

(Open) Letter to Claudio Sgarbi

July 27, 2022

Dear Claudio, I ran across a marvelous reference to the way the figure requires a profile in Vico, it is where he says that we need a “Lesbic rule” (the carpenters on the island of Lesbos were famous for their pliable lead, which they used to form instruments to measure irregular edges accurately). It’s in the *Study Methods of Our Times*, just before he says that the fool pays no attention to high truths or low truths (this is not a put-down of the fool, its just to locate him accurately on the Gettier table!). The astute ignoramus notices

the lower truths but is unaware of the highest (the truths that require *jouissance*). The “learned men destitute of prudence” attempt to deduce all of the lower truths from the highest (to justify their belief in truths without *jouissance*, which is now evident as prudence!), and finally the wise sage who not only is aware of the relation of lower truths to high ones but advocates a *method of the sorites* to show how accident is required for the operation of fate (prudence is this correlation).

	TRUTH	BELIEF	JUSTIFICATION
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

The Lesbic rule allows the sage to use a “roundabout path” whenever the straight one is impossible (hence, the need for an “ersatz” methodology).

We look at the figure and must ask how it is distinguished from the ground. *It sticks out*. It is “continent” in the sense that its profile (the Lesbic rule) is confirmed by the math of the Jordan Curve, which shows that it is quite difficult to define how a single line can distinguish between an inside and outside, between continence and the resulting incontinence of the ground.

We attach the figure to the idea of intentionality, the ability to act, move, and persist (*conatus*). The figure can disappear on one side of space (the sun sets) and re-appear on the other (the sun rises) and be *the same sun*, with an intentionality and *person-ality* (“Apollo”). The *conatus* of the forces of nature are the “gods” that persist and insist, and demand our respect.

The fact that Vico talks about *conatus*, sorites, and the sage who looks for “as many causes as possible” for any one effect, in order to determine which of them has been *the most effective*, matches perfectly to Lacan’s theories of the subject and signifier. The Vico-Lacan connection is, paradoxically, the most profound anticipation of one thinker of another, and the most profound unconscious duplication of the other for the one ... *in all of history of thought*. It is not just a coincidence that Vico’s theory of metaphor is identical to Lacan’s. It is because both thinkers realized the intrinsic dependence of metaphor and metonymy, in the process of producing fantasy, as a mask of the Symbolic’s failures and gaps.

When we see a figure emerge from a ground, we perceptually *decide* something that is a matter of inference rather than a “givens.” We know this because we can create situations where the figure and ground reverse. This is the vase/face condition that you showed. But, this is related to the other ways homeostasis permeates all perception, as in the case of the stereogram, where the mandate to resolve the

tiny, “imperceptible” differences of a 2-d pattern involve things that we associate with projective topology: (1) a vanishing point that is materialized close to the position of the viewer and (2) the simultaneous perception of a 3-d form out of a 2-d surface. Because the stereogram gives us both *conatus* (the form has durability) and *cathetus* (the form keeps its shape even when we move our heads from side to side, or look into other parts of the “thickened space” that has emerged from the pattern), we are justified to see it as an analogy to the process of sorites.

The 2-d pattern of the stereogram is a kind of zero-degree of information. There is a pattern and a repetition and ordering but we do not see the differences. Spencer-Brown would see this as a series of predications, (y)x, whose logic is that of metonymy (one part, x, represents the whole, y).

f|b e|g a|c d|e y|f g|a b|x c|d

As you see, the terms are scattered halves that, when combined, “cancel out” except for the case of (y)x. For every ‘n’ there is a ‘~n’. Except in one case, where the “twins separated at birth” find each other (Oscar Wilde’s *The Importance of Being Ernest*). Vico’s “one cause that is more effective than the others” is the (y)x.

Lewis Carroll shows how these predications can make up puzzles whose solution is *latent* within a series of statements that are all fundamentally metonymies; taken as a whole they constitute an *orthogonal 2d surface* whose emergent form we cannot directly perceive UNLESS we use parallax (the process of cancellation to reveal the implicit symmetry of the scattered halves) to abandon our Euclidean focus on each statement in favor of a “projective” (non-)focus that reveals the (y)x form, *which has a contour that is clearly 3-d and thus a relation to a “ground that is a charged ground” that is conatus and a durability that is the same as the “cathetus” we experience in the vanishing point’s relation to the viewing point.*

Conatus, cathetus, orthography, the Lesbian rule, figure-ground distinction, the idea of a “charged ground” (e.g. the bed of sex), the standard polygon of the torus, the way the Fibonacci numbers originate with a cut between the number as content and instance (“audioactivity”), the way that a depth emerges out of the juxtaposition of arithmetically spaced and logarithmically spaced (Lesbian?) rules ... Lacan is both consistent and revolutionary.

We encounter reality as a blah blah blah of details whose latency is its “unconscious.”

- (1) “All the policemen on this beat sup with our cook;
- (2) No man with long hair can fail to be a poet;
- (3) Amos Judd has never been in prison;
- (4) Our cook’s ‘cousins’ all love cold mutton;
- (5) None but policemen on this beat are poets;
- (6) None but her ‘cousins’ ever sup with our cook;
- (7) Men with short hair have all been in prison.”

We are unaware that these metonymies are all “causes,” in Vico’s terms, that conceal within their sorites, “Amos Judd loves cold mutton.” The value of this is not in its content, since we don’t give a damn

what Amos Judd prefers or doesn't prefer to eat. Neither, in the parallel case of Joyce's epiphanies, do we care a twit about their literal descriptions. The revelation comes in its *structural relation* to metaphor, the way something has been suppressed (this statement, as a "monster" combining Amos Judd and mutton) that is equivalent to Freud's perception of the "monster" in the name Signorelli.

Because he is a FOREIGNER, Freud sees what native Italian speakers cannot see, he sees the *stereogram* of Signor, translated as Herr, and metonymized in the multiples of Bolzano, Boltraffio, Botticelli, Herzegovena, SIR-bia, Trafei, and even in conversions to stories about Turks who would rather die than do without sex. This is the "charged bed" or ground, the field that is the sorites with the latent signifier, Herr.

The latent signifier is a form that is durable (*conatus*) and topological (*cathetus*). So let's not fuck with Spinoza, please, because Spinoza is *not connecting the ethical with the perceptual*. Vico IS, because he sees that conatus, as a will-to-act is inseparable from the latent signifier that is the "one cause among 'as many causes as we can find' " for any one effect, the project of the SAGE who is in many ways not unlike the fool, because the fool (000) in Gettier terms and the sage (111) must each add a + (jouissance) to produce a chiasitic bond. In fact this bond has been realized, in the saying from Alexander Pope, "He was a wit among fools and a fool among wits" and of course [Shakespeare](#).

We could re-write the fool and sage as 000+ and 111- to say that the +/- is the essence of *jouissance* in the form of the love where we "give what we don't have to someone who doesn't want it," Lacan's chiasitic saying.

The Gettier table is a staircase with risers and treads, (y)x, i.e. metonymies and, hence, sorites. As such they create the orthographic surface where a stereogram conceals within its soritic pile a latent signifier, a surplus/lack, that creates a (projective) form out of 2-d dissonance (*clinamen*), endowed with durability (*dæmon*) and dependent on the *tesseræ* of the viewer and viewed, the "irregular, jagged cut" that creates the multiple metonymic relations we experience in the everyday as blah blah blah and which the psychoanalytic session strives to create in the Analysand's free associations.

The < and > strategy of the Analyst is thus a stereo-grammatical procedure, a sorting through of the blah blah blah to find the latent signifier (i. e. "the unconscious") that is not a content but rather a *structure*. The < and > that Bruce Fink uses to characterize the Analyst's options of entering "late" with a cough or "ahem" or coming in "early" with a provocation is *nothing more or less than Spencer-Brown's predication series of (n)m* in the Amos Judd series, the creation of the sorites of the orthographic surface, out of which *conatus* will find the monster (the Unconscious) and where *cathetus* will provide durability to the form. In architecture it is evident, I hope, to you, my dear educated friends, that the durable form is the labyrinth invented by Dædalus to imprison (contain = continence, eh?) the half-beast (= metonymy) by means of fractal curves (Aabc/Babc/Aabc) that make each passageway a dual, leading Borges to conclude correctly that the seven "layers" of enclosure are really 14, because each layer has the form of (n)m, metonymy, and the labyrinth is also a *sorites* with *cathetus* and *conatus*.

The stereogram is not (just) a toy. The Amos Judd puzzles are not toss-offs. Metaphor (Vico and Lacan *and* Joyce all agree) involves suppression of what the foreigner sees (the one who is outside the Symbolic of a language) and "psychotically" associates with a structure (of metonymical fragments or moments). We

are thus obliged to view the connection between the “cloud of metonymies” in Freud’s parapraxis and the relation to “authentic travel,” as outlined by Henry Johnstone in his study of Odysseus as a “passive hero. Because each metonymy is bi-nomial, (n)m, it is “audio-active.” Audioactivity is the essence of psychoanalysis, which hears a word that means something in a conventional way, blah blah blah, but which has an *audio component* that activates the Unconscious. The analyst is basically an ear, the ear trained to hear audio-activity.

Numbers have audio-activity, as we see in the case of “one 1,” the logical basis for the unary trait. The sequence 1, 11, 21, 1211, 111221, 312211 ... is *rule based* (you say the number when you see it, then write down the results) and the rule is the LESBIC RULE! It “fits around the profile of the *figure* and distinguishes it from the ground.” John Conway discovered the exact value of this figure and it became known as the “Conway Constant.”

The profile/silhouette simultaneously identifies a figure with conatus and charges the ground that has been “pushed into the background” on behalf of this figure’s formation. It is “charged” with the duties of being incontinent. The left of the frame and the right of the frame must be disconnected, spatially, by reducing them to nothing more than formalizations of our cone of vision (a picture frame). However, in the framed space of conatus, the left edge is “simultaneous” with the right edge. As soon as the figure disappears on the left it will re-appear on the right, *because there is no space beyond this fictive space* that we do not imagine as a necessity to our looking-at and framing-of pictorial space.

But, as we can simplistically demonstrate with any framed picture, there is nothing beyond the edges or behind the surface *other than what WE imagine*. The content we attribute to the *field of the Other* is actually the *field of the Subject*, hence our way of writing the Subject, S, as \$, indicates that the edge of the subject's field, its *contenance* to indicate *incontenance* (infinite extension), it nothing other than the signifier of the limits of the Other, S(A). This may help us understand Lacan’s Graph of Desire a bit better (we need all the help we can get!).

Thanks to VICO, Lacan becomes a bit more intelligible, although it is just as true to say that Lacan helps with our reading of the otherwise impenetrable Vico. Penetration as the imaginary form of understanding (breaking into a locked library, sneaking into the castle, climbing a ladder to the lover’s bedroom) is our way of saying that incontinence and continence hold the keys to the fool’s 000+ and the sage’s 111-, the way the fool “curves around” to meet the sage, the way the ladder up is also the ladder down, the way that the passage in is also the passage out. There are many Lacanians, even, who do not understand how these dualities are related, or how they are related to sorites, cathetus, or conatus — words that they NEVER HAVE USED, to my knowledge.

When you find something that you don’t find in others, you must give what you don’t have (latency) to those who don’t want it, who do not know how to form the “demand” to the Other because their Other is defective, i.e. not properly toroidal. Every work of scholarship is an analysis of defect, and ours is to show how this absence is the *place* where something must be restored. The Lacanian architect must find/create the *place* of restoration out of the terms that are not found, but which exist in Lacan’s thinking in a *virtual way*, a latent way. We must psychoanalyze the blah blah blah of Lacanians and also Lacan, whose *mi-dire* design of presentation shows that he is aware of this latency, and of things he *does not need to say*, or things

he can refer to only obliquely, parenthetically. Lacan creates an orthographic surface and says as much. He tries to space EVENLY not just the materials inside each seminar, but to space them “arithmetically” in the plus/minus logic of alternating themes of the subject and the signifier. He is consistent. He always tells truth, “but not all of it,” meaning that he knows where to estimate the point where he must stop and the reader/audience must begin. This is the match-point of the Fibonacci \emptyset , the place where the Lesbian Rule must create a proper profile that will authenticate the edge that the reader must match (*tesseræ*).

Reading is not to consume information or judge or even say we like this or don't like that. Reading is to discover the Lesbian Rule out of pliant lead so that we can fit around Lacan's figure, determine his *conatus*, and realize the charged ground, where cathetus will provide us with a correlation between our points of view (random, belated, eccentric) and the ever-fixed mark of the vanishing point that appears before our eyes with the “stereogram” experience of reading Lacan and finding that figures emerge out of the sorites of seemingly unrelated metonymies.

Don't lose heart. There is no other writer in history who, like *both* Lacan and Vico, understands this relation between writing and thinking, or the jagged line that is the surface of the text. Others have glimmers but do not know how to write the jagged text. They wish to *conclude* their arguments, but as Henry Johnstone has argued, we must tarry in the silence of the time just after the argument has finished talking. Artists instinctively know about this silence, as we can see directly in plays such as *Who's Afraid of Virginia Wolfe*, or John Huston's version of Joyce's *The Dead*. With works of art such as these on our side, we don't need to quibble over the meaning of “there is no sexual relation” or “woman does not exist.”

Our duty is to find a place, which is the customary duty of the architect, to find the site and pace it out. You show the vase-face profile. This is the Lesbian rule. “One of them is unnecessary.” With the one line we have two things, the figure and the ground, and the face says that the ground also “has a face,” it is the charging of the ground as a projective rather than recessive form. A bed with something going on as soon as we occupy it.

We look at the orthography of the stereogram and discover that we cannot see it with Euclidean eyes but our brains “know how” to discover the latency that will produce 3-d out of 2-d, creating both *conatus* and cathetus, a form that is durable and a vanishing point that is right before our eyes. The Lesbian Rule has allowed the ground of the pattern to produce a figure “emergently” without our conscious recognition, and so it is an analogy of the way we as “foreigners” can see the Signor in Signorelli.

We must not be too skeptical. Lacan does not want to prove something to us. He wants us to think *forward*, to begin with the orthography of the jagged text he presents us, to see, through analogies and especially through visualizations, that there *is* such a thing as an Unconscious and that we *do* have access to it but only through its “impossibilities.” Our patient < and > (no better picture of a *tesseræ* than this, eh?) comes with the obligation to see, in the odds and evens of the powers of *a*, the powers of the cut, the way that anamorphosis penetrates into everything. Our insights (into Vico, into *conatus*, into cathetus, etc.) do not relieve us of the obligation to continue to think *through* the texts we read, to see them as versions of the stereogram, even if we can't (as you can't) actually experience the stereogram. As Merleau-Ponty says, the blind man or crippled man are not limited by their handicaps. They fully expand into “the pictorial” or “the ambulant” as subjects; subjects are wholes, durably, because they are constructed by the cut. They already know everything about desire because they know that they can know nothing (*kenosis*).