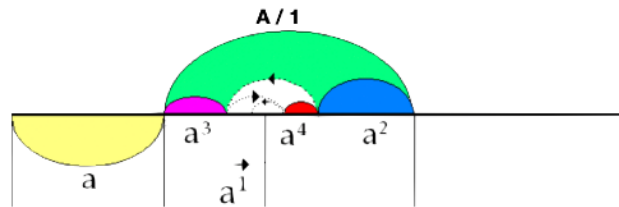


Letter to Lorens, Andy, and John

on the occasion of Lorens' reading of Seminar VII

In taking up the matter of the Borromeo knot, do not forget the excellent work of Will Greenshields on the Borromeo knot specifically. As a form of hopefully legitimate outreach (sanctioned in this case by Elie Ragland), George Spencer-Brown's own topological notation shows how the knot is a variation on the theme of $x = 1 + 1/x$, a "self-intersecting" formula that yields the same form as ... the Fibonacci number series. From there we go to Lacan's definition of the unary trait (in Seminar VII, even!) and the idea of recursion, the part that contains itself as a part, and hence the essence of metonymy known as metalepsis. Self-intersection and non-orientation — the flags of projective geometry. The more details one discovers, the more interesting the story becomes.

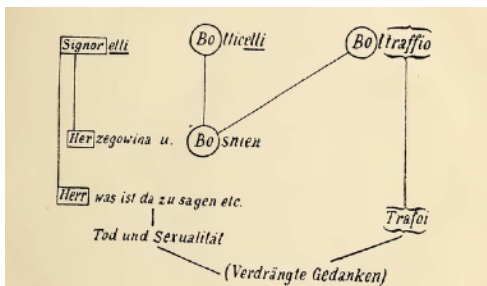


The illustrations for Seminar XIV, *The Logic of Phantasy*, are either botched or omitted from Gallagher's English translation. The French transcription, however, has color illustrations nicely done. It is important to follow Lacan's logic to show how, if A (in green) is set to the value of 1, the Fibonacci \emptyset becomes the "vanishing point" determined by odd and even alternations of the powers of a . Lacan connects this to his sexuation *mathemes* and jokes that you should "take your slide rule to bed with you" to prove that there is no such thing as the sexual relation. As if you needed proof!

In Seminar XIV, *jouissance*, under the name of the *objet petit a*, is given a thrilling ride with what Lacan calls his "slide-rule" analogy, where he puts the a and A along a line and adds and subtracts the value in relation to the Golden Mean, \emptyset .

This is a case where we stop asking what the little a is "like" and look at what it can do. By calling this slide-rule analogy a relation of the mean and extreme (where the "outer" elements, A and D, of the analogy form, $A:B :: C:D$, and the "inner" elements B and C, take us to Lacan's formula for metaphor, and thence, in Seminar V, to his beautiful thoughts about Freud's parapraxis). The mystery depends because the

metaphor is not given as such but is the missing name "Signorelli," and it's missing because Freud is a stranger who sees what the native speakers of Italian do not see, the "signor" which, as Herr, drags him all over the Adriatic, as he encounters HERzegovna, thinks the name might be BOticelli or BOLtraffio (BOSnia and HERzegovna), and Boltraffio, like any good metonymy, divides into Traffei, the town where an ex-patient, he hears, has just committed suicide because of his sexual



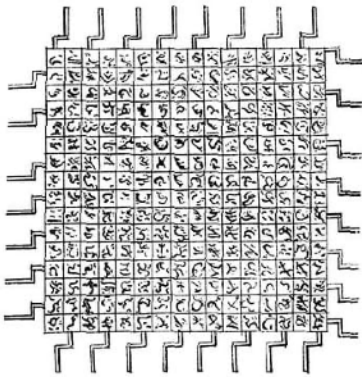
frustrations. Then he talks to someone about how Turks are very polite to their physicians, calling them HERR always, and would rather die than do without sex.

The “mean and extreme” phrase in XIV was therefore not a throw-away reference to the Fibonacci \emptyset but a reference to a style of visual thinking Lacan has been using for a long long time.

How do you solve the mean and extreme expression? You either cross-multiply, as Lacan asks us to do with the S' in the numerator and denominator in his metaphor matheme, or you invert the full fraction as well as the elements you are averaging to get the harmonic mean, which the \emptyset represents.

If we face Lacan's arguments directly we are almost always confused. They seem to jump around, they are elliptical. But, we should not forget that Lacan is purposefully polishing a FACE on his thoughts that will grind down the irregularities (which he refuses otherwise to remove) so that we can see our face in them and CONTINUE his thoughts, using the principle of the *mi-dire*: “I say half and you think the other half.” The smooth face of Lacan's texts, which we usually perceive as a patch-work of irregular shapes, a tessellated pavement, is in reality a very old device in literature that has not yet been articulated because

the scholarship has gotten buried. However, Goethe knew about it and gave the Italian lieutenant he meets in the Tyrol the power to express it (*Italian Travels*). It is the *mi-dire* traced back to an ancient source, the *zairja*, a computational device invented by Jewish, Arabic, and Christian scholars (presumably a few atheists too) that reversed the causal chain idea to say that the purpose of real thinking was “to find, for any one effect, as many causes as possible.”¹



Jonathan Swift knew enough about the *zairja* to parody it in his *Tale of a Tub*. Then, Daniel Libeskind caught wind of this and cribbed it for his design (without naming the device) for his exhibition at the Biennale in 1985 (“Three Lessons in Architecture”).

I do not recommend we use the word *zairja* in public, it will just confuse people, but if we understand the principle of the *mi-dire* way of writing ... to find as many causes as possible for one given effect ... we will see immediately what Lacan is doing in Seminar XIV. In his slide-rule analogy he follows the rules of math (as always) but shows a new way of thinking about projective geometry, where \emptyset functions as the vanishing point that, topologically, exists in the same plane as the parallels that it gathers. Really! there is a lot to expand on here, and Lacan has given us permission to “think for ourselves” as long as we do the same homework he is doing. Lacan's *mi-dire* polishes a surface on his texts that allows us to see inside the solid, this is the same orthography that he uses in the slide-rule analogy to demonstrate how, at the level of simple addition and subtraction, a depth emerges through the powers of a ($a^0, a^1, a^2, a^3 \dots$) that goes back to the mean-and-extreme comparison. It's truly brilliant, but we can easily miss it if we ignore what he is saying and think that he is simply making a series of claims about things. He is inviting us into a way of thinking.

I probably would not have paid any attention to this except that, in my prior studies of Giambattista Vico, who was at least as strange as Lacan, I encountered the same *zairja* thinking, and even some of the same textual devices. An even more striking discovery is that Vico's theory of metaphor is nearly identical to Lacan's, and as you know Lacan's metaphor theory differs from ALL of the others that Paul Ricœur described in his otherwise exhaustive book on metaphor. Ricœur also left out Vico, a confirmation of my

¹ See David Link, “Scrambling T-R-U-T-H: Rotating Letters as a Material Form of Thought.” http://www.alpha60.de/research/scrambling_truth/; link to full article given.

view that Lacan and Vico not only have an original theory of metaphor but, as both excluded from Perelman's and Ricoeur's idea that metaphor is an analogy with one term missing, have got the right idea that all the others have missed. ALL of the others.

Let's not underestimate the value of Lacan's originality. We can demonstrate it negatively, by comparing him to an endless list of other thinkers, or we can demonstrate it positively, by simply showing to others how Lacan's *zairja* is active and working in all of his writings, thanks to the *mi-dire* way of cutting the text off before it is finished, allowing others to finish it. This is not vagueness. It is not obtuseness. *It is a method that works*. Derrida, for all his brilliance, and possibly next to Badiou, comes close to Lacan in originality, knows how to think but not how to allow others to think like him. When Lacan cuts his thought in half, it is to have an at-least-possible/imaginary listener-reader who finishes the thought. If you find this a bit odd, accept my claim that this kind of thinking was popular up to the 18c. but nowadays is virtually unknown. In Gongorá and other weirdos, you can see it at work in the methods of *agutezza*, which Vico picks up and elaborates in his *New Science*.

While I don't recommend this kind of bizarre footnoting, I do recommend that we take Lacan at his half-word, that it is a way of thinking, not a collection of mysterious enigmatic statements. In Seminar VII Lacan tells is the story of Apollo and Daphne but he does not tell us the first part of the story,² which would give away the secret of projective geometry's spatial binomial, the same secret he involves in this slide-rule analogy in Seminar XIV. We cannot afford to miss these connections, but it is too much to expect of ourselves if we read alone. I would recommend that any time we read Lacan we find at least one partner, even if an imaginary one, to provoke us into thinking forward, not stuck trying to figure out what the hell statement X or Y mean.

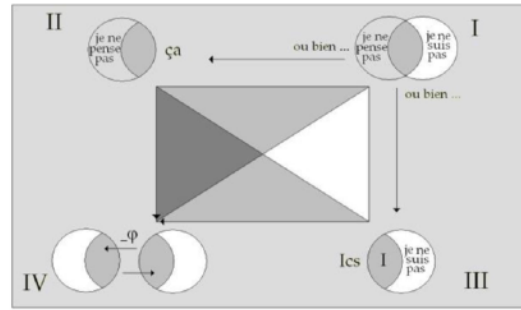
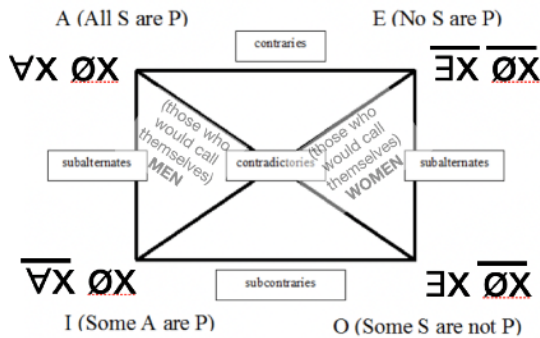
Even this "never read alone" method has its history, at least as ancient as Petrarch, where the humanist bemoans the fact that his contemporaries are idiots so he must address his writing to dead thinkers and have real conversations with them. If we have some living friends, we are lucky and should not waste the opportunity to collaborate.

The Borromeo knot holds together but we cannot see how it does not. It operates through a topology of A:B :: B:C, the literal form Lacan gives for metaphor:

$$\frac{S}{S_1} \cdot \frac{S_2}{x} \rightarrow S\left(\frac{1}{s''}\right)$$

We have to ask, what do all these s's mean? Dan Collins has written a nice article about this in *(Re)turn: A Journal of Lacanian Studies* 6 (Spring, 2011): 149–157, the journal I think Elie Ragland started in Missouri. Collins emphasizes the contrast between the “mean” or inner terms, S₁ and S₂ that seem to

² I have added this back with just a little research. Apollo insults Eros, thus Eros's craft of an arrow that inflames Apollo with love and Daphne with hate is the *jouissance* we need to understand why Lacan is interested in this and says that “architecture is a surface of pain.” Why? Because Daphne invents her own (projective space) *trap* — as soon AS she thinks she wants to escape. This goes to the heart of the meaning of *jouissance* in topological terms and it is a mystery why Lacan did not go into the backstory, where the projective line is defined, by the story, in *precisely correct geometrical terms!*



Seminar XIV makes extensive use of the standard/reference polygon of the torus (right) in mockery of the Aristotelian logical square, perhaps to emphasize his conversion of Descartes' *je pense* to "I think not, therefore I do not exist." The sexuation quadrangle repeats this form in a different guide where the upper right of the woman ("there are no exceptions to the part-all condition") constitute the extreme and the positions of the man constitute the mean terms of the "mean and extreme," with its associations to Fibonacci \emptyset and the slide-rule relations of *a* to A, the little to the Big Other, *laterally*. The orthography of the A/a produces an alternation between odd and even values of the power of *a* to introduce a parallax depth condition within the plane of the slide-rule surface.

cancel out, but of course this is the latency and invisibility that relate DIRECTLY to the function of the unconscious, as Lacan shows in Seminar XIV, when he compares Analysis to the reference polygon of the torus, which "spreads out" from repetition and converges again on suppression, after creating a "chiralistic" relation between acting-out (within the Symbolic) and psychotic *passage à l'acte*.

We encounter the unary trait which has some enticing mysteries that Lacan does not resolve, leaving us the opportunity to see that the Borromeo knot is not the only "calculus of form" (Spencer-Brown's term) that has an anamorphic logic. Then, we oblige ourselves to go back and correct past accounts of anamorphosis, including the great Mladen Dolar's (sorry, but he got it wrong!), because anamorphosis and parapraxis are two sides of the same coin. And, if I have not already confused or bored you, let me say that "two sides of the same coin" is an idea of great antiquity, since tokens known as thaumatropes have been found in Magdalenian caves where a hole in the middle of a disk allowed it to be spun to combine images on both sides. Lacan is thus a "master of cinema" because his thought is essentially anamorphic in this way; he essentially allows the visible to join the invisible, on a literally rotating basis.

So one way of approaching Lacan is to chip away at isolated ideas to connect them with "partners," and this will always be a respected methodology in Lacanian studies. But, I personally warn against this kind of study, since it POSTPONES the obligation of the *mi-dire*, which is an obligation that we cannot pretend that it doesn't exist. This is the obligation to go further into the depths of Lacan's presentations, using his vast collection of writing to corroborate a style, rhythm, and METAPHORIC parapraxis of his own, a scholarly parapraxis build on the model of Freud's travelogue model. It's not that we don't need to make connections to other thinkers, but we should at least connect Lacan to his equals, and there are not that many of them on this count, the *mi-dire* count. The figure of the missing half is more common in literature than philosophy, where philosophers want to play "the last man living" and say everything that can be said. Hegel does not do this, even though he tries. Plato knows he cannot succeed and so invents the dramatic model. But, in literature we have the masters, Shakespeare and Cervantes, who both die in the same year,

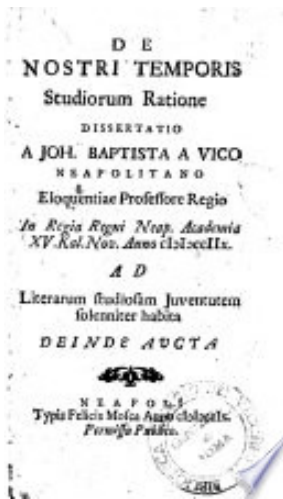
who understand it so well that we could use almost any of their works to find out more. With Don Quixote we have a masterpiece demonstrating the zairja logic that he has learned from Ramón Lull, and at first we hate the idiot but at some point tilt into his way of thinking and see fictions as realities. Once we do this, we enter into the anamorphic presence of Quixote's project and understand its parapraxis and its necessary relation to travel, where distance and thought run in parallel, according to what Vico called the Lesbic Rule. I will let you look that up on your own. It's in the *Study Methods of Our Times*.



My point is that we should not despair with Lacan's difficulties but approach them in sympathy to his method of writing. He does not want to confuse us, except when a momentary confusion will be therapeutic, a showman's trick. Let's enjoy the show here, and, without having to believe in magic, appreciate the tricks and illusions as a truly magic performance that leads to truly magic thinking, something that few other thinkers are able to pull off. We do not escape the unconscious! This is the lesson of psychoanalysis, and a warning against psychotic externalizing writing, that can mimic subjectivity but "knows nothing of it," *kenosis*, because it cannot act within the Symbolic, where psychosis is also present but as a vanishing point, a \emptyset .

This is not my point, certainly; and not Lacan's point uniquely. It is a point that has been made for eons in different ways, but in consistent ways, and even Andy's interest in the Arabesque proves this point.

Sometimes smart and careful scholars miss the point and give us detailed accounts that nonetheless leave out the one thing we need to know. In Vico studies there are legions of scholars who know nothing about the relation of Vico's theory of metaphor to his doctrine of metaphysical points and *conatus*. I would say almost all of them. This does not mean that the connections do not exist, they remain to be found and expanded. This is our responsibility ... to continue Lacan's legacy, in ways that *cannot help but touch* on architecture and even revolutionize *our thinking about architecture*. In turn, the ethnography of architecture (not so much contemporary architecture theorists) has a lot to say to Lacanians who think architecture is, thanks to Fredric Jameson, all about Frank Gehry, or, thanks to Žižek, all about the spandrel's aspect as a left-over part. DAMN these guys. They are smart, they SHOULD have recognized their failure to connect! It is our job to connect whenever we can and in whatever style we can master. We must do our homework.



I would love to see someone do a critique on Žižek's writing about the architectural spandrel. Žižek cites exaptation and its relation to the sorites but never *names* the sorites properly or gets into its history as a logical paradox. It would also be good to scour Will Greenshields shorter works on topology, Louis Kauffman's work on George Spencer-Brown, and the book Jean Nicod wrote on topology and argumentation, which Lacan cites in Seminar IX, allow us entry into the question of Lacan's considerable powers of visualization. *If Lacan is a "visualizer" who uses a mi-dire method to subdivide his already subdivided teachings, the case should be made that this is an ESSENTIAL component of his theory, one that is consistently neglected, distorted, and misunderstood, but one that is equally essential to the forging of any relation of psychoanalysis and architecture.*