

# Try and Fail

program for a zoom round-table discussion, Sunday, July 23, 2023 12 noon, Eastern US time

DON KUNZE, MODERATOR

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**S**ome people have conjectured that Lacan actually suffered from a mental condition:

Wernicke's aphasia or receptive aphasia is when someone is able to speak well and use long sentences, but what they say may not make sense. They may not know that what they're saying is wrong, so may get frustrated when people don't understand them.<sup>1</sup>

This amounts to a caution for those reading Lacan, in effect to absolve them of the pains of



reading transcripts of lectures where Lacan was, undoubtedly, being not just a little theatrical. His drama and excitement was a part of his style, his *phasia* as he himself volunteered in Seminar IX, *Identification*. Bow-ties and cigars were stock props, the black-board and large sheets of drawing pads on easels were others.

There is no doubt that Lacan was what we often call, lacking any better term, “a visual thinker.” The problem was that the diagrams, mathemes, and sketches that

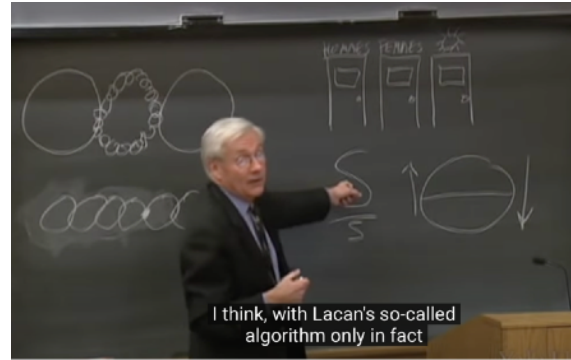
were evident to him were not as revelational to others; in fact they served to muddle the heads of many who were already muddled by the *mi-dire* style of his presentations, which jumped from idea to idea without warning or suddenly terminated unexpectedly — in the style of his variable-length clinical sessions.

Attempts to clarify what Lacan said and wrote seem to need no justification. Where only half is given, another half is necessary. The problem has been that the first half comes from the horse's mouth. To make for a good though rude joke, we know where the other half must come from. There is no imitating Dr. Lacan, he was one of a kind. But, by piling on commentaries and captions, we are going against his explicit advice: don't ask me again and again what I have said — just *do what I do*. Carry my project forward; don't stop to count the bread crumbs I drop as if they were mana from heaven.

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<sup>1</sup> “Types of Aphasia,” *Stroke Association*; URL: [https://www.stroke.org.uk/what-is-aphasia/types-of-aphasia#Wernicke's aphasia \(fluent aphasia\)](https://www.stroke.org.uk/what-is-aphasia/types-of-aphasia#Wernicke's%20aphasia%20(fluent%20aphasia))

There were many bread crumbs, and what crumbs! Toruses, Möbius bands, cross-caps, anamorphic images, topological tales from antiquity, and Borromean knots made of string arranged in a variety of configurations! Yet, those who picked up these crumbs frequently did not know what to make of them. A large majority reassembled them into a loaf made of Affine Geometry, a rubber-sheet version of graph theory having nothing to do with Projective Geometry, founded by Pappus of Alexandria and rediscovered by Girard Desargues and Blaise Pascal in the 17c., then revived in the 19c. It would just take cracking a mathematics history book to discover that Lacan was right in knowing these facts. As Samo Tomšič has noted, the *objet petit a* lives in a 2-d world but cannot be found among Kant's transcendental (Euclidean) aesthetics.<sup>2</sup> Yet, many of continue to pictorialize topology, as of the torus were really an edible donut and not a spiral and empty center.



Even seasoned Lacanians get confused when trying to represent the simplest graphic conditions.

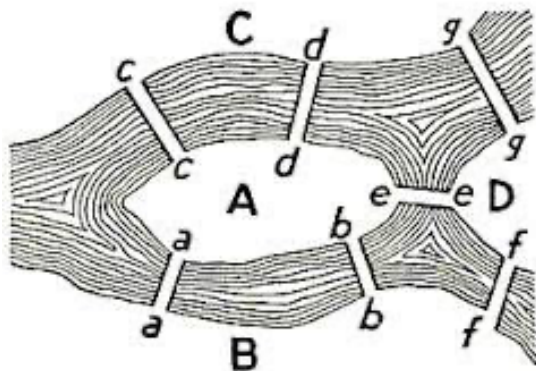


FIGURE 98. *Geographic Map: The Königsberg Bridges.*

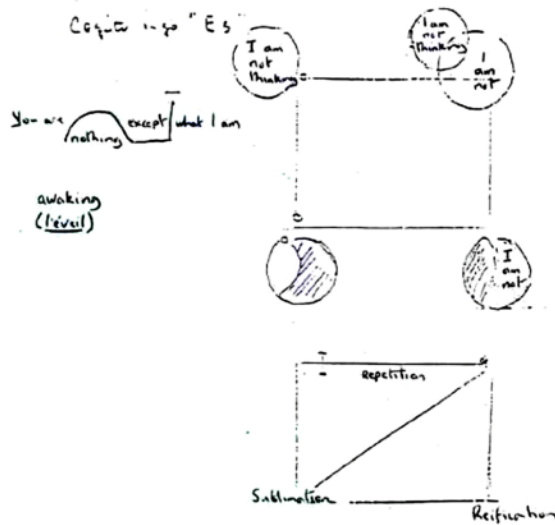
Euler's treatment of the Königsberg Bridge Problem is the most frequently cited source of topology by Lacanians, including by Jeanne Granon-Lafont. However, this began the science of Graph Theory, not topology.

Even when poor Xavier Audouard tried to make this point in Seminar XIII, Lacan mistook him for a perspectivalist. Although Lacan misjudged Audouard's demonstration, his vehemence can be taken as a gauge of his distrust for those who continued to "pictorialize" psychoanalysis. Only some of the worst cases have been famous: Laura Mulvey's weaponizing of Foucault's re-directed gaze on behalf of the women wronged by Hitchcock.<sup>3</sup> Granon-Lafont's misrepresentation of the historical origins of topology, taken up enthusiastically by Elie Ragland and uncritically adopted by countless others, is less well-known but sufficiently misleading.

This doubling-down resistance is the condition of not believing what is not just demonstrable but true.

<sup>2</sup> Samo Tomšič, "Mathematical Realism and the Impossible Structure of the Real," *Psychoanalytische Perspectieven* 35, 1 (2017): 9-34.

<sup>3</sup> Even Mulvey moved on from this thesis, but many have not. Better to start fresh with Dan Collins' "Stealing Money from Offices," *Lacuna* 16 (July 2018): 105-124. In this important essay Collins notes that "doing Lacan" involves a "criticism by the cut" rather than "criticism by punctuation." This distinction has been an important part of my topological project and has inspired efforts to build a set of new critical terms around the idea of the "katagrophic cut."



A Gallagher graphic from Seminar IX, *identification*, misrepresenting the corners that Lacan had clearly drawn in the seminar and failing to give the correct name for the diagram source, the “fundamental polygon of the torus.” The French transcript shows the polygon correctly.

Truth would be, in the case of projective geometry, a way of understanding *jouissance* by experiencing *jouissance*, what Giambattista Vico aptly called a “proof of the body” (*The New Science*, §345). Such an experience can be had by spending time with stereograms or the Ames Window demonstration. In these it is impossible not to acknowledge a double-decker reality schema, where one energy line flows in constant tension and another takes a zig-zag, or “isomeric” path.

Lacan himself puts this matter in terms of a chess game, where the players take turns upsetting the balance that is ideally preserved in the “rules of the game.” But, he notes, the *real rules* evolve through practice — the actually *play* of the game — and are thus emergent. We only know the rules when we

have re-assessed the play, retroactively. We discover that the real logical of the game has been one of “instrumental convergence.” Thanks to the suppression of certain trial actions, others have been made possible and productive. A full accounting of the game would be the Game that takes a “Hamiltonian” view that includes the accidents along with the rules, the mistakes along with the successes.<sup>4</sup> The outcome of the Game is due to the “instrumental” — i. e. structural — relations among these discordant parts, unpredictable from the start of the game, knowable only *retroactively*, at the end.

Lacan left his topological legacy sparkling clean, but his exhibits seem to have been stuffed and un-dusted inside glass cases in wayside museums. Many of the illustrations from the French transcripts did not make it into the English translations, so there is no talk about symmetrical difference, “union without intersection,” the differences between Euler circles and Venn diagrams, or the fundamental polygons that carried the torus as far as Seminar XIV.

Lacan was a visualizer. But, many books of Lacanian theory can go for hundreds of pages without a single illustration. Presentations at conferences do not use projectors except to spell out

<sup>4</sup> Henry Krips correctly pointed out to me that the term “Hamiltonian” specifies a series of Lagrangian transformations; I use the term as an analogy for other cases where there is, like the Hamiltonian, a “sum of kinetic energy and potential energy” in hopes that it might inspire Lacanians to find a term able to extend the idea of the Real as a case of energetics. In my case, that energetics would be founded on the idea of instrumental convergence.



Some get it right: Chaplin, *the Circus* (1928)

what speakers have already said. If Lacan left his theory at the half-way state, it seems that the completion of the other half will be done in the dark.

### Try Again

What would remedy this? First, this obvious question: “Who am I to say?” I am not a mathematician, in fact I am one of those unfortunates who find mathematical notation unbearably impenetrable. There must be a better team leader out there, somewhere. Second, people don’t like to be told they are wrong, especially by a non-expert. There is a logical and emotional basis of Resistance. People don’t doubt for no reason; they have understandable interests in maintaining the larger structures of their mental operating systems. “No paradigm before its time,” and possibly this is not the right time.

Ignoring all that (since a backward glance can kill the blithe pilgrim), the future of topology in Lacanian studies depends on finding examples and inventing demonstrations that allow those who behold them to change their own minds themselves, willingly, voluntarily, enthusiastically. I have put forward a number of these in the form of movie examples: the extimacy of *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, the “thaumatropics” of the con-game in *Vertigo*, a parallax analysis of the Three Prisoner’s Dilemma, a Gaussian analysis of the Borromeo knot, a graphic restoration of the “fundamental polygon” of the torus, a clip from Chaplin’s *The Circus* explaining how the sphere become a torus in the modest settings of modern film production, what metalepsis, sorites, and inside frames mean.

At this point the results of these efforts have been limited. Those who took in these “proofs of the body” did so because they had already understood and mastered them in their own terms. Iraj Ghoochani has broadened my scope and ambitions, thanks to our recent proposal for Open AI’s next phase of development. Diana Coelo’s filmic imagination continues to inspire. Still, it seems that those interested in topology will find themselves on a small desert island, where, as much as everyone enjoys the good company, they will still light signal fires to alert passing ships.



*The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951) was not produced by Lacanians but nonetheless got the idea of *extimité* right. Freud wondered how Jensen’s *Gradiva* got his theory right, and Lacan was similarly astounded that Marguerite Duras had seemed to represent his theory perfectly in her novel *The Ravishing of Lol V. Stein* (1966).

This is a long invitation to a short event. Come if you can to a zoom conversation on Sunday, July 23, 12 noon, Eastern US daylight time. This Sunday’s zoom event is a part of iPSA’s program

of discussion of chapter proposals, where each author exposes his/her essay's intentions and strategies. Instead of presenting, however, I would appreciate your input on this important issue of topology studies in the Freudian-Lacanian field.

US East Coast time: 12:00 noon / London GMT 5 pm

Berlin/Italy Central European Time 6 pm

Tehran 8:30 pm

zoom link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86045533506>

- NO LECTURE, MINIMAL SCREEN-SHARES, 2 HOUR MAXIMUM DURATION •

(SUGGESTED TOPICS, NOT HOWEVER LIMITED TO THIS LIST)

*extimité*

*anamorphosis*

*isomeric points*

*katagraphic cuts*

*cathesis • cathetis*

*tesseræ*

*instrumental convergence*

*Audouard's thesis*

*Ames Window Illusion*

*Lacan's chess-game analogy*

*Parrhasius's curtain*

*Simonides invention of artificial memory*

*HAL's suicide thesis*

*symmetrical difference*

*Euler circles vs. Venn diagrams*

*aphasia and metaphor theory*

*Freud's parapraxis*

*fundamental polygons*

*discourse theory*

*thaumatropes*

*READ: my discussion with ChatGPT on the issue of aphasia:*

<https://chat.openai.com/share/cbac24d7-9428-466b-8b92-ac6898e6efd5>