

# From Conceptualization to Visualization:

## The Latent Message of Images in Seminar XIV, Session 12, Part 2

1. In this part 2 of my notes about the missing illustrations in Gallagher's translation of the original French transcripts of Seminar XIV, session 12, I want to move beyond a simple addition of what is missing, and even beyond an attempt to annotate those missing pieces. I would like to advance a thesis that is general for all reading of Lacan, a thesis that should be good news to architects, artists, and others who are good at visualizing but bad at conceptualizing. This is a way of reading Lacan that tilts the playing field to the advantage of visualizers by animating and re-drawing what Lacan has presented in his lectures, on the blackboard, but which have had trouble surviving the transcriptions and translations.
2. If visualization is to mean anything to Lacan scholarship, it will be only as a means of developing something that would otherwise be foreclosed. The Gallagher translations' shortcomings are not isolate cases but rather symptomatic of a general graphic distemper. Even when complex diagrams are displayed, there are almost never any explanatory keys explaining, even briefly, what the letters and numbers might mean. Yet, it is clear that Lacan, in his live sessions, often went to great pains to make his blackboard examples as clear as possible. If there is to be a visualizing of Lacanian theory, it will have to ground itself by finding examples where artworks and other visual materials have independently seemed to make the same point. In fact, Lacan called on art and ethnography in just such a way, and with the same aim of corroboration.
3. The complexity and wealth of the French transcript, ESPECIALLY in session 12, is a good place to test this thesis. In the second half of the session, Gallagher has entirely left out the graphics of the formulas but nonetheless translated a description of what's happening.
4. Although what remains is a sufficient but cryptic indicator, the graphic expressions here are not simply illustrations of the text. They actually provide a means of comparing and correlating the formulas *visually*, in ways that the text cannot support. It is the form of the expressions rather than their literal meaning that is significant. We see the progression from 'little a' over big-A expanded as 'c' over little 'a' plus big A, and relate it to the line that Lacan draws from an origin point to the condition of the *passage à l'acte*. Then we see how Lacan expands the series into a pattern by duplicating elements that are variations of the 1 over 1: first big A over big A, then  $-\emptyset$  over  $-\emptyset$ . We can't possibly *hear* this in the text, we have to see it and use that visual insight experimentally.
5. When Lacan suddenly imposes a new and unexpected angle, such as the connection of these expanding terms to the problem of the sexual relationship, namely the impossibility of it, we are thrown a curve. How can a mathematical progression relate to something as complex as love? However, when we look at artworks addressing the complexities of love, we see that artists, too, have had recourse to specific geometric relations.
6. In the case of Paolo and Francesca, two lovers whose story Dante tells in his *Inferno*, the background tells us a lot. The lovers innocently are reading a book about two lovers, Lancelot and Guinevere, and fiction suddenly engulfed their own situation. The sequence of one story in another story gives way to a backwards fold, and the result was, as Francesca put it so delicately, that suddenly they decided to stop reading. This relation of a sequence to an inversion, of fiction over reality, was no accident.
7. Artists such as William Blake could easily follow Dante's cue if they did not discover it for themselves. Such a love was a spiral that, while it contained the lovers in a tight spin, forbade them from touching. Here we have a combination of two opposed forces, one centripetal, one centrifugal. The spiral concentrates in a specific form what we all experience as gravity.
8. In the Lacanian literature, the torus is everywhere. It is the one figure from projective geometry that is so much a part of everyday life, from bagels to bicycle tires, that it is impossible to say that you can't imagine one. Yet, the torus combines the same two antipodal qualities as the impossible love-spiral of Paolo and Francesca. The circulation around the tube, so to speak, of the tire is what

Lacan says is like the repetition of demand. Or, it is more accurate to say that demand takes the form, the Real form, of a repeated circle around a void that is continent, that 'holds air'. At the same time, repetition fails to find what it was looking for, so its turn is advanced a notch, and the circle becomes the spiral and the spiral forms another circle. Although this second circle completes itself, it creates a second void that can't be breached. Lacan refers to but doesn't specifically call out the torus as a combination of two kinds of voids, one that is continent another that is incontinent, but a visual approach sees this in his drawings and hears it in his references.

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10. For Lacan, all Subjectivity is toroidal, so it's important for us to grasp the torus as a machine that combines two opposites. The subject strives for being, but lives within the Symbolic and Imaginary, which resist any representation of the Real, so everything it signifies is barred, or sublimated. The only thing left behind is the mark of the repression of the phallus, which structures the unconscious like a language, but one that tolerates contradiction and negates negation, the basis of binary oppositions. The diagram called the reference polygon indicates this dramatically by showing two vectors, the blue B and red A, springing from a common point and then converging on the opposite corner, where sublimation takes place in a criss-cross exchange between a doubled void. Lacan is showing us how the Unconscious is formed, how it is structured like a language, from the contributions of momentary psychosis outside the Symbolic, from 'above', and acting out, from within the Symbolic, from the right. This is another way of drawing the torus, another way of saying that, for the Unconscious to exist, you have to combine the incontinence of psychosis and the continence of the Symbolic, but thanks to the nonsensical content of acting out, this comes in only as a structure.
11. Because the phallus is a signifier and not an organ like the penis, it reveals the form of the Real in terms of ratio that Lacan designates as a harmonic division. Using a straight line that is much like the plucked chord the ancient Greek philosophers used to sound musical harmonics, Lacan shows the little 'a' and big 'A' as a ratio and a part of the distance from an origin point to the *passage à l'acte*. This distance is like Zeno's arrow flying towards its target, hence Lacan's distinction of goal and aim as action and intention. The action has FORM, and that form is the Golden Ratio, which is coincidentally represented by the Greek letter 'phi', just like the phallic signifier. With the four fractions Lacan shows in session 12, it's important to see how each is a step or stage that covers additional distance by including some form of 1 over 1, first the A over A, then the minus phi over the minus phi.
12. Because the 1/1 is not a vertical fraction but a diagonal one, we see that two things are shifted. The 1 is a numerator and a denominator, but it is delayed or jogged over a space. This is the structure of the unary trait, which is vertical and self-cancelling in its Symbolic form, but diagonal and latent in its Real form, its projective form. This is important in distinguishing how, with every EFFORT made to cover some distance, things are produced unintentionally that remain behind and have a potential power to emerge at a later point.
13. Latency has a mathematical role in the construction of the Golden Ratio, as Lacan demonstrates in Seminar 17, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*. The French title uses the word *invers*, or turning over, so the standard algebraic representation for the Golden ratio involves turning over the value of the answer into the question, taken up over and over. The deeper and deeper levels of the value of  $\emptyset$  can be represented as an inside frame or cut between the Fibonacci numbers, each one of which *turns over* its value as the counting component of the unary expression, whose value is always 1 over 1 or '1', to add to itself to make the next number. The cut is already there in the series, but if we draw it out, it shows how latency produces a self-intersecting series of numbers that are successively more accurate estimates of the value of  $\emptyset$ .
14. Architects will recognize some very familiar ways of restating this principle in the history of modern architecture. Corbusier's famous *modulor* applied the idea of the divided line to the human form, with the important detail that the hand had to be raised to make the ratios work.

15. This was not a new idea. Joseph Rykwert's study of the 'dancing column' made the same point. The raised hand, the element of agency added to the static figure, is open, or incontinent. When it is raised to do something or point somewhere, it completes the structure of the subject as continent, opens it up to unknown possibilities.
16. I may be abusing this idea of the upraised hand, but when an important artist uses it in what is possibly the most important painting of his career, this conjecture is worth the risk. Note here that we have several representations of ratio. There are the twinned prostitutes, the twinned gate-keepers, and the divided figure of Melancholy shown seated in the lower right corner.
17. These ratios are also about how continence that the painting imposes on the viewer, who sees the images as framed and *contained*, to the reference in the painting to two openings, the front that is opened to the viewer as the gate-keeper on the left pulls back a brown curtain, and a more cosmic incontinence made by the companion figure on the right, who pulls apart the sky itself, that Picasso makes to appear to be another kind of curtain. The figure of Melancholy suggests that thought itself, as in Rodin's sculpture 'The Thinker', is a matter of rationality taken back to its roots in the idea of ratio.
18. When we find these kinds of clues in art, we need to find more than one to prove that the case is not an isolated accident. In Hans Holbein's double portrait, 'The Ambassadors', the continence of the framed scene is disrupted by a blurred stain that we can discover to be really a skull painted to be seen only at a single angle, from the lower left corner of the painting. This spot opens up the painting to quite a different set of meanings from the display of wealth in the main view. Anamorphosis here is not only the presence of latency as a kind of surplus that will invert the meaning of the main work, but it will do so in the same jogged way that the unary trait was jogged to make the Golden Ratio.
19. The contrast between continence and incontinence could not be greater than it is in this particular painting. Using numerology, geometry, and information written on the back, the *invers*, of the painting, Holbein is showing us the 'other side of history' by referring to the astrological prediction of the specific day of the Apocalypse, thought to be April 11, 1533, the date given for the completion, or 'vernissage' of the portrait. Holbein adds a funny detail. He says he finished the painting exactly at 4 pm, but this is another clue. The sun angle at 4 pm over the horizon of London would have been, on that Good Friday, exactly  $27^\circ$ , the same angle as the one used to set up the anamorphic skull and put the viewing put directly beneath the half-concealed cross.
20. After these excursions into works of art, whose creators seem to be entirely in tune with the unary trait and Golden ratio through the indirect uses of continence and incontinence, we are allowed to take these terms back to the geometrical realities of Lacan's favorite projective surface, the Torus. What's the result? Because the torus combines two motions, one around a void that is continent, like the bicycle tire, and a void that is incontinent, the hole in the middle, we have .
21. There are many operations we might show to demonstrate how the torus is really a projective geometry surface and not just a bagel or bicycle tire. But, there is an easy way to demonstrate the two properties of projective geometry, non-orientation and self-intersection, that we can see if we take a section cut of a sphere.
22. The cut allows us to see inside the sphere and its exterior at the same time, so we can follow what happens to an arrow that, from the view of an observer on the surface, would indicate a movement from west to east, but when it slides to the other side of the globe, shows another observe a movement from east to west. The observer can only view things in terms of rotation, but with the interior opened up, this limitation can be overcome, and the result is that the two directions become a case of non-orientation and self-intersection. Taking this demonstration to Lacan's famous gapped circle, we can see how the gap is in the circle all along, and not just at the break, because every time the circle moves in one space, it is also moving in another space, a projective space. The projective motion is latent within the apparent motion. We can describe this as an electrical circuit where there are two inverter switches, one that inverts the current from positive to negative and another which turns it back again to positive. There is no action potential here because things are

perfectly symmetrical. However, if we remove one of the switches, the a-symmetry creates a latent, second circuit. This circulates a positive along with a negative and a negative along with a positive, in a kind of criss-cross virtuality, just as Holbein could show both a blurred skull in the straight-on portrait but would tilt the main image into a blur when the skull could be seen. The alternating conditions would be both a sequence and a double circuit.

23. This doubling and latency is possible because of the cut we made to see the sphere as a projective surface rather than a Euclidean solid. Following Edward Abbott's famous children's book, *Flatland*, where all the characters are two-dimensional and have a tough time imagining what a third dimension would be like, our life on planet earth is essentially flat. But the earth is not a sphere but, rather, a sphere in motion, and that motion makes it toroidal. As we move from point to point, the earth beneath our feet is both rotating and revolving. The surface is temporalized. But, when we experience things like the Coriolis effect, where fluids seem to form vortexes, like water going down a drain, we find it very spooky! Like Abbott's Flatlanders, we can't imagine the dimension that is the Real of our planet earth.
24. In the Lacanian Imaginary, the Real is the dimension of spookiness, of correspondences that cannot be explained rationally, by which we mean not the 1/1 as reducible to the value of 1, but a 1 to 1 that involves a delay or displacement, as when the earth moves beneath our feet at the same time our feet aim us towards a visible goal. The difference between goal and aim is always spooky, and it often takes the form of a whirlwind. Our cultures represent this spookiness in terms of miracles and omens, the uncanny, complex interactions such as the fugue, chiasmus, crisis, or the comedy of the farce, or the compact version of the joke. In architecture and visual arts we can't represent the void, but we can show how we have to walk around it, with funny pathways whose shapes we can't explain.
25. We can't dismiss these work-arounds, because without them we wouldn't be fully human. This is like saying that there is not column without a hand raised above the head of the body it imitates. There is a topological way of showing how this hand is present. For each object that we face, there is another object, actually a whole series of objects, that is eclipsed. The latent objects are present simply because the visibility of the first object has created an indefinite and unknown invisibility, a secondary virtuality that operates entirely in a negative mode. Even if we walk around the object, we generate new virtualities, new series of eclipsed potential shadow objects.
26. Although these shadow objects are inaccessible, they are elevated to what Lacan called the Dignity or 'Dign-nity' of the Thing. We have access to it through the conditions set up by art, music, literature, and architecture; but to understand how these work we need to know the basics of metaphor.
27. The idea of the perfect shadow does, however, offer us some clues. It reverses the direction of our viewing. The perfect shadow reversely specifies our viewpoint, captures us in the act of viewing. Ordinarily we define perspective as a matter of the viewer looking out at the world, but in projective geometry, the perfect shadow looks back at us. We have a case of reversed perspective, and to corroborate this, we can look to the history of images made using reversed perspective to see if they also involve this idea of holding the subject in place and elevating the status of the object to the dignity of the Thing.
28. An architectural façade drawn in reverse perspective implicates the viewer and paralyzes him or her at the viewing point. Every thing in the scene 'points directly to the view', the view and the viewer were 'made for each other'. This kind of identity is found in a more the more widespread tradition of the Orthodox Christian Icon, which establishes the same 1:1 relationship with the viewer, who does not look AT the icon but has the icon image penetrate the viewer in a moment of religious captivity, where all other options of seeing and thinking are eliminated.
29. The reverse perspective icon creates a perfect shadow that in this case has a religious power. It is not just inspirational but directly transformative. In secular situations, this becomes the idea of being haunted, always being watched or followed, and in the literature of the Uncanny, the perfect shadow means that there is a second reality latent but implicit within the first, the ordinary reality.

We scratch the surface of this ordinary reality and we see immediately a Real that shines through, that seems to have always been there and always ready to make itself felt.

30. Again, we need to correlate these conjectures with actual traditions. In the case of the perfect shadow and reversed perspective we can use the icon's ability to penetrate simply by reversing the rules of ordinary perspective to interpret a myth that has long been mis-interpreted: the story of the birth of Athena as a fully armed virginal goddess who presides over the fortified citadels of cities. The main clue is the role of Zeus's head or, rather, skull. Zeus's domain is the sky, so the skull is the top of this domain, the edge of the blue sky known by the ancient word of æther. The story goes that Athena, unable to escape the trap of this surface required a cut to be born. In other words she is a case of our sphere that, cut in half, revealed itself to be a projective 2d surface with non-orientation and self-intersection capabilities. Athena is no different. Hephaestus the smith helped Athena by cleaving Zeus's skull, making a cut in what appeared to be the margin of 3-dimensional space, to allow Athena's birth into a space of self-intersection and non-orientation, another way of saying 'the space of the Real' or the absolute space of a divine being. The word for Hephaestus's axe, the cœlum, meant both heaven and wedge, meaning that the idea of this cut was present in the æther all along. The myth simply laid out the thread of the story, which had been wound into a tight ball of latent associations.
31. This story lays the groundwork for Athena's metamorphosis into other Goddesses, especially ones carrying swords who are perched on the peaks of buildings. In the case of Old Bailey, the dome serves as the skull of Jove, and Justice with her scales stands above this, as if to say that, above the appearances of the everyday, there is the rule of law, that is to say, structure in the form of a circuit or rather two circuits that balance off changes to stabilize things and preserve the idea of identity against the flow of time. The full meaning of the architectural pinnacle, as in the case of the city's fortified citadel, is both practical and necessary. Like Lacan's Borromeo knot, where each pair of rings is held together by the separate third, it is the *separation or absence* of this pinnacle, it's detachment, that makes it effective from the position of its secondary virtuality. The power of the perfect shadow is that it can't be accessed. This is the blindfold on Justice Athena, impervious to our gaze by the curious replacement of blindness for invisibility. In this way, we see how the two virtualities are necessary to each other, in the same way that the abstract rule and the immediate circumstance are the necessary components of English law.

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