fact, projective geometry posits the infinity that Euclid was afraid of, and is logically prior to Euclid. Although Euclid “comes first” in the forward-moving experience of history, it retroactively refers to projective geometry’s logical priority. In a strange way, the history of geometry reflects precisely the relation of metaphor to the latent signifier; and in Vico’s historical account of the first human thought, this, too, is a manifestation of a fear of infinity.