

## Notes for Seminar XIV, 14/16

*This is a two-part essay, the first a general essay on how Lacan's texts are different from other kinds of "presentational" texts, where I get into the analogy of the stereogram; the second are numbered points relating to specific points in the texts, mostly of sessions 14 and 16. The problem with Gallagher's bad graphics was the starting point, but it led to think of Lacan's entire text as "graphically based."*

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Read from top to bottom:  
First, the Other and its corresponding Subject (before castration/Symbolic), then after, then the remainder (= lack, also surplus. In math, too much is the same as too little.

### Thoughts about How (and Why) We Read Lacan

Session 16 is pivotal for Seminar XIV, with many references to the previous session 14 (skipping over the presentation of Green). These notes come mainly from the text of 16, but references to the text and especially the graphics of session 14 are critical. In the French transcript, Lacan's complex math formulas are clearly shown. In the Gallagher translation the formulas are shown in-line with the text and some illustrations are omitted. This makes it difficult to follow Lacan's reasoning, as where the parallels between the unbarred to the barred A and the unbarred to the barred S (Other and subject) are said to have an "irreducible remainder," the *objet petit a*. It would seem essential to present this simple table to emphasize the idea that the *a* is *left-over* from the process of barring (negation? restraint? division? splitting?) but the English text omits it. In Session 13, where this table appears it is tied to the whole idea of *jouissance* and its relation to detumescence. How can we understand what Lacan means by sex without this reference to  $-\emptyset$  and the relation to detumescence and the limits to satisfaction?

In 14 we have the analogy of the slide-rule, which we have had difficulty understanding because for some of us this is an unknown object, and it has been hard to imagine that before the time of electronic calculators it was entirely useful to engineers and architects and generally known to everyone in technical schools, at least those who had to involve trigonometry to find the answers to common problems. Without knowing that the slide-rule juxtaposes two "incommensurable" kinds of scales, the logarithmic and arithmetic, the idea of the orthographical surface relating to a depth-phenomenon would be impossible to argue.

### The stereogram analogy

In the architectural orthographic drawing, the eye relates to the drawing surface in a 90° way that constructs a "moving vanishing point at infinity" that moves along with the eye — a phenomenon that Brunelleschi named *cathetus*. At the same time, the vanishing point and viewing point are really the same point — twins or doubles. The viewing subject structures the viewed object, and this "Lacanian" idea is found also in Vico's idea of *conatus* — the idea that the subject and object share a point that does not move but allows for and engenders motion. So, when we see that the vanishing point seems to "move along with us" as we travel and look to the side of the road, we can experience conatus and cathetus directly, we don't need to theorize about abstract captions for the effect. It's there.

In the same way, the stereogram is a flat pattern that, thanks to micro-differences in spacing, creates the sensation of a virtual space where we can clearly see shapes. Note that the shapes are *only surfaces*, no

details other than the paisley of the original flat pattern. Once our brain allows us to visualize this depth, it allows us to move from side to side, with the object seeming to adjust to our lateral movements. We have binocularity *inside* the stereogram although we have forsaken it in order to see this thickened surface as a *void*. While philosophy has great difficulty talking about “nothing,” human experience has direct experiences where we can convince ourselves that not only does a second virtuality exist that is “just about 2-d surfaces,” but that conatus and cathetus are not abstract ideas but properties *of* our experience and, possibly, *the logic behind* our experiences of the Imaginary.

This is the logic that Lacan treats elsewhere under the heading of retroaction. When something happens, we have to ask ourselves, “What must have happened before this ‘first time,’ in order for it to appear to us *as* a first time?” In other words, we don’t know we’re counting until, when we realize this *first*, we are already at #2. The logic of this requires not just a 1, a “1 of 1,” but the “impossible idea,” the zero. To face something means that you have required yourself to think about what is *behind you*, and its relation to what is *behind what you face* (its shadowed sides). This is the essence of Desargues’ Theorem.

### **The figure-ground analogy**

We are talking about fantasy and its relation to the imagination, the ability to create something *out of* nothing. Isn’t it critical to understand how, within the virtuality of the expected there is another virtuality of the unexpected? The stakes of a successful reading of this seminar are high for anyone who is interested in such a question. These notes are informal but the task is serious. The idea of taking a slide-rule to bed raises the issue of how the bed, a piece of furniture, can be come a ground with its own “ground rules.” The ground is supposed to be passive, so how can something passive impose a structure, an order, a timing?

When we say a figure is distinguished from a ground, we imagine that it’s something we can draw a line around completely, distinguishing the inside of the figure from the outside of the ground which lies behind and beyond the contained figure — incontinently! Yet we know from the torus that we can draw two kinds of closed lines. One can reduce to a disk and then a point; the other wraps around the torus’s tube and cannot be reduced. It produces a cut that produces two Möbius-band surfaces. So, we *know* that an orthographic mark such as a line drawn on a surface can have two totally different results. The cut of the line operates in two virtualities. AND, Lacan seems to argue that this has to do with the “impossibility” of the sexual relation, and he shows this impossibility by linking the four logical statements that define men and women to Aristotle’s logical square, where the diagonals represent contradiction. So, not only is the sexual *relation* impossible, but both men and women are “logically constructed” as self-contradictions!

Lacan’s ideas are difficult enough, but the English translation’s omissions and crappy drawings make things worse. We have to get inside the relations of the text to the graphics by seeing what is given in the French transcript to create a new kind of critical access. This may mean that we need to involve such analogies as the stereogram (where orthographics continues the lessons of the slide-rule) and the idea of the “katagraphic” mark. My feeling is that these extras are admissible as we require ourselves to return to the original text to justify our excursions. The text is the ultimate authority, but it is not written to be conclusive but, rather, to open reading to new inventions.

## Homeostasis

We must remember some basics. Freud faced the issue of how the physical human body is able to maintain balance — homeostasis — in the face of stimuli from both inside and outside. In many respects, the human's neural systems (which extend out into the world, beyond the brain and even beyond the fingertips), are like any other system's ability to survive attacks. The simplest solution, based on the pleasure principle, had to be abandoned for one that could take into account how people often seem to work against their own self-interest; how they include self-sacrifice; how they enjoy pain and suffer from pleasure; and how the low-energy state sought by the system actually resembles a Nirvana-type simulation of death. The complex "solution" was far from resolved, and Lacan sought to qualify it by introducing the idea of the subject's construction of the Other in the contexts of language (the Symbolic), how the Other must be constructed as lacking, or not fully knowable, and how the subject bases its idea of wholeness on external structures.

## Homeostatic maintenance, retroaction, and parapraxis (metonymy)

There is an even more mysterious and fundamental issue, that of retroaction. Lacan abbreviated it in the example of counting: we don't know about any series until we encounter the *second* of the series. The number 2 tells us what the number 1 is all about, and make the 1 a "logical basis" for its own appearance and significance. In language this is the temporal phenomenon of not knowing the meaning of the first of a sentence until the ending is reached. This focuses attention on the role of latency, which is the force within metaphor, where the replacement of one signifier by another is, basically, a suppression. As in the example of Freud's "Signorelli Parapraxis," suppression is coupled directly to the emergence of a "cloud" of metonyms, signifiers with part-wise links that shuffle laterally to create a "surface" or "screen" masking the X? that made, in Freud's case, the name Signorelli inaccessible. This is a model for how the unconscious creates something concrete to insulate itself from consciousness, which in reverse order is the answer to the question of how something — an object, place, building, etc. — can *have an unconscious*.

The metonymic cloud of signifiers works like the orthographic surface of the stereogram, which Lacan analogizes by the slide-rule. The surface is created logarithmically, he says, which means that the *powers* of the object-cause of desire (an abstract concept we use just as a place-holder at this point!) arrange themselves as if they were metrically even-spaced (as in the stereogram pattern) so that an overlap (Lacan, the odd-even alternation of the powers of *a*) will create a depth effect. Is this depth the depth of the unconscious? The example at least gives us a look at what the depth of the unconscious "might be like." It is a depth with its own brand of perspective and virtuality, and it is something related to projective geometry, where the cut disappears and insides and outsides flow freely into each other (because the distinction between inside and outside no longer functions, just as negation no longer functions in the dream).

## Reading Lacan as a stereogram

These issues appear throughout Seminar XIV, each surfaces briefly and then vanishes as it is overlapped by the next issue, so in a way Lacan is creating his own stereogram by rambling *laterally*, between even and odd positions, to give each signifier a metonymic (halved) structure — the logic of *mi-dire*.

It is up to us to see the text as a stereogram, to let the depth of the text develop just as the 3-d object appears “in our brain” from the need to *balance* the small differences in the pattern (*clinamen*, a useful word for this process). There is no Lacanian thinking without this face-to-face process, no Lacanian theory that is “presented as a whole” to be evaluated, criticized, and understood or misunderstood. There is *only* this face-to-face process where things happen inside a projective unconscious, where forms emerge out of disruptions and overlaps.

This is not just a necessary way of reading, it is about our subjectivity in general. That is why, when Lacan talks about sexuality, he is not so much talking *about* sexuality as “talking about talking about.” Ideas are not shot out from the writer to the reader. The cut between writing and reading creates a surface where there are patterns (metonymies) and overlaps (latencies), where we are confused whenever we try to focus on the pattern itself but, if we allow a virtuality to develop in relation to a “point in the distance” we experience the thickening of the patterns in the same way that Freud’s parapraxis metonymies thickened in relation to the Master Signifier, Herr. It was HERR, “sir,” that was suppressed, not the name Signorelli, and that’s what would emerge inside the representational surface if we made the analogy literally a stereogram. In this Seminar on *The Logic of Phantasy*, the surface of the text is metonymical in that every idea is a half-idea, the Symbolic of the text depends on the Imaginary that makes the text a cut (hence, our difficulties). *But, if the text is a cut, then its “surface” is an orthographic plane, just like the slide-rule in chapters 14/16.*

Our reading is a depth-experience, where meaning appears in the form of a shape, a shape that in the stereogram as well as in projective geometry, is *demonstrably* two-dimensional yet able to “flow.” We say that “ideas form in our heads” and this is what literally is happening when we read the seminar. We “see” something in a virtual space that is created by our act of reading. The more we understand this process, the more we are able to relax our reader’s eyes and look into the distance, rather than focus on single meanings that seem to confront our disbelief.

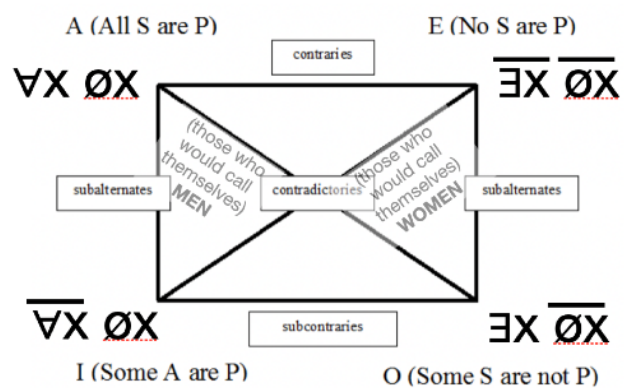
## Notes for the Text of Session 16

*These are fragmentary and incomplete ... an invitation for you to add your own notes. Text in red was added at a later point. Do you best to follow along with the seminar text ...*

Some notes are tied to particular parts of the Gallagher text, shown as page numbers inside parentheses. Other notes float over the text, inspired by a topic or name. Text in red was added later, as questions that seem to be provoked from the first reading.

1. (166) The great secret of psychoanalysis — no sexual act! So, what is an “act”, is it the reduplication of a motor effect (“I am walking”)? Just saying it makes it so. Put it in a signifying chain and the subject is inscribed in the repetition. **Once in the torus (the tube part) acting becomes impossible, a thing belonging to the “other void” (the middle of the tube). Because sex is Symbolic (see the diagram below), the “act” associated with it belongs to Analysis (the quadrilateral diagram).**
2. Subject tries to inscribe himself, in the same *form*, as sexed, with the aim of **intersection**. [Is this a case of “union without intersection” of the Euler circles?]

3. “Structured like a language” ... only because objects are produced that relate to metaphor and metonymy that the relation to sexuality is established.
4. “There is no purgatory” = “there is no sexual act.” (Both are the “big secrets,” the first of the church, the second of psychoanalysis. Jules-Amédée Barbey d’Aureville (2 November 1808 – 23 April 1889) was a French novelist and short story writer. He specialised in mystery tales that explored hidden motivation and hinted at evil without being explicitly concerned with anything supernatural. **Connection of sex to purgatory is intriguing. Could the structure (a spiral tower, not unlike Babel) be also the structure of sex as a series of deadly sins relating to the body (gluttony, etc.)?**)
5. Lacan realizes there would be a drop-off in business if sexuality was not emphasized. But, is it like the parish priest who, in being against sin, gets so many opportunities to talk about it? Is the negative attitude an excuse for never letting go of it? The Ucs. calls sexuality sinful, different from the parish priest’s sin=sin. **Is this related to the idea that the Symbolic ego has its unity established outside itself? That there is a relation to doubling that makes sex “no laughing matter”?**
6. The subject has to “measure himself AGAINST the difficulty” of being a sexed subject. Antagonism.
7. The *objet petit a*, again, is allied with the Golden Number (which is not a number but a relation) — **a relation of the orthogonal surface (a cut) to the contiguity of the space like that created in the stereogram, which is depth that is an interior, the result of the cut of something (the stereogram pattern) with itself, the cut that allows the stereogram pattern to slide across itself.**
8. Every attempt at continuation creates an effect of difference,  $1-a$ . (Cf. the ‘ $x+1=x$ ’ of idempotency; this is the  $1+x=1$  or unary trait form;  $1-a=1$ ). With  $a^2$  the odds/evens lateral meander to the vanishing point proceeds. **There are many doublings here. The alternation between “ $1+a$ ” and “ $1-a$ ” that Lacan uses to show us that it is the instance of these odd and even cases that creates the point between the “goal posts” that is the  $\emptyset$  of the Fibonacci, the vanishing point between the steps (left, right), the ichnography that walks into the space of the stereogram. Doubling seems to go back to the two versions of the “interval between the two deaths,” one in the direction of the symbolic>literal (the not-yet-dead condition of Antigone), the other in the direction of the literal>Symbolic, the necessity of the deceased to wander until he/she finds a Symbolic judgment. See note 10.**
9. Take your slide-rule to bed with you. The bed is a ground that is charged. Something passive that has become an “activated passivity.” **Passivity charged up is a “field of play,” and the wandering hero who willingly submits to suffering is an example of a figure turning himself into a ground. This is the essence of the wandering hero (Hercules, Odysseus, etc.)**



The diagonals in Aristotle’s logical square are “contradictories.” Lacan uses it as a template to demonstrate that each sexual “position,” man or woman, is an irrational combination. But, we already knew that.

10. Just as there are two forms/directions of “between the two deaths,” are these two forms related to idempotency and the unary trait? Are Polynices (who has forgotten how to die) and Antigone (who doesn’t know she is dead yet) poster-children for the unary and idempotency? Creon can’t seem to do anything more to Antigone to hurt her (that’s idempotency), and the dead person in need of a Symbolic death is the unary trait idea because of the lateral shuffling of the labyrinth. No one has commented on the role of lateral movement in creating the “minimum difference” of doubt that makes the 7 passageways into the 14 bi-passageways that Borges calls infinity.
11. Two aspects of the *objet petit a* — “with this index, this form of object” — is the principle of castration (the corner at the lower left of the Standard Reference Polygon of the torus, with its two  $-\emptyset$ s (modes of castration: either kicked out of the club, Symbolic, or never allowed in, Psychotic) moving across a void. **Think of the Marx Brothers’ mirror scene, Harpo dressed as Groucho. *Dressed for bed*. The bed is the charged field, passive but active. Activated in order to be passive. Groucho’s “guarantee of wholeness” (the mirror reflection) is betrayed by the Id-brother, Harpo. Psychotics are known for their ability to mimic neurotics.**
12. Lacan’s mathemes for men and women are like the contrast between contraries and contradictories. We cannot allow ourselves to let this be based on  $A=A$ .  $A$  and not- $A$  can be “said at the same time.” Thus contradiction reigns in matters of sexual difference. One could say that the conditions for “those who would call themselves men/women” is drawn from history and ethnography — *practices/acts*. It is up to us to explain why they are universal, and why these universals seem to be grounded in  $A = \sim A$ .
13. Difference is sufficient to generate the belief in AGENCY. A pressure difference in the atmosphere leads to flows of air, wind, but we imagine that there is something “blowing” the wind, less often sucking it. Difference itself is, **in essence**, the  $A=\sim A$ , the question is the agency we invent (sexual relation? sexual act?) that is retroactively constructed as being the agency? **Is difference a *minimal difference* ( $\partial$ ), such as that in the case of the Möbius strip or sorites, such that both identity AND difference are maintained at the same time, as in the case of  $A=\sim A$ ?**
14. So, is *any* difference sufficient to generate a “square of oppositions” that become a template for assigning agency (and hence discourse) to sexual (non-)relations? This is the orthograph analogy, that a lateral sliding movement, no matter how small, generates a sagittal dimension, with a vanishing point in PROJECTIVE SPACE, with its topological rules of toroid extimacy (inside=outside). The vanishing point on the horizon is also at the center, where all vectors pass through. “There is no purgatory” means that there is no buffer zone beyond this vanishing point; rather the buffer is between things, in the middle.
15. **Lacan’s slide-rule analogy should be read this way: the involvement of lateral movement in the creation of a secondary virtuality is rule-based (i.e. reason-able). “Sexual experience is rule-based (i.e. structured). What is the rule? The rule about lateral movement (orthogonality that creates a depth condition).**
16. Bi-valence (the excluded middle principle) produces **an alternative** third thing: a difference that, no matter how small, generates this THIRD THING and the virtuality of spaces and times that support it ethnologically (169). **The anamorphic skull in the Holbein double portrait can be seen when the eye is**

a minimal angle,  $\partial$ , from the surface of the canvas. This forces the skull image to be perceived as a “flat face” perpendicular/orthogonal to the line of sight.

17. *Ex falso* idea again: “every centaur has six limbs” which is in denial about the fact that there are no centaurs to begin with. The bed: activated in order to be passive. *Ex falso* as  $A = \sim A$  ? Is the quodlibet sequitur the allowable variety of cultural practices, necessary to adopt to varied climatic, terrestrial, and political conditions? Another way of saying  $A = \sim A$  is to say that what we see, the visible, is conditioned by its opposite or non-state, the invisible.
18. The male/non-male, “nothing else.” (Hence “woman does not exist.”) The sexual dyad will need the third, the one that was excluded by logic. The one AND the other is opposed to the one Or the other. One AND — intersection. male AND female. Lacan says this doesn't exist for the same reasons that Euler circles show union without intersection.
19. The logical square of Aristotle is converted, thanks to the “contradictory diagonals” of the male and female conditions, to the reference polygon of the torus. The consistent logic promoted/pretended by the square is turned into an origami folded space — by sexual difference in this case! — that creates a two-dimensional FORM that emerges from a metonymical plane of half-signifiers. We don't see any cut (distinction/difference/negation) inside this virtuality of sexuation, which is to say that we don't see any biological necessity to be a man or woman, but rather a relation to *conatus*, the *intention to act* AS a man or woman, to act in relation to the inside-outside of the phallic law (the Symbolic) or in relation to the limits of the phallic law, the “not-all” principle (the Imaginary) — the *passage à l'acte* that is not interpretation but (psycho-)analysis. In the Symbolic we can draw a line (*katagraph*) and say “don't cross it!” In the Imaginary, the line disappears, like the mirror in Alice's home, and we pass into Wonderland.

Again, apologies for this fragmentary account ...