

## Seminar IX, April 11, 1962: *Lexis*

If anything, the psychoanalyst and champion of the Freudian field, Jacques Lacan, had style. His dress was impeccable. In Chapter 17 of Seminar VII, Lacan noted that the person “begins to organize himself as clothed.” Blogger Graham McAleer has written, eloquently, that “fashion is not about liberation, benevolence, and titillation. It is about fetishization: law and property, hierarchy and privilege, master and slave. Fashion is not about being a citizen of the world but *jouissance*.”<sup>1</sup>

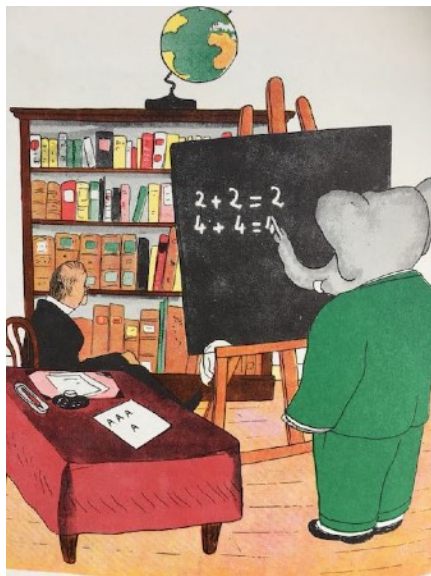


Figure 1. Jean de Brunhoff and Laurent de Brunhoff, “Babar Does Maths,” from *Babar à l’Ecole*, 1990. If we can forget for the moment that Babar allows us to forget the atrocities of the Belgians in the Congo, the very country where an imaginary utopia of elephants had existed, and where the precocious and dapperly dressed Babar managed to escape to Europe to receive his education in preparation for his restoration as king, de Brunhoff’s clever fantasy is here altered to show Babar as demonstrating the principle of idempotency in the mathematical form of  $x + x = x$ , which he did not do in the original.

back of *Las Meninas*. There are the two Papin Sisters, the two linguistic functions, metaphor and metonymy, and the split down Lacan’s own speech known as the *mi-dire*. There is the lack that is

At first, Lacan’s thinking seems, like his marked division between what he said and the way that he said it, a matter of two parts. There is the split of the subject, S, into conscious and unconscious lives, fraught by the twin demons of alienation and separation. There is of course the famous Mirror Stage, with its effects of creating things in pairs, such as (following Freud) the ideal other and other ideal. There is the *corps morcélé* teetering at the edge of pre-subjectivity’s autoeroticism and the masterful virtual image supported by its Symbolic family and friends. There are even two deaths.

The theme of two’s is not just spatial, it’s the temporality of the *après coup*, the 1 of counting that is not discovered until the number 2 is reached, and even a future that is not realized except as a past-to-have-been, the future anterior. There is the unary trait, a now that is an archeology of a *ne’er* to be forgotten moment in the past, just at the moment when a father’s cough became a trait for future Dora’s to suffer. Topologically, there is are the two voids of the torus, the two edges and two sides of the Möbius band, defeated with a twist, the two antipodes of extimity, the intimate exterior and alien interior, the *invers* of psychoanalysis itself. There are the “two 2’s” of discourse, the “two 2’s” of sexuation, the two egos of the L-schema; Lacan even divided the seemingly single punch of the *poinçon* into two parts, and even in two ways, a  $<$  and  $>$ , also a  $\wedge$  and  $\vee$ .

There is the doubly aimed arrow of Eros in the story Lacan retells about Apollo and Daphne in Seminar VII, the doubling of the perspectival world inside an anamorphic other in his study of Holbein’s painting, *The Ambassadors*, and the double portrait at the

<sup>1</sup> Graham McAleer, “Jacques Lacan: Psycho-Analysis and Fashion,” December 2, 2017. URL: <https://ethicsoffashion.com/jacques-lacan-psycho-analysis-fashion/>

simultaneously a surplus, the Parrhasius who defeats his rival with a painted curtain, and the voice that is ventriloquism and the gaze that returns the look. True to his Hegelian upbringing, Lacan splits every synthesis into a new antagonism of thesis and antithesis, just at a higher level, just as every ring in the Borromeo knot is responsible for holding together the two rings it's not. In fact, wherever there are three's in Lacan, the third is in service to some couple, perhaps an unconscious tribute to Lacan's Catholic upbringing, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. And, when he looks at Joyce, he looks twice, once at Stephen Hero and then at *le pauvre hère*, the poor wretch, the writer on the verge of psychosis, the *hérétique* like Hamlet, on the verge of killing his second father on behalf of his first, the Ghost.

As Dan Collins has written,<sup>2</sup> these 2's require us to employ a two-fold style of critique, one side of which, the "criticism by the cut" is both itself about the 2's and requires its companion criticism, punctuation, to heal what has been wounded by winding, the torus being the way to wind, in that every hole has a *Doppelgänger*. The cut is based on the function of the distinction that is simultaneously an edge and a center. Although punctuation "comments on and completes the signification of S<sub>1</sub>," the cut "isolates S<sub>1</sub> in its non-meaning and halts the obsessive pursuit of meaning as explanation."

knowledge	1	1	1
faith	1	1	0
resistance	1	0	1
ignorance	1	0	0
error	0	1	1
rumor	0	1	0
rationalization	0	0	1
science	0	0	0

But, if it's meaning we're looking for, Lacan is one hell of a place to come, and in two other essays, Collins points to psychoanalysis as a matter of metaphor, which is both about the failure of meaning as such — something Collins took up in hi)s expansion of the Gettier formula of "justified true belief" into an eight-fold ladder of faith, resistance, ignorance, error, rumor, rationalization, and science.<sup>3</sup> At which point we remember that it was a ladder that *le pauvre hère* Tim Finnegan fell from to what would be the first of his two deaths, to dream a dream that began where it ended, the last half first completed by the first half last, "riverrun, past Eve and Adam's, from swerve of shore to bend of bay, brings us by a commodius vicus of recirculation back to Howth Castle and Environs" — to which we earn the privilege of adding, if we finish the book, "A way a lone a last a loved a long the" (whose punctuation is to be found on page 1, retroactively).

Figure 2. Dan Collins' expansion of the "Gettier field," through a binary number series whose 100s digit is Truth, 10s is Belief, and units are Justification. Thus, 110 is true and believed but unjustifiable. Science, according to Karl Popper's *modus tolens* principle cannot depend on justification nor belief, and must establish any fact as falsifiable.

How was it that Lacan missed the references to Vico? Not just the Howth Castle and Environs version of HCE ("Here Comes Everybody," meaning Vico) but the Latinate *commodius vicus* (there is a Vico Road in Dalkey, which lies opposite Howth Head, where Stephen Dedalus in *Ulysses* goes to meet the blabby schoolmaster, Garrett Deasy, a chapter overdetermined by repetitions of Vico's ideal eternal history (gods,

<sup>2</sup> Dan Collins, "Stealing Money from Offices," *Lacunæ* 16 (July 2018): 105.

<sup>3</sup> Dan Collins, "On Metaphor," *(Re)turn: A Journal of Lacanian Studies* 6 (Spring, 2011): 149–157; Dan Collins, "A Short Digression on the Meaning of Knowledge," *Lacunæ* 18 (2019): 79–93. I must take the credit/blame for converting Collins' + and – designations to binary 1s and 0s. This shows that the Gettier field "counts down" from 111 (justified true belief) to 000 (science) as one would count down from 7 to zero; but it also shows that the field can be inverted, with significant pairings of "palindromic" elements (faith with error; ignorance with rationalization). These correspond to the i(a) — I(A) "recirculation" short-circuit in the Graph of Desire, where contention, strife, and a "struggle to the death" is historically associated with the demand of the Master for recognition. This is the first quilting point (*point de capiton*) of the Symbolic consciousness, the first attempt to put an end to what Collins has characterized elsewhere ("Stealing Money from Offices) as the "obsessive search for meaning as explanation."



Figure 3. Giambattista Vico, the “Dipintura,” frontispiece to *The New Science* (1744). Although Vico promised to give a detailed explanation for the presence of all of the objects shown in this emblem-like scene of the first clearing made by human (cyclopean) culture, he left out the helmet of Hermes (lower left).

heroes, men) to form, in its own way, a torus whose central void is Dublin Bay.<sup>4</sup> If Vico is a void for Lacan, it was thereby allowed to play the role of a scholarly anamorphosis, given the 18c. Neapolitan philosopher of culture’s proclivity for concealing his “highest truths” within the “lowest levels” of his primary work, *The New Science*. Like Lacan, you quote him at your peril. The true Vico, like the true Lacan, is a “truth *about* truth,” which one of Lacan’s analysand’s guessed without being prompted (Seminar VII, lesson 14).

What critics say in their negative assessment of Vico also applies to Lacan: that he put style above content, *lexis* (Gr. λέξις, “word”) above *phasis* (Gr. φάσις, “sentence”).<sup>5</sup> In Vico’s case this was a vocational obligation, for most of his life was spent as a Professor of Rhetoric, requires to give annual lectures on eloquence to a composite audience of faculty, students, and alumni at the University of Naples.<sup>6</sup> Given that Vico was thinking, writing, and teaching under the shadow of the Spanish Inquisition, cast from its own HCE, Caserta, Vico had no choice but to bend the truth of his sentences and sublimate his truths of truths, like any lover of love itself, within style. His favorite compositional concealment trick was the lipogram, created by ellipsis, the unsaid conclusion. Any who doubt this technique have only to regard the engraving Lacan commissioned for the the 1725 edition of *The New Science*, updated and reprinted for the 1744 edition. Vico claims to speak of every element shown in the image, and does in his accompanying inventory — fail but one, the famous helmet of the messenger–thief god Hermes, “hidden in plain site” at the bottom left corner, in the direct line extended from the statue of Homer, just as Poe had Minister D\_ had hidden the unopened letter

addressed to the Queen of France in his card-rack, for all to see.<sup>7</sup>

Where the sentence cannot bear up to the labor of “truth of truth,” the word must accept this duty. Style, *lexis* — and without a doubt Lacan’s *mi-dire* way of speaking was his undisputed oral fingerprint — became a way of simultaneously creating voids within his argument and creating excesses that drove many

<sup>4</sup> Equally ignored in Lacanian scholarship is the study of this overdetermination by the Canadian-Jewish poet A. M. Klein, “A Shout in the Street: An Analysis of the Second Chapter of Joyce’s *Ulysses*,” *Literary Essays and Reviews* 1951 (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2019); URL <https://doi.org/10.3138/9781487589325-081>

<sup>5</sup> “*Lexis agonistike* however is from the term *skiagraphia*, meaning a rough sketch or outline of painting. Aristotle once again opposes Plato by believing that *lexis agonistike* does not need questions asked, but only answers. The answer refers to the use of invention given to the actor because the writing portion is only outlined.” “*Lexis* (Aristotle,” *Wikipedia*, URL [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lexis\\_\(Aristotle\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lexis_(Aristotle)). My eventual point to be made will be that Lacan’s *lexis* depends on his ability to deliver lectures that were simultaneously well-formed and extemporaneous, creating an atmosphere of chance out of which emerged a driving sense of necessity, in the Greek mythological form of *dictē*.

<sup>6</sup> See Ned O’Gorman, “Aristotle’s Phantasia in the Rhetoric: *Lexis*, Appearance, and the Epideictic Function of Discourse,” *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 38, 1 (2005): 16–40.

<sup>7</sup> It is no coincidence that Poe’s card-rack is, phonetically, a palindrome. Pronounced backward, it is “kcardrac.” The story is palindromic as well, with a chiasmus whose two parts meet, bow-tie fashion, at the point where the Police commissioner hands Dupin the reward cheque. See Richard Kopley, *Edgar Allan Poe and the Dupin Mysteries* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). Kopley points out that in the first half of “The Purloined Letter” there are half-phrases “answered” by complementary components placed in reverse order in the second half.

in his audiences to the breaking point. His excess was a trademark. It led Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen to accuse Lacan not just of stealing his material from anywhere, everywhere. An “inspired autodidact — that is, a prodigious *assimilator*, open to every influence, quick to grasp resemblances and analogies among the most diverse fields,” Borch-Jacobsen did not stop in accusing Lacan of a congenital plagiarism:

Whereas Freud, throughout his life, never stopped his self-analysis (mercilessly interrogating himself about his “family romances,” his relationship with his father, his infantile megalomania, his identification with heroes, Lacan burned all his bridges, broke every filiation and every paternity (including the analytic ones), to offer the world a completely fabricated *personage* — that of the Analyst with a capital A, always Other, always Elsewhere. And this personage, naturally, masked no one: self-display (*Selbstdarstellung*) without a self (*Selbst*). Lacan, whose exhibitionism was immense (it verged on the ridiculous), exhibited nothing after all but his own histrionics — that is, his own absence of “self.” This fascinating personage, who so obligingly took the stage in his seminars and in private life, was a terrific actor (or “clown,” as he himself said), capable of all roles to the same extent that he was incapable of any one in particular. Was it so strange that he finally identified with the whole repertoire of the era?<sup>8</sup>



Figure 4. We must take the expression, “Lacan: The Absolute Master” seriously in the way Lacan as teacher played the fool (the automatism embodied by the phonograph in Victrola Records’ adopted imagery of the pet hearing the voice of its dead master). Lacan, speaking from “between the two deaths,” engaged an animalistic response in his followers, an obedience “to the death” in the positive form of a *Lebensphilosophie* on par with Heidegger’s.

An emperor so well dressed as Lacan was thus able to “show himself fully,” exposed (literally undressed) as “complete fool,” thanks to his renunciation of the obsessional pursuit of new meaning in favor of a *lexis* that allowed him the excesses due to a thief who finds himself in an abandoned dark palace with no guards, no royalty, no competitors about to restrain his appropriation of a “treasury of signifiers.” If Lacan, like the famous delusional naked emperor, was as empty-headed as the fool he made himself out to be, he was no less able to rely on shining a light in the faces of his audiences to the extent that they remembered him in resplendent finery. The true emperor, as has been said, needs no clothes, since others will imagine the best livery “each in their own way.”<sup>9</sup> We read what we want to read, just as the audiences of his twenty-seven seminars heard what they wanted to hear: the voice of a dummy, channeling the Voice of the Master, another of the many doubles Lacan employed to do a “criticism by the cut” to reserve, for his final act, a suture with a topological twist, in the place of a “criticism

<sup>8</sup> Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, *Lacan: The Absolute Master*, trans. Douglas Brick (Stanford, CA: Stanford University, 1991), 3.

<sup>9</sup> In this way, Lacan depended on the aphorism of Charles Baudelaire, that “Thank God we do not understand each other, otherwise we would never be able to agree!” By intentionally breeding misconceptions, Lacan transformed his audience into “errorlogical mechanisms” that, each unable to produce the right answer, could be added up to reveal a precise average number. Sir Francis Galton discovered “the wisdom of the crowd” by collecting the tickets that had failed to guess the exact weight of the prize ox at a county fair, to find that the average of all the 787 wrong guesses was impressively accurate (1,197 pounds). This has been made famous by Jim Surowiecki’s book *The Wisdom of Crowds*.

by punctuation.”<sup>10</sup>

In emphasizing that Lacan was not precisely an author but rather a teacher in the oral tradition, Jacques-Alain Miller elaborated his theory of Lacan’s essential Medievalism:

Lacan makes maxims or *sententiae* (in the Middle Ages, the word also meant “common place”). Thus, he does not allow the Other to choose what of Lacan must be repeated — and this, because he formalizes his own thought by expressing it in formulas which are simple, or which at least seem simple. Thus, “The unconscious is structured like a language.” “Desire is the desire of the Other,” and “The signifier represents the subject for another signifier” are *sententiae* of Lacan. At present, part of our task lies in culling these *sententiae*, in gathering them into a florilegium [a collection of literary extracts; an anthology]. Thus we do with Lacan, because he seems to present himself as an author in the medieval sense of the word, i.e., as the one who knows what he says.

What can we say about this knowing, however? In Borch-Jacobson’s view, Lacan’s truths are stolen goods, indiscriminately lifted and displayed without shame. By speaking rather than writing, Lacan seemed to give the front of the stage over to *lexis*, allowing his sources to supply the needed *phasis*. It was up to his followers to, so to speak, “complete his sentences,” supplying the supplement to his aposiopesis methodology of presenting only part of what needed to be said. If we take this practice to its ancestor, we find the *tessera*, properly presented in the plural as *tesseræ* because a clay token with a decorative design was made to be broken in half by two friends upon parting. At their hoped-for reunion, the token would be rejoined, along the ragged fracture, an act that simultaneously celebrated and authenticated the original breakage.

Lacan’s teaching as *tesseræ* engages another term in Harold Bloom’s musicology of repurposed Greek terms, that of *clinamen*. Joyce’s Eve and Adam’s was of course a reference to Lucretius’ “even atoms” flowing along as Lacan envisaged parallel flows of signifiers in need of a good quilting. Coming from below, the demand of the not-yet-to-fully-be-a-subject pushes into this flow from below, and here we might take advantage of the situation to draw a parallel to the contrasting terms *graphein* and *katagraphein*. The former refers to writing as such, the latter to an *inscription* famously connected to the action taken by Jesus as an apotrope in the episode with the woman accused of adultery (*Matthew* vii 53, viii 1–11). The scribes and Pharisees, finding Jesus again in the Temple, brought before him a woman accused of adultery, to effect what amounted to a forced choice. If Jesus failed to condemn the woman to death, as they anticipated, they would accuse him of violating Mosaic law. If he acquiesced to their ruling (the stoning had

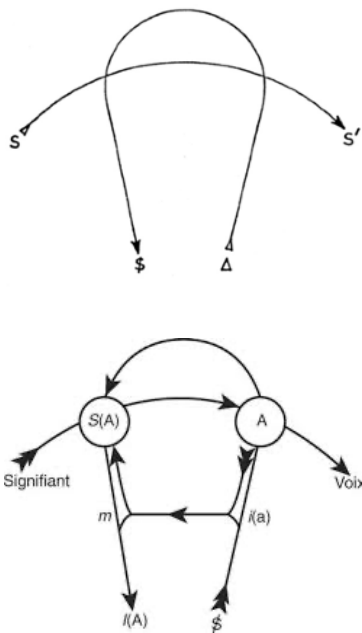


Figure 5. Lacan’s “Graph,” more commonly referred to as “The Graph of Desire,” in its early “brain stem” form. The signifying chain S—S’ is quilted by the Δ at a point later identified as the *Autre*, recovers its signifier retroactively. A short-circuit opens up between the *i(a)*, ideal ego, and *m*, or ego, back to the ego ideal, *i(A)*. In this loop, we might fit the entirety of René Girard’s thesis of semblance and rivalry, the fight to the death of the Lacanian–Hegelian Master demanding recognition.

<sup>10</sup> This thesis is developed more fully in Mladen Dolar, “His Master’s Voice, His Master’s Ear,” in *A Voice and Nothing More* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2008), 74–81. This thesis could be extended to consider Lacan’s *voix acousmatique* — his specifically hypnotic effect on audiences, something that can be only indirectly inferred through transcriptions and translations.



Figure 6. When he meets the adulteress, Jesus is depicted (retroactively) to write what he had said: “He that is without sin.” Pieter Bruegel the Elder, in the Courtauld Institute Galleries, London (The Princes Gate Collection, 9), 1565.

already been pronounced as her sentence), they would diminish his reputation as a merciful savior. Either way, their plan was to put a stop to his wild sermonizing either on account of the sentence of the law (critique by punctuation) or the letter (critique by the cut, the rhetorical *lexis*). Instead of responding immediately, Jesus knelt down and began scribbling on the Temple pavement with this finger. This was not an entirely unusual thing to do. It was a Semitic custom for someone needing to “buy time” and show that they were thinking of saying something decisive to begin to make marks on the ground.<sup>11</sup> In other words, Jesus was aware of the immanence and structure of the forced choice. His action of *katagraphēin* introduced a pause in this drama

that could be considered as a rhetorical enthymeme — the insertion of a “silent term” allowing the audience, representing the ruling Sanhedrin (the Jewish supreme council of post-exilic times which had religious, civil, and criminal jurisdiction), to skip over the inconvenient truth, that they were unable to specify executions. Jesus’s silent middle term was a pause that, in refusing to respond to the demand, created a retroactive awareness of the true legal situation, alongside the attempt to force Jesus’ hand.

It was not recorded what Jesus had inscribed on the floor, although Pieter Bruegel opined that he had written what he had said (Fig. 6). Aside — Jesus’s doodles might be easily compared with Lacan’s often-complex *mathemes* and topological drawings. Certainly the distinction between *graphein* (Jesus’s second bending-down-to-write-something gesture) and the first *katagraphēin*. The *kata-* is both down and in. A *katagraphic* is an inscription that, like a tattoo or engraving, bites into its material substrate. The sign does not simply sit on top of a flat surface, it engages the surface materially, like a burin. Another common word for burin is the *cælum*, which also means “heaven” in Latin. Dürer used to complete his anagrammatical design for the title of his *Melencolia* §1, 1514, where *Melencolia* is intentionally misspelled so that the letters (again, a use of *lexis*) could be re-arranged to spell *limen caelo*, or “gate of heaven.”<sup>12</sup> This can mean, simultaneously, the gate of the wedge/burrin, the engraver’s tool to inscribe a *katagraphēin*. There is no reason to abandon one meaning for the other. As in the case of Jesus’s enthymemic kneeling, both are necessary aspects of responding to a forced-choice situation.

Back to Jesus: As well-instructed by John the Baptist, Jesus was aware that in cases of adultery, it is necessary to admit evidence from either or both the husband and/or co-adulterer. Evidently in this case, such evidence was not in record. If Jesus did not know this, he seemed to be making a lucky guess. The scribes and Pharisees, after being asked if any among them were so guiltless as to be qualified to throw the

<sup>11</sup> Raymond Brown, “Notes” and “Comment,” 30. “The Story of the Adulteress (vii 53, viii 1–11),” *The Gospel according to John I–XII*, a new translation with introduction and commentary, *The Anchor Bible* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 332–38. Brown notes that the problems of authorship and canonicity are overtaken by the fact that the story is undoubtedly ancient and of eastern origin.

<sup>12</sup> See David Ritz Finkelstein, *The Melencolia Manifesto* (San Rafeal, CA: Morgan & Claypool, 2016).



Figure 7. Here comes everybody, April 11, 1962.

first stone, and at the point of his second, *graphein* kneel, silently departed. The *katagraphein*, a “hapax” word found only once in the Bible, while *graphein* can be found in more than five hundred instances.<sup>13</sup> The enthymeme is *precisely* the strategy employed by the other “absolute master” (Borch-Jacobsen’s expression, not mine) to allow for emergence; and emergence is the other side of *kenosis* the first component of which is the “emptying-out” of meaning effected by Jesus kneeling to scribble on the Temple floor. Without supplying denotative signifiers, without “answering the question,” Lacan and Jesus set in motion the process of exaptation that has, in so many introductory psychology classes, allowed the wild guesses of indifferent undergraduates to, collectively, guess the exact number of jelly beans in a jar on the professor’s lectern. The argument here is that the enthymeme, the Lacanian *mi-dire* (and other half-way measures), and the delivery of the “inscription gesture” of the *katagraphein* constitutes a “virtuality of effectiveness.”

First, the element of virtuality: what is done is not done literally, but virtually, i. e. in the domain of the Imaginary. Jesus did not write anything intelligible, at least nothing that was thought worthwhile to record. His graphic blank — scribbling without writing anything in particular — was the downward counterpart to the silent interval this kneeling act inserted between the Pharisees call for a definitive response and Jesus’s inversion of the question into a redirected question. How Jewish! one would say. To answer a question with a question is to insert a place where a meaning has been expected. The virtuality of this pause cannot be ignored, nor can Lacan’s own awareness of the value of the pause, as when he puns and parodies Pausanias’s “pause” in *The Symposium’s dispositio* of speeches on the subject of love (Seminar VIII, *Transference*). We are talking about a signifier that signifies nothing. The nothing is the gap, a disturbance (*clinamen*) in the flow of cause, when causality gives way to casuistry.<sup>14</sup> Referring to a foundational paper, “Empty Speech and Full Speech in the Psychoanalytic Realization of the Subject,” Lacan remarked that (quoting Ben Hjørth):

... there is a profound speculative (that is, positive) force animating [Lacan’s] witticism [the parodic “Motto of ‘causalist’ thought” he gave as “*Cause toujours. (Devise de la pensée ‘causaliste’)*”. It is one which partakes of that mysterious, (side-)splitting quality of the joke or *Witz* to which Shakespeare, Freud and Hegel attended so closely, convinced that there are manifold, *Doppelsinnig*, even contradictory truths to be found in jest. While Lacan’s own flamboyant performances of wordplay are themselves often dismissed—most vehemently, of course, by those same colleagues, so-called “orthodox”

<sup>13</sup> See Jean-Daniel Causse, “Il n’y a grâce qu’insensée,” *Études théologiques et religieuses* 85, 3 (2010)/3: 359–369. DOI : 10.3917/etr.0853.0359. URL : <https://www.cairn.info/revue-etudes-theologiques-et-religieuses-2010-3-page-359.htm>

<sup>14</sup> Again, the theme of fool play: see Ben Hjørth, “Introduction: cause:rie :: repetition:s,” *S: Journal of the Circle for Lacanian Ideology Critique* 10 & 11 (2017–2018): 1–15.

Freudians — as the conscious obscurantism of a sophist, or simply the attention-seeking tomfoolery of a narcissistic poser, in retrospect it seems that this jester may well prove a prophet, at least when it comes to the strange, even paradoxical temporality of this weird object of metaphysical inquiry to which we still give the name “cause.”<sup>15</sup>

If the chain of signifiers organized by causes producing effects (also affects) can be parodied as a scam (casuistry), then the interruption of this scam — not the least of which is the paradigmatic bait-and-switch of the forced choice — can only be a pause, a silence, a chance for the scammers to turn around and hit the road. If it worked for Jesus, the thinking goes, it can surely work for Lacan, as a kind of “virtuality of effectiveness” from whose blank slate comes the *limen coelo* of the *katagraphein*. A gate and a fracture, a wedge that breaks into heaven ... unannounced, as it were.

Session 17, held on Wednesday, April 11, 1962, had few headlines to compete with. John F. Kennedy gave a press conference in Washington DC on the unfair practices of steel manufacturers. Georges Pompidou was again in the news, as was Jackie Kennedy. The Greek-French director Agnès Varda's *Cléo de 5 à 7* and Antonioni's *Leclisse* were playing at the cinemas. The day before the sharp-edged bassist Stu Sutcliffe died of a cerebral hemorrhage in Hamburg. Had he lived, the Beatles would have suffered a rockier career than with the Paul McCarthy, whose left-handedness made for better group photography. In short, Session 17 was one of the most notable things happening on April 11, the fool's month, whose *poisson* shape was to gain some considerable fame thanks to Lacan's introduction of Cantor circles.

It is evident throughout IX but especially in Session 17 that the audience's patience was beginning to wear thin, when, every Wednesday, Lacan would muddy the waters thought to be so smooth in Seminar VIII (*Transference*). Indeed, at end of that year, Lacan parted ways by parting waves: “What emerges as a fascinating form turns out to be invested with libidinal waves” (Sem. VIII, “Mourning the Loss of the Analyst,” 388 in Bruce Fink's translation). As in Mozart's aria from *Così fan tutte*, “Soave sia il vento,” two Lacans left that day, June 28, 1961, sailing away on the calm waters of the *Triebregungen*, the drive impulse. Lacan cited Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus*, a painting not coincidentally the most likely to induce the “Stendhal Syndrome,” the sudden collapse of art lovers overtaken by its beauty. If Lacan's audience was in thrall to the final words of Seminar VIII, their reactions on April 11 the next year were not recorded. Certainly, we might speculate that, in the spirit of Socrates' “sting ray” in *The Meno*, 79e–80d, by the time of the 17th session, the audience were not just numb but paralyzed, thanks to Lacan's topographical engagements. *Il vento* no longer was *suave*. The smooth ocean was parted by a more-than-phallic signifier, a *katagraphein* working at the prow of a ship in new waters.

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<sup>15</sup> Ben Hjorth, *ibid.*, 2.



**symmetric difference**

If Seminar IX is a pivot — or, rather, “cut” — in Lacan’s work, what is the argument for saying that Lesson 17 is a pivot in that Seminar? My defense begins with a deferral. It is a pivot mainly for “investigative purposes.” Given the inaccessibility many readers experience in relation to IX’s materials, the project of paraphrasing or, worse, explaining its contents would be wrong-headed. Although *Identification* is its appropriate and official title, an alternative might have been, *Getting Serious about Projective Geometry*. The chapter requires some expertise and willingness to meet Lacan halfway in his now focused assertion that for any study of psychoanalysis, projective geometry is a required course.

The introduction of Euler circles at the point of Lesson 17 is a demonstrable tipping point. A Euler circle looks like a normal circle. It is not. When used to diagram conditions and ideas, it looks like a Venn diagram. It is not. Why? How different? Although Lacan discusses Euler circles at the same time he is talking about set theory, we should note that, although Venn enclosures can be used to the full extent of any map of logical relationships, Euler circles are “limited to reality.” This is the account given by standard mathematical sources, but for psychoanalysis it has a pointed and luminary significance. If one revises this to read “limited to the speaking subject’s reality,” you have a two-edged sword. On one hand, abstractions ranging into pure logical relations would not be flagged by a Venn diagram. An overlap of two conditions can be made with Venn circles as long as logic allows. If two Euler curves attempt the same thing, their shared zone must be flagged and tagged, as “impossible.” Psychoanalysis, however, is familiar with this skull-and-crossbones sign. The striped tape marking off crime scenes restricts only the general public. Investigating officers may cross and investigate. The overlap that creates the impossible is allowable for Lacanians. It is the space (and time) of the Real. It is the non-projective map of the forced choice.

Unfortunately, Bruce Fink refers the cartography of the forced choice as a “vel,” a Venn diagram term that makes no distinction between the subject’s standardized behavior within the Symbolic and the alienation that creates a condition of the Real. A Venn diagram extends the subject across the forced

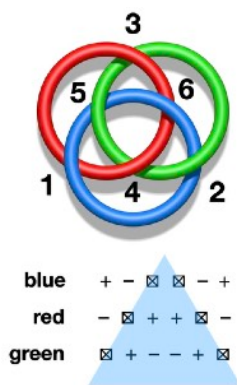


Figure 8. Using Gauss encoding, the pattern of “third rings” related to the crossing of each pair shows the role of “symmetrical difference.”

choice without noticing. It is tempting to use Freud’s late-in-life quip, *Psyche ist ausgedehnt; weiß nichts davon*. Psyche has no idea where it’s been asked to go. The robber however knows this territory well. As a con artist at best and killer at worst, he pretends to extend a choice to his victim: “Your money or your life!” But, of course there is no choice. Without money, life is no fun, and with a life no amount of money can solve your problems. The logic of this demand is circular; the paradigm springs from, as Lacan teaches, the original forced-choice relationship between speaking as an act (*énonciation*) and as content (*énoncé*). You must act to speak and when content wears thin, you have blahblahblah. Discourse as such will open up its small cracks to the extent that Unconscious content may be exposed and escape. Just such a jailbreak is what Lacan had in mind with the Dilemma of the Three Prisoners, discussed in his essay on the nature of Logical Time. In my view, Derek Hook has made a valuable contribution to the understanding of this parable by comparing the *inter*-subjectivity of the puzzle to its *trans*-subjective solution. In other words, were we to attempt a map of the Prisoners’ Dilemma using Venn diagrams, we would not notice this distinction. Using Euler circles, there would be a clear divide. We would not call the Prisoners’ Dilemma a set-theoretic problem;

rather, it is Eulerian. The same notation required to show how any two rings of the Borromeo knot adhere because of the *absence* of the third ring would show how any two prisoners may be seen by the third, who is *blind* to his own dot's color. In sum, Venn does not see the problem; Euler does. Why is this?

Lacan labels the would-be Venn diagram of two intersecting circles on page 173 of the Gallagher transcript as a “union minus the intersection” — a + minus a  $\times$ , or union sign,  $\cup$ , minus an intersection sign,  $\cap$ . This begins to look a lot like the bilateral distinctions Lacan made elsewhere to qualify the *poinçon*,  $\diamond$ , as both  $\langle \rangle$  and  $\wedge/\vee$ . He seems to have an eye for “criticism by the cut,” practicing it wherever the bland idea of unity, merger, or just “1” can be upgraded to “the unary.” Within the sentiments of the criticism by the cut, the unary always a two, and an *action* between a two. *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, for example, in my view should be understood in Joycean terms and re-titled, *The Twone of Psychoanalysis*.

Gauss coding of the Borromeo knot seems to be — because it generally is — a tautology. Rings simply rest on top of each other in a stack. However, this “stack” has the unusual property of having the topmost ring tuck under the bottommost. There is no top or bottom, although each ring relates to each of its neighbors in terms of being above one and below the other. The Gauss notation shows two things: (1) that it “cannot say anything” about the third ring in relation to any pair; and (2) that this Wittgensteinian silence is symmetrical. Its “space of which I cannot speak” rotates with every position of paired rings. The invisible — and hence virtual — *force* holding together the Borromeo rings is the effectiveness of the knot, which Euler can see and Venn cannot. The Venn talks through the most important zone of silence in all of psychoanalysis. Euler, respectfully, remains silent, in the tradition of the enthymeme, the *katagraphhein*, the lipogram, and the Impossible–Real. And, if silence as an existential quality of subjectivity can be carried over to the cases of blindness and invisibility — as it should, if we are to use Euler circles or any other graphic measure to gauge the projective geometrical nature of the psyche and its extensions, we may more fully understand what Freud's *ausgedehnt* means.

(1) It is gnostic, in the sense of *kenosis*, the “emptying out” that makes room for “knowing without knowing,” a more ancient term for the Unconscious.

(2) It is “inscribed beneath” — the clue we get from *katagraphhein* — in a symmetrical exchange that we first came across with Ernst Jentsch's two-term algorithm for the uncanny, between the subject, D, who does not yet know he/she is dead and the living subject, A, who, fearing death and running from it inadvertently runs into its arms:  $D_A \Leftrightarrow A_D$ .<sup>16</sup> By extending this Biblical *hapax legomenon* to the phenomenon of exchanges involving blindness, invisibility, and or silence, we gain access to situations like that of the Three Prisoners' Dilemma, where Euler circles maintain a silence and thus draw their magic lozenge around the impossible-Real.

(3) The lozenge is of course not unrelated to the Lacanian *poinçon*,  $\diamond$ , also re-written by Lacan as  $\langle \rangle$  and  $\wedge/\vee$ . What would Lacan have done with James Joyce's appropriation of the religious diagram known as the *vesica pisces*? It seems that he is fully aware of this not as an overlap but as a void, whose

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<sup>16</sup> Ernst Jentsch, “Zur Psychologie des Unheimlichen.” *Psychiatrisch-Neurologische Wochenschrift* 8, 22 (August 26, 1906): 195–98; and 8, 23 (September 1, 1906): 203–05. Freud cites Jentsch as a primary source but fails to give proper measure of the symmetry: Sigmund Freud, Hugh Haughton, and David McLintock, *The Uncanny* (Brantford, ON: W. Ross Mac-Donald School Resource Services Library, 2013).

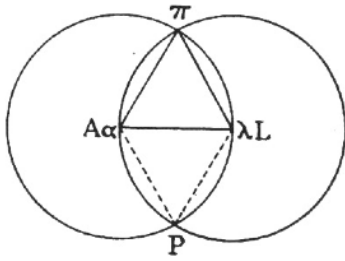


Figure 9. James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*, a Eulerian void katagraphed by the Real triangle,  $\alpha$ ,  $\lambda$ ,  $\pi$ , and the virtual (impossible) triangle ALP. The (maternal) void is therapeutic for HCE, the Vichian “ideal eternal history and theory of subjectivity presented in the saga.

*lip(s)* may be designated by Latin and Greek variants. Again, the Vico reference in ALP (“Anna Livia Plurabelle” but also ALP’s attempt to awaken HCE from his dream.

(4) The dream, like architecture, requires shelter, an insulating buffer to extend it. Here, however, “extension” and “insulation” require further specification. While the dreamer may be imagined as inside the dream, she is undeniably outside of it, paralyzed by sleep.

Although total paralysis is a physiological reality of deep sleep rather than REM sleep, the figure–ground reversal of the dream assigns the dreamer the function of a fixed “surface” onto which the animated figures and actions of the dream race across, in a semi-realistic simulation of everyday life. The insulation function is more properly called “idempotency” and related to the function of the electrical switch that, once activated, remains in the active position, until a

specific external criteria is met. In the example of the commonplace elevator/lift, one push calls the lift, subsequent pushing the button will not make the car come any faster or recall the request.

Idempotency is also a programming feature in computer algorithms designed to defend network servers against “denial of service” attacks, where malicious robots are planted to send simultaneous requests for responses from a targeted website. Just as the dream defends against external stimuli by incorporating the disturbance as a “dream event” internal to the ongoing dream, the computer algorithm attempts to immunize itself by mimicking the leading edge of the attack and reversing the command. Just as Plato divided *lexis* into *mimesis* and *diegesis*, imitation and account, dreams and computer programs use imitation and story line to maintain the dreaming state of the dreamer as well as the serving operations of the server.

Lacan’s idea of Euler circles is correct, mathematically and psychoanalytically. Thanks to his distinction of the Euler circle from the Venn circle, our understanding of other topological features in this Seminar and others can be reached by the non-mathematician, at least on a prosaic basis. This is Lacan’s *lexis*, his style, his manner and manner-*ism*. Just as he was splendidly dressed, he is resplendent in the way the text flows freely from one topic to the next, as if Lacan were a kind of Charlie Parker inventing motifs and arabesques on the fly. If *ausgedehnt* means anything for Lacan, it is the ability to speak in this way, *in this style of extension*, without having to know in advance where he is going, but all the while giving the impression of being in possession of an absolute design. If I could compare this to a “nothing and nowhere” design, I would illustrate my point with a quote from Lewis Carroll’s *Hunting of the Snark*:

He had bought a large map representing the sea,  
Without the least vestige of land:  
And the crew were much pleased when they found it to be  
A map they could all understand.



Figure 10. Leonardo da Vinci, *Annunciation*, 1472, Uffizi Gallery, Florence. With the rule that the pregnant woman cannot be made more pregnant and the complementary principle St. Jerome applied only to Mary, that her virginity was intact despite her multiple births, we see Leonardo contributing to the idempotency idea *laterally*, with his sequence of spaces splayed out to fit within the elongated frame. Mary at the lectern, like Babar at the chalkboard, is impregnated by the word, not its content but its style, its *lexis*. Only in such a delivery can the divine word be regarded as a medium of unlimited semiosis, bringing an end to the obsessive search for new meanings with a metaphoric substitution of pure meaning-fulness. The lectern does this by creating a “secondary virtuality (of effectiveness),” the effect of the Word as flesh, i. e. *lexis* over *phasis*, *énonciation* over *énoncé*. In this choice, the lipogram (the missing/omitted/purloined) letter can combine without any loss of potentiality.

In Fig 1, “Babar Does Maths,” the kindly adolescent elephant on his reverse grand tour of Belgium takes instruction concerning the basics. I have revised this to suggest that Babar has qualified for graduate level instruction in idempotency theoretics, which plays out generically as “ $x + y = x$ .” In other words, “ $x$ ” remains the same. Just so in the Euler circle where there is any attempt to fill in the lozenge of the forced choice. It is a permanent and radical void, only the margins can hold any character or quality: ALP,  $\alpha\lambda\pi$ . The *vesica* and its association with the womb, the original organ of hysteria, returns us to the forced choice simultaneous production of its inverse,  $\updownarrow$ . The hysteric womb, portable, carries this palindromic idempotency machine to whichever place it may produce a “miracle.” In the case of the ear (Fig. 10), the Word uses chiasmus to co-generate act from content and content from act. This is not an intersection satisfying the separate “sets” that are joined in the *vesica*. Its union is palindromic; each point generates its own antipode: Joyce’s “twone.” This is not a Jungian balance of the forces of good and evil, but the creation of a virtuality of effectiveness that is the radical anamorphosis required to answer to Mladen Dolar’s call for a universal extension covering the entirety of psychoanalysis.<sup>17</sup> Antagonism is the key. The message of *lexis* is strife.

We return to Empedocles’ system of humors, but in this return we must remember the role of melancholy, which is both a member of the system of humors and outside the system, thanks to the medical diagnosis, that whereas other humors are present as a balance of good and bad effects, black bile is

<sup>17</sup> Mladen Dolar, “Anamorphosis,” *S: Journal of the Circle for Lacanian Ideology Critique* 8 (2015): 125–140. There are some problems, beginning with Dolar’s over-simplification of Hans Holbein’s *The Ambassadors*, 1533. By reducing the riddle of the painting to the finding of the skull within the blur, he misses the point of overdetermination, key to the idea of a more universal kind of virtuality that would necessitate a more universal kind of anamorphosis. The remedy is to be found in John North, *The Ambassadors’ Secret: Holbein and the World of the Renaissance*, 2005. This, I suggest, is the “secondary virtuality” of an Aristotelian “fifth cause” of effectiveness, a non-perspectival (but geometrically projective) “real of the virtual” that Slavoj Žižek defined in 2004 in response to the enthusiasm for virtual reality (perspectival and non-projective). While the first virtuality is homogeneous within the space of perspectival representation, the second is radically exclusionary. See Slavoj Žižek, “The Reality of the Virtual,” Ben Wright (dir.), 2004; URL <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RnTQhIRcrno>

toxic in any amount.<sup>18</sup> Like the *vesica*, like the Word made flesh, like the hysterical womb, this quality is key to the mobility of melancholy, its presence as a virtuality both radically other and radically mobile.

If idempotency is the buffer of the dream, the insulating walls of a house, the pharmakon (both poison and cure), palindrome, torus, and Borromeo knot, it is the virtuality by which the subject as such is simultaneously held together and divided. But, this is just a way of characterizing idempotency. There is no proof of idempotency's relation to subjectivity or psychoanalysis. But, there is a means of establishing its role through the provenance of occasions where it can be shown to be the only effective cause. Cause of what? Here I must define sense in its extreme, potentially psychotic, condition: sense not just in the face of nonsense but sense as the result of nonsense. In the story of Zeuxis and Parrhasius, the rival painters of ancient Greece, to best Zeuxis in his production of a flawless *trompe-l'œil* of an open window with a bowl of fruit so realistic that a bird flew into the mural wall, breaking its neck, painted a curtain that the judges took to be a real one. Like the bird, they had "flown into the wall" and broken their critical necks. This was truly a "criticism by the cut." The story is not about the superiority of the painting of the curtain as a representation, but the trap that the curtain sets for the judge's desire to see what was hidden. But, in my view, Dolar has the direction of the gaze backward. It is not the judges who wish to gaze at whatever is hidden by the curtain but the non-existent concealed space behind the curtain that desires the judges. Dolar "Foucault-izes" the gaze, as Foucault himself did in the famous case of the Panopticon in *Discipline and Punish*. By allying the gaze with "those in power," Lacan's point, that the gaze is the desire of the other, is lost. If we correct it by saying that Parrhasius's painted curtain creates a virtuality that (1) can never be perspectively restored to the space from which it had been severed and (2) the result is that desire has become transferable, then we see immediately the difference between *graphein* and *katagraphein*.

If Dolar's gaze directionality is correct, the judges desire to see what is behind the "curtain" but, in mistaking the painted curtain to be the real one covering Parrhasius's entry in the contest, then the discovery that it is painted is the discovery of the Mark, that he has been swindled by the Con. If, however, the gaze is *located* within the (secondary) virtuality of the painted curtain Con, it represents a cut that simultaneously marks and is marked, a figure and the ground required by the figure. In other words, the *katagraphein* is idempotent, which is why making this kind of mark allowed Jesus to "buy the time" necessary for the Pharisees to leave and the woman to be set free. The story makes no sense without this corrected virtuality of the gaze allowing figure and ground to reverse. Like Schreber, Dolar has reversed both agent and act. Schreber loved his analyst, but had to deny this. He made Flechsig the agent, but *at the same time* had to convert love into hate. The resulting effect, "Flechsig wishes to harm me" was the result of a simultaneous circulation of forces around the void of the forced choice. The Eulerian overlapping circles, unlike the nul-set of the Venn diagram, saw the impossible-Real of the void and specified the circulation required as its symptom. Simultaneously, it "de-located" the instance of this void, allowing it to attach to non-contiguous objects, occasions, or — as the Schreber example makes clear — agents, and agencies. This is why the standard conclusion of the "Schreber syllogism" (Schreber loves Flechsig, Flechsig hates Shreber,

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<sup>18</sup> Raymond Klibansky, Erwin Panofsky, and Fritz Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy : Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, Religion, and Art* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2020).

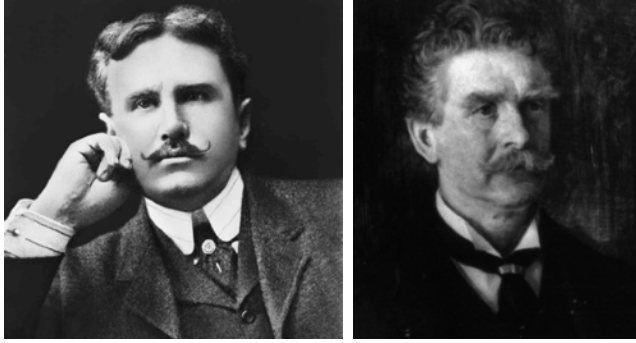


Figure 11. O. Henry (William Sydney Porter) and Ambrose Bierce, turn-of-the-century American fiction writers who employed idempotency of the forced choice into the device popularly known as “the plot twist.”

Schreber hates/fears Flechsig) doesn't work.<sup>19</sup> Schreber loves Flechsig even more surely than if he had simply admitted to his homosexual desire for his analyst. Schreber's love for Flechsig is durable, unshakable, *idempotent*. It is defended by the layer of self-conversion that resists every denial, ever lover's quarrel, every inevitable lapse of loving attention. Schreber's love is based not just on lack but on the *symmetry of lack* that Lacan identifies in Lesson 17.

For American readers, this symmetry is familiar thanks to its popularity as a story motif in the late Nineteenth Century, through writers such as

Ambrose Bierce (“An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge,” 1890) and William Sydney Porter, pen-name, O. Henry. In his most famous tale, “Gifts of the Magi,” 1905, O. Henry presents us a couple barely able to make ends meet in New York. The husband yet wishing to give his wife something for Christmas, sells his only treasure from his father, a gold watch, to buy a set of ornamental combs for her still-magnificent cascade of hair. His wife, however, has cut and sold her hair to be able to buy a gold chain for her husband's watch. The gift becomes more than the exchange of two independent gifts. Each gift has annihilated the other, but in this negation the gift takes on the value of the *agalma* of the Magi, what Don Cameron Allen has called “mysteriously meant.”

Dolar's gaze direction identifies the fact of the trick but not the logic of it, a logic which engages the virtuality of effectiveness — the how and why of the trick. His ambition to extend anamorphosis to the entire range of psychoanalysis relies on this correction, which restores to anamorphosis the logic of idempotency and the functions of figure-ground reversal, the forced choice, and — so obvious, in the example of the painted *curtain* — insulation.

For Lacan the showman, *lexis* allows the audience to indulge his capricious patter about princesses and philosophers, young girls in love, and (putting the two things together) *courtly love*. This is why I think that session 17 is so critical in Seminar IX. He introduces the idea of the Euler's circle but does not say at once that it is different from the Venn circle. Rather, he tells the story of Euler's correspondence with the Princess of Anhalt Dessau. To introduce this ellipsis, Lacan tells his audience that they must correct certain errors of thinking.

It is necessary to begin again from schemas unshaken in spite of everything, let us admit, in your thinking, unshaken for two reasons: first of all because they emerge from what I would call a certain peculiar incapacity properly speaking for intuitive thinking or more simply for intuition, which means at the very foundations an experience marked by the organisation of what is called the sense of vision. You will very easily grasp this intuitive impotence, if I have the good fortune that after this little conversation you set yourself to pose simple problems of representation about

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, David Gamez, *What We Can Never Know: Blindspots in Philosophy and Science* (London : Continuum, ©2007), 182.

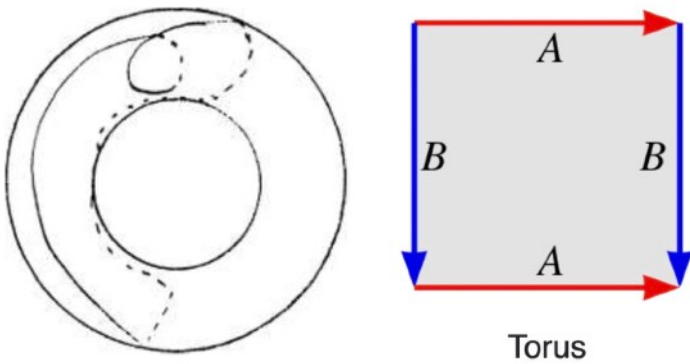


Figure 12. Left, diagram of torus, Jacques Lacan, *Identification*, Seminar IX, Lecture 17, 1962. Right, the “fundamental polygon” of the torus as a projective surface. *Wikipedia*: “a fundamental polygon can be defined for every compact Riemann surface of genus greater than 0. It encodes not only the topology of the surface through its fundamental group but also determines the Riemann surface up to conformal equivalence.”

what I am going to show you can happen at the surface of a torus. You will see the difficulty you will have not to become confused. Nevertheless a torus is quite simple: a ring. You will become confused, but then I become confused like you: I needed practice in order to find my bearings a little in it and even to grasp what that was suggesting and what that allowed to ground practically.

Amazingly, Lacan puts his finger precisely on the issue of perspectival thinking, the “sense of vision” that runs into difficulties when it sees, in the simplicity of the torus, something impossible. It will be necessary, Lacan advises, to become confused; but, don’t worry — “I [will] become confused like you.” Lacan

himself needed practice to get his bearings, to find the practical grounds for his demonstration. Lacan buys time by wondering why Euler took the time with the Princess, and how other great thinkers, such as Descartes, seemed to have similar weaknesses for rich and beautiful young women of noble birth.

This is the magician’s trick of misdirection. While Lacan talks of princesses, the audience is thinking, “We should be relaxed, this is not a drill or test.” Lacan is “piling it on,” rhetorically, hypnotically. At the point where the audience submits to the repetition of numbing digressions, when they are in effect paralyzed by them, he pulls the rabbit out of the hat. Even though he has told us on other occasions that the rabbit has had to be in the hat in the first place, we are still astounded, not so much at the miraculous sudden appearance, but that we had become paralyzed and blinded without being aware of it. The magic is the sudden jubilation coming from our side of the stage, not Lacan’s. We have felt what is properly external and alien, but we have felt it *intimately*. We have found our names in an ancient book we found by accident in a bookstore just before closing hours.

*Lexis* works because repetition produces the promised result, the failure that demand, in its occultation of the desire of the other, encounters. It meets up with the very thing it has itself engineered.<sup>20</sup> In failing, it is able to identify with this circuit and claim it as its own, an “eigenvalue.” Geometrically, the failure advances the circuit, causing it to spiral, but the vector of this advance is itself governed by a centralized void. These will construct a “spindle of necessity” powered by *jouissance*. “You will become

<sup>20</sup> This is Vico’s *verum ipsum factum*. Giambattista Vico, *On the Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians: Unearthed from the Origins of the Latin Language*, trans. Lucia Palmer (Ithaca and London: Cornell University, 1988). Because the whole of Vico’s work is a lipogram in Lacan’s writings, this omission itself takes on the projective geometry of the forced choice, and could be rewritten, katagraphically, as “if true then made; if made then true.” The wit of the famous dictum is, as Donald Verene has noted, is in its convertibility, which (Lacan would add) is a circulation around its impossibility; or which Joyce would add, is “around the swerve of shore to the bend of bay.” Alliteration carries us around the verbal void while keeping open the flow of *jouissance* to invigorate the sleeping Finnegan, HCE.

confused, but then I become confused like you: I needed practice in order to find my bearings a little in it and even to grasp what that was suggesting and what that allowed to ground practically.”

