

Who's on First?

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Costello: Well then who's on first?
Abbott: Yes.
Costello: I mean the fellow's name.
Abbott: Who.
Costello: The guy on first.
Abbott: Who.¹

Introduction: The Defense of the Humanities

From Percy Bysshe Shelley's "Defense of Poetry" (1822) through C. P. Snow's "Two Cultures" (1959), the humanities' classic rhetorical stance has been one of defense in the face of science. This defensiveness has marginalized the arts, but even more damaging is the assumption that natural sciences are precise while the human sciences are generalistic. But, in contrast to the objects of nature — by definition alien from the theories that attempt to explain them — human objects and actions are theoretically open to full and complete understanding, even if this understanding must adopt specific strategies and forms in the face of the paradoxes of self-reference ("we are what we study").

Giambattista Vico (1668-1744) was the first thinker to realize the implications of this, through his motto of *verum ipsum factum* ("humans may in theory know what they have made"). Precision of human sciences is a function of the "precision" of subjective structure, whose invariance affords cultures' and history's infinite diversification. Later, Jacques Lacan (1901-1981) qualified this precision as based in language, but in a language that confronted the human subject with an identity that did not exactly fit. For both Vico and Lacan, a metonymy of inside for outside puts the human mind *outside of itself*. As Agent Mulder said in *The X-Files*, "The truth is out there!" The truth *and its dislocation* was the basis for both Vico's "optical" construction of subjective universality and Lacan's idea of the "extimate" (*extimité*) in the famous "mirror stage." Because dislocation is an *architecture* in the "optical identities" established by Vico and Lacan, architecture occupies a privileged position within the humanistic theory of both thinkers and, indeed, anyone who attempts a theory of subjectivity.

The Mirror Stage's Place-as-Temporality

In her lucid and witty review of Lacan's mirror stage, the scholar Jane Gallop couples the bibliographical problem of determining which of Lacan's articles is historically the "first" written account of his oral and unrecorded presentation in 1937 with the issue of what comes first in the mirror stage itself.² The scholar's predicament of finding a "primary text" to serve as the source for the idea as it first emerged in print is, in an uncanny sense, a

mirror of the very subject the scholar has isolated for study. Sandwiched in between is a greater, more breathtaking parallel, the realization that, just as the mirror stage is the beginning of the child's anticipation of control based on an image of unity, Lacan's *own* beginning as a thinker begins with this idea, which is in many ways, structured exactly like the mirror stage.

Where have we encountered this kind of multiple mirroring before? Thanks to the comparative obscurity of this Eighteenth Century Neapolitan philosopher of culture, only a few readers might supply the answer that I believe fits best: Giambattista Vico's *The New Science*, where the author places, as the origin of not only his object of study but his awareness of the "science" of that object, the "imaginative universal" (*universale fantastico*). Vico's own insights begin with the historically remote moment that initiated human thought proper: a moment when humans attribute their own qualities to the sky. Thunder occasioned this transfer through a metonymic sequence of sounds that the first humans took to be the voice of the sky.³ Soon, all of nature was animated by humanlike character and intentionality. If this idea is the generative origin of the entire *New Science*, the question is, how did Vico think of it?

Vico gives an account of his discovery principle in terms of a special universal invented at the opposite end of history from the myth it is empowered to discover: "*recollective fantasia*," a combination of practices he elaborates throughout his earlier works and *Autobiography*. This form of *fantasia* is for the modern scholar, the modern reader; anyone who would aspire to understand the remote, strange thought of the first humans. At the end of history, this combination of memory and imagination is a *form of* and *counterpart to* the very thing it attempts to discover: a key that both mirrors and deciphers the imaginative universal. But, this form of mastery, like Lacan's mirror stage, promises future success that retroactively fragments the scholar's "past." The imaginative universal and the scholarly universal required to unlock it are antipodes of a globe that required clever navigation, a trip that cannot penetrate directly through but must sail around.

If we take Vico's late work on the scholarly universal in combination with his personal account of intellectual development, we have an interesting story. Working in his father's bookstore, the young Vico fell off a ladder and sustained a concussion. The attending physician predicted that the boy would either die or grow up to be an idiot. Vico leaves it for the reader to disregard the physician's prediction or take it up in a new light — that Vico's highly original and widely misunderstood thought did in fact amount to idiocy.⁴ Vico follows up this joke with a series of images of dire alternatives. At one point, he reports that he did not know whether he, in his search for a totalizing theory, was a "god or devil." He employs a mystical-esoteric image as a frontispiece to the last edition of *The New Science*, based on "Cebes' Table," a text that was well known in Vico's day. The story accompanying the table is interesting. Pilgrims visiting the Temple of Saturn notice an image in the shadows at the rear of the temple and ask the attending priest about it. It is an image of wisdom, he replies, but be careful if you wish to look at it. If you understand it, you will be transformed by its wisdom; if you fail, you will go mad. Some of the many versions of this text propose an image that approximates the painting in the back of the

temple: a labyrinth surmounted by or surrounding a temple; or, as in some versions, a *mons delectus*, a steep pathways leading to a pinnacle occupied by a temple above the clouds. Again, the high-stakes allure of discovering the “first human idea” pervades not just Vico’s advice to the reader of *The New Science*, but also the idea that initiates that work itself: the thunder that shocked the first humans into thinking like humans, and the idea that, once discovered as a principle, grounded the science of that moment and its aftermath.⁵



Figure 1. Otto Vænien (1556-1629), “Cebes’ Table,” Source: *Theatro Moral de la Vida Humana*, 1672. By comparing the Table to a *mons delectus*, or “mountain of choice,” Vænien is able to deploy Vico’s ideas of the *cælum*, heaven as mind (*animus*), able to penetrate mute matter (the clouds). At the same time, Vænien demonstrates the primary architectural function of the table: a distinction between the otherwise “anamorphic” building types, the temple and the labyrinth.

It is curious that both Lacan’s and Vico’s generative insights involve mirrors in literal as well as figurative ways. In Lacan, it is after all the mirror that initiates the child’s (mistaken) anticipation of unification based on the specular image. Vico makes something of the same comparison. In the image that serves as the frontispiece of *The New Science*, known as the *dipintura*, a divine eye enclosed by a triangle casts its gaze on to a reflecting jewel on the breast of *Metafisica*, who surmounts a globe representing the limits of the perceptible world (Fig. 2). The visual ray reflects on to a statue of Homer, as frozen as the

victims of Medusa and himself famously blind. “Blind to what?” would be Lacan’s question, and one might say “blind to the objects that, in the visual field of those with sight, are structurally invisible: namely, the gaze (in Vico, the divine eye; in Lacan, the concealed return-gaze of the Big Other), but also other “part objects” that mark the edge of the human ego’s efforts at control: the voice, the breast, feces.”⁶



Figure 2. Domenico Antonio Vaccaro (1678-1745), “La Dipintura Allegorica.” Source: Giambattista Vico, *The New Science* (Venice: Felice Mosca, 1730). Vico’s “memory place” and mythic clearing in the Nemean wood, first printed as the frontispiece of the second edition of *The New Science*.

Objects lying at Homer's statue's feet metaphorically defend the imaginary and symbolic realm: a scales representing justice, a purse for commerce, fasces for centralized government. These represent the accretions of the collective cultural ego: the *certum* or concretizations produced to protect from imagined-real lacks/threats, which, like the plow and tiller further into the image, develop humans' heroic mastery of nature. The limits of perception that compare to Lacan's part-objects are on the altar and the globe precariously placed at the corner of the alter: the rituals of fire and water, used to sanction the boundary crossed at both marriage and burial, which, Vico notes, were originally the same ceremony.

Standing before the mirror of *Metafisica* (nature *made into* a mirror), the first humans "misrecognize" themselves by seeing the bodies and actions of gods. This is not the same as the human infant seeing a mirrored self-image, but the parallels are nonetheless instructive. The (at first unrecognized) act of mirroring is what Vico credits as the essence of his insight. It is the metaphorical capacity of mind to conceal itself from itself, and this capacity is a quick succession of the very powers of metaphor that Lacan himself cites. The thunder is essentially metonymic. It does not say anything that the first humans can understand. Rather, it creates a "meaning effect." The author and Vichian enthusiast James Joyce speculated that it contained the necessary phonemic components of all languages, just as linguists note that the infant, in babbling, will run through all vocal possibilities and gradually discard the ones not used as he/she learns a native tongue. Metonymy, Lacan devises, is a means of signifying through absence.

$$F(S \dots S') \cong S \text{ (—) } s$$

Ed Pluth provides an expert translation:

The *S*s stand for signifiers, and the *s* for a signified effect. This formula expresses much that we already know about metonymy: the movement from one signifier to another in the signifying chain (*S ... S'*) is congruent to or tantamount to (\cong) one signifier giving the effect of there being a signified somewhere, an effect that is not placed in the signifying chain but that "resonates" beyond the signifying chain, indeed, beyond the signifier itself (*S—s*). The bar between *S* and *s* can then be taken to represent a gap between signifiers and the signified effect but also as a minus sign, such that metonymy gives us signifiers with an absent signified effect. "Resonance" is perhaps the ideal term for expressing what it is that metonymy achieves.⁷

Through this formula, we can see the importance of metonymy to the mirror stage. Gallop notes: "The mirror stage is a decisive moment. Not only does the self issue from the mirror stage, but so does 'the body in bits and pieces'. This moment is the source *not only for what follows but also for what precedes*. It produces the future through anticipation and the past through retroaction. And yet it is itself a moment of self-delusion, of captivation by an illusory image. Both future and past are thus rooted in an illusion" [emphasis mine]. Metonymy's "meaning effect" is created through an absence, a *defect* in the succession of signifiers that, intending to signify, provide only a partial supply. Meaning is created by

resonance, and resonance is made possible by the distance constructed between the “partialized” subject-in-bits-and-pieces (the subject that realizes itself as “formerly fragmentary,” or *morcelé*). This is a subject made uncanny by a marginalization that invites it into a space but does not allow it properly to belong in that space, to be at home.

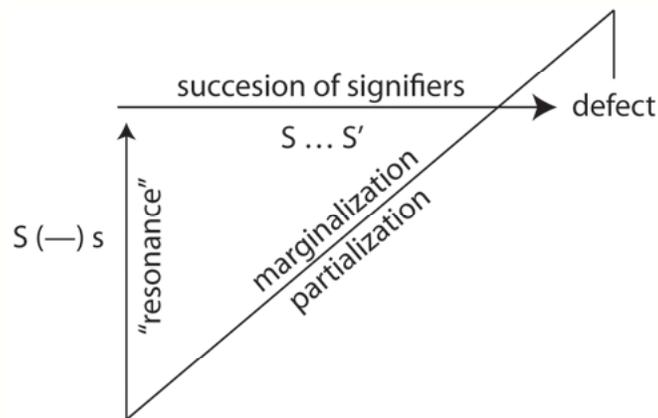


Figure 3. Lacan’s idea of metonymical meaning follows the structural model of the “anacoluthon,” the figure of rhetoric where a terminal element retroactively revises the meaning of the succession of signifiers by altering, through a process of resonance (cf. anamorphosis, parallax, *moiré*) the idea of the initial element, “who’s on first.” Source: author.

Vico’s Mirror Stage

Vico’s subject fits perfectly into the Lacanian schema — and in two ways that compound the mystery of how Lacan’s mirror stage is the origin of the phenomenal subject *and* a science of the phenomenal subject. Vico’s visual evidence is compelling. We have in fact the *subjet morcelé* before our eyes: the pieces of human civilization *as* pieces, in the style of the emblem books of the Eighteenth Century, cast about the ground of the “oculus” or clearing in the forest, an opening created by the first humans to gain better view of the provident signs of the sky; past and future, divided by a mirror.⁸ Moreover, *Metafisica* stands on a globe that is in fact an inverted topological model of the heavens, an outside made into an inside, the “beyond” of Elysium contained within the mysterious sphere: a case of Lacan’s idea of “the extimate” (intimate exteriority; exterior intimacy) if there ever was one! We see Homer as a statue, not a human figure, as if to emphasize the “permanent erection and stasis” of the materiality of poetry: the dream of unity as a projection in a projected space, appropriately flawed — the base is cracked. All objects in this image are described meticulously in Vico’s preface, all but one, that is: the helmet of Hermes. Homer is shown looking directly at it but Vico doesn’t explain its presence. What is the meaning

of Vico's silence on this image of invisibility and secret wisdom? When Vico says, just before he sets out his claim to have discovered the key to human construction, that "we must reckon as if there were no books in the world," is he returning to Plato's principle of never writing down any complete thesis but, rather, using language to create a fragment of what the reader-listener must complete silently, internally? Vico's own research was the opposite. According to Verene, he consulted every available text, was an avid reader, a bibliophile.⁹ Yet, Vico was too much a Platonist to regard the written word as complete. Even if he had not been familiar with Plato's "Seventh Letter," he would have learned the lesson of the Dialogues, that truth cannot be literally stated, that it does not yield to the demands of the intellect to display itself; that it can only be "encountered" through error, dream-like reflections, and myth. The *dipintura*, and no less the text of *The New Science* itself, should be regarded as *tesserae*, fragments of a whole that must be "completed by the audience."

To condense what should properly be a lengthy exposition on this subject, consider this short-cut. The literary device of the "unreliable" or "defective narrator" has long served fiction as a means of creating a doubled point of view. With the realization that the narrator is possibly a fictional creation of a "real" author, who intends the reader to deploy an ironic rather than naïve understanding of the literal account, a space much like the space of the mirror stage is opened up. The point of view is misrecognized, taken up by a false voice. A "future space" is opened up, where the original single vanishing point of intentional meaning is doubled and competitive. Like the dramatic device of twins who mischievously change places to fool the naïve lover, the object of knowledge or resolution of the plot blurs, vibrates, shifts. Once the geodesic point against which all other lines were held to account, the vanishing point is doubled by the unreliable/defective narrator, the voice that undermines order from the inside-out.¹⁰

The space of the defective narrator creates doubles, just as Lacan's mirror creates the child's composite perception of a reflected image, which puts the child into the Lacanian order of the Imaginary, and the gaze of the Other, which puts the child into the Lacanian order of the Symbolic. These two images, left and right versions of the imaginary, constitute a "stereo-gnosis," literally a knowledge of the world through the touch, in this case, of tangent versions of the subject. Like twins, *Doppelgängers*, and rivals, the "minimal difference" between the two nearly-identical versions creates a space that can't be crossed, a bomb that can't be disarmed. The stereognostic of the mirror image and the gaze, the image that only the subject can see directly and the image that others "mistake" for the subject, is the necessary and sufficient condition for an inversion that frames space from the inside out. The new space "partializes" the subject in retrospect, makes the narrator into a defective narrator, keeps the point of view "infantilized," fragmented, *morcelé*. The defective narrator is like Humpty-Dumpty. He is reduced to a broken child, just as Vico's *Autobiography* tells of his childhood fall from the ladder in his father's bookstore.

Critics of Vico return perpetually to the theme of lack: Vico is difficult to read; he "cannot possibly mean" what he says; he repeats himself. He originates ideas that others develop

but seems to have “arrived too early.” *The New Science* text is a hodge-podge, a hopscotch: themes and ideas are repeated laboriously. Only a few critics have suggested that Vico’s shortcomings as a writer might actually be intentional. Maria Frankel argues that *The New Science* was designed as a spiral, where the narrative line repeatedly encountered the same radial theme lines.¹¹ Vico’s *Autobiography* gives away the secret that Vico staged his narrative personality to match the profile of the melancholy genius — between Saturnine paranoia and manic enthusiasm.¹² “Vico did not know whether he was a god or demon,” he wrote, mirroring the challenge given in the story about the Table of Cebes.¹³ That is, although Vico identified his discovery with the image of mastery lying in the future of the mirror’s virtual image, he placed his mental turmoil and writing on the side of the fragmented subject strewn in front of the glass. Vico even attached a psychoanalytic explanation to account for his defective narration. Using the classical system of humors, he diagnosed himself both as melancholic and choleric (the Eighteenth Century version of manic depression). Rather than crediting Vico as simply a born-too-early clinical psychologist, however, it is important to note that the system of humors connected its psychological applications with history, geography, cosmography, physics, theology and poetics. The choleric/melancholic link was a code for the heroic poet (or poetic hero), one whose primary field of action was based in event (cf. Lacan’s “act”) but whose awareness was aligned with the underworld (cf. Lacan’s “fantasy”).¹⁴ The opposition of choleric and melancholy duplicated the mirror image’s structured opposition of mastery and failure. Vico’s deployment of the phrase *aut deus aut demon* (“god or demon”) repeated this logic, since the hero, at the “top” of the cycle of humors in terms of power and wit, was also historically credited with being melancholic. Melancholy was not just irony and depression; it was the literal power to investigate Hades and return, the theme of *katabasis*. What was for myth the story of the hero’s ability not just to visit the underworld but to resurrect the dead, was in scholarly terms the power of the voice of the underworld as such: the prophetic sibylline insights that can be expressed only through riddles and silences.

Mi-Dire (Saying Half)

The melancholy hero that Vico devised as his literary persona embodied the metonymical subject. The *objet morcelé* in front of the mirror is, after all, a back projection: a subject cast into the past of a constructed history, Vico’s autobiographical self. Just as the metonymical thunder, a series of syllables without meaning, only a “meaning effect,” jolted the first humans into humanity proper, motivating them to cut clearings into the forest. The clearing’s boundary is what Pluth called “the gap between signifiers and the signified effect but also as a minus sign, such that metonymy gives us signifiers with an absent signified effect.” This absent signifying effect was at first acousmatic, as the “voice” embodied in the thunder.¹⁵ The signifiers, as in Vico’s *dipintura*, lie strewn about the opening, just as did the pieces of sacrificed animals in early divination rituals, the enactments of the minus sign. The *objet morcelé* is both the sacrificial victim and the artificially constructed “defective” narrator, a fictional victim or *fictim*, who gives only half the story.

Vico's theatrical organization of *The New Science* makes an interesting prolegomena to Lacan's mirror stage works. Even the (apocryphal?) story about how the *dipintura* got inserted into the text pages of *The New Science* "at the last minute" recreate the controversy about which of Lacan's texts come first.¹⁶ Is Lacan's warning about finding later views in antecedent texts more than "just an error of anachronism"? Is it an *apotrope*, a warning to those without eyes to see or ears to hear to turn back immediately — a warning we have already encountered in the case of Cebes' table? Beyond the *apotrope* is, after all, the domain of the Prophetically Blind, who are in the mirror-psychology of transitivity, also invisible.¹⁷

The answer to this question has a central significance for the role of the humanities in architecture and other spatial practices that engage ideas about the space of the subject. In the first place, the central feature of subjectivity becomes the boundary that, as mirror or screen, separates space into two parts with radically different fundamental natures. The subject is, in an equally fundamental sense, the agent who must traverse these two spaces and the act devised to sneak across the border. The subject's crossing, and the intransitivity of the boundary crossed, subsequently color all of the subject's moments — actual and virtual — including the extension of the subject's mastery through visual perception. What is the role of the mirror stage? Is the developmental "fact" of the mirror stage so axiomatic that it was discovered and developed independently some two hundred years before Lacan's formulation of it? Do Vico's and Lacan's "versions" constitute antipodal variations on the mirror-stage theme, a kind of "Before Freud" and "After Freud" dating system that chronologically frames the same kind of "anachronisms" that Lacan set up as apotropaic warnings? Most interestingly, is humanistic theory itself defined and developed by its own subjectification, its construction of its own mirror stage, its own system of apotropaic warnings? Are theory's twin aspirations, for congruence on one hand and disorderly openness on the other, sustained by the mirror-stage's forwards and backwards projection towards unity prefaced by fragmentation?

Here, it seems that Lacan has deployed Vico's device of the helmet of Hermes. This is the only object shown in the *dipintura* that is not explained in the text. Hermes is the god not just of commerce but of wisdom, trickery, seduction, and theft.¹⁸ He conducts the souls of the dead to Hades. His power of invisibility is linked to movement and secrecy. In a famous image, Hermes is shown holding a candelabra representing the seven planets and holding a finger to his lips to indicate the secrecy and silence that protect the motion of the soul across this space in the twinned processes of birth and death. Secret motion? One thinks of the labyrinth as puzzled motion, the dances once performed by the Greek chorus, the imposed silence and invisibility of Eurydice as she is led from Hades by Orpheus. Lacan's case is not so esoteric, but his interest in antiquity and use of puzzles, particularly in his reference to Borromeo knots, Klein bottles, and Möbius bands find a modern scientific and clinical context for restating these matters in their full complexity.

Catherine Clément returns repeatedly to the theme of Lacan's way of speaking. Early in his career, he was fascinated by the speech of the Pepin sisters, two servant women whose brutal murder of their employers in 1949 created a national scandal. The power of the

fragmented speech of these women to evoke puzzled but prophetic meanings led Lacan to regard metonymy's ability to generate meaning through absence as primary. Metaphor was, in contrast to metonymy, dependent on the idea of a whole. Metaphor could create meaning by organizing signifiers that had no prior relations. It was a "master signifier," a signifier able to organize other signifiers. Metonymy in contrast depended on the boundary that, in the mirror stage, created meaning effects through remote control and inverted uses. Fragmentation both undermined and reinforced wholeness. It came before and after. It certified its own opposition and destruction. It was a boundary, pure and simple, and this boundary was both a dividing line and a minus sign.

The key was Lacan's discovery that his science must "suffer" the same metonymic-paranoiac symptoms as its primary objects of study. Humanistic knowledge of the subject must find a way to collapse the distance and distinction between itself and its materials without losing its ability to make sense. The topological interpretation of this problem was clear. Science had to create an "internal dimensionality," a space and time without recourse to an eternal template of verification. It had to work, in short, with resonance rather than correspondence. The speech of the Pepin sisters and other famous paranoiacs was called *mi-dire*, "half speech." This linked it to the more historical, and less hysterical, forms of prophetic signification: the speech of the oracle, the murmurings of the tribal shaman, the fragmented *tessera* whose reunion constituted a proof of authenticity. These associations reinforced Lacan's already obtuse style of writing and speaking. "I always tell the truth, but I cannot tell all the truth," he was fond of saying.

Conclusion

By inventing an "optical identity," Vico and Lacan show how metonymy accommodates theory's twin obligations, to coherence on one hand and contingency on the other. Itself sustained by the mirror-stage's forwards and backwards projection towards unity "prefaced" by fragmentation, theory as *mi dire* is able to wake up from the fantasy of ideology and re-create itself as an act. This is what Harold Bloom might call "strong theory," just as he distinguished poetry that accomplished similar ends "strong poetry."¹⁹ Because optics and identity are the components, according to Freud, of the uncanny (*Unheimlich*), it is inevitable that theory — even non-architectural theory — revolve around the primary *architectural* theme of the home, and the manic melancholy of the scholar will forever be directed towards the project of distinguishing (or not) the temple from the labyrinth.

Notes

1. The well-known "Who's on first?" dialogue was devised by the comedy team Bud Abbott and Lou Costello. One of the many sources of this transcript is <http://www.baseball-almanac.com/humor4.shtml> (last accessed February 20, 2009). "The general premise behind the exchange has Costello, a peanut vendor named Sebastian Dinwiddle, talking to Abbott who is Dexter Broadhurt, the manager of the mythical St. Louis Wolves. However, before Costello can get behind the plate, Abbott wants to make sure he knows everyone's name on the team." My use of this quote in the context of the famous mirror stage

idea of Jacques Lacan and the possible anticipations of this idea by the 18c. Neapolitan philosopher of culture Giambattista Vico aims to show how the idea of time, generated in both a backward and forward direction by the mirror stage, creates a perplexity at both the level of the phenomenon and the science of that phenomenon. The idea of the subject ambiguously known through a proper name and pronoun echoes throughout history, the Homeric case of Odysseus's trick played on the Cyclops, giving his name as "Nobody," affords an escape from the giant's impossible prison. This is the first of many instances where the "defective subject" becomes both a key and a password.

2. Jane Gallop, 'Lacan's "Mirror Stage": Where to Begin?', *SubStance* 11, 4, Issue 37-38, A Special Issue from the Center for Twentieth Century Studies, 1983: pp. 118-128.
3. Irish novelist James Joyce famously used an imagined transcription of this thunder word in his novel, *Finnegans Wake*, New York: Viking Press, 1967, p. 3. "Ababadalgharaghtakamminarronkonnbronn-tonnerronnntuonnthunntrovarrhounawnsk-awntoohooorderenthurnuk!" There are nine other "thunder words" in the novel.
4. The alternative, that Vico actually "died" is not considered by any Vico scholar to my knowledge. This would engage the Lacanian idea of "between the two deaths," which was in Vico's age the popular device of the death narrative, the *katabasis*. The most famous source would have been Macrobius's *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, an elaborate discussion of Cicero's retelling of the dream of the nephew of Scipio Africanus, who was led by his dead uncle to the ramparts of Elysium to see the world below "as it really was." This involved the Platonic reversal of life and death. What for the body seems to be life is really for the soul, death; and the body's death is the birth of the soul. Reading *The New Science* and Vico's *Autobiography* as death narratives solves many textual problems and empowers Vico with the magisterial powers of an Orpheus. These powers do not include omniscience but, rather, a combination of clairvoyance with idiocy, in keeping with Vico's self-diagnosis of his melancholic-choleric personality. Giambattista Vico, *The New Science of Giambattista Vico*, trans. Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984; Giambattista Vico, *The Autobiography of Giambattista Vico*, trans. Max Harold Fisch and Thomas Goddard Bergin, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1944.
5. Mark Linder, in his review of Lorens Holm's article describing Brunelleschi's famous perspective mirror-experiment, seems to me to make an inverted use of the multiple coincidences at the "ontic and ontological" levels, as Heidegger might put it. Mark Linder, 'Time for Lacan: Looking after the Mirror Stage', *Assemblage* 21, August 1993: pp. 82-83; Lorens Holm, 'Reading through the Mirror: Brunelleschi, Lacan, Le Corbusier: The Invention of Perspective and the Post-Freudian Eye/I', *Assemblage* 18, August 1992: pp. 20-39. Linder takes seriously Gallop's report of Lacan's warning to his students: "It happens that our students delude themselves in our writings into finding 'already there' that to which our teaching has since brought us"; Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, Paris: Editions de Seuil, 1966, pp. 94-95. Catherine Clément, in her book *The Lives and Legends of Jacques Lacan*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1983, affirms as much. But, what Linder considers to be a case of simple anachronism is something more in Gallop's view: "... Clément's claim that all Lacan is *en germe* in 'The Mirror Stage' produced an enthusiasm in me which immediately became embarrassing. My embarrassment corresponded to a realization that it was extremely pleasurable to find the later Lacan 'already there' in the early writing. An anticipation of maturation produced joy along with a willingness to suspend disbelief. This joy may resemble the 'jubilation' which Lacan ascribes to the child assuming his mirror image, being captivated by an analogy and suspending his disbelief" (Gallop, *op. cit.*, p. 120). In other words, this is no "mere mistake" but a moment of synchronicity, unmistakable because of its parallel geometries, effects, and error. The student anticipates in the early texts the maturation of Lacan's teachings. Thus, somehow, the effect of Lacan's text on his students is analogous to the effect of the mirror on the infant. Lacan's text functions as a "fictional" but effective mirror image. Holm would be more in agreement than Linder with Gallop's point since Gallop does not condemn the bi-directionality of

the mirror stage's temporality but, rather, connects it to the scholar's *necessary* complicity. Linder plays Zeuxis to Holm's Parrhasius by mistaking the "curtain": the ability of the mirror used by Brunelleschi to back-project a history of error and failure, for which the "event" of the perspective device promised a utopian correction.

6. This image may be one of the first philosophical deployments of the parlour game, "blind man's buff" (or "bluff"), since the blind Homer is credited with sublime insight because he is able to represent partiality (invisibility/monstrosity) directly. Homer's representational ability is thus 1:1, but in the special sense that liminality is transferred to poetry without distortion.
7. Ed Pluth, *Signifiers and Acts: Freedom in Lacan's Theory of the Subject*, SUNY series, *Insinuations: Philosophy, Psychoanalysis, Literature*, ed. Charles Shepherdson, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2007, p. 36.
8. For a perceptive overview of the cultural phenomenon of emblem books, see Don Cameron Allen, *Mysteriously Meant, The Rediscovery of Pagan Symbolism and Allegorical Interpretation in the Renaissance*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1970.
9. Donald Phillip Verene, *Knowledge of Things Human and Divine: Vico's New Science and Finnegans Wake*, New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 2003, p. 146.
10. I would like to go further into this, but the economy of this essay requires a compact explanation. By "voice" I mean one of Lacan's famous four "partial objects," objects that, as components of the "partial drive" (the drive whose goal lacks an aim and circles back to the same empty place vacated by the "impossible" object — the breast, the gaze, feces, the voice). In his excellent review, Mladen Dolar explains carefully that the voice defies phonemic analysis and, in popular experience as well as in psychoanalysis, radically de-localizes speech. Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More*, Cambridge, MA, and London: MIT Press, 2006. Dolar extends the important earlier work of Michel Chion on the "acousmatic" voice in cinema. See *The Voice in Cinema*, ed. and trans. Claudia Gorbman, New York: Columbia University Press, 1999. I realize that the authorial voice is only acousmatic or a partial object by analogy, but I am interested in the imaginary embodiment of the voice in the mind of the reader as a special category. It constitutes the "minimal element of ventriloquism" that Dolar finds to haunt every speech act.
11. Margherita Frankel, 'The "Dipintura" and the Structure of Vico's *New Science* as a Mirror of the World', in *Vico: Past and Present*, ed. Giorgio Tagliacozzo, Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1981, pp.43-51.
12. The trope of the melancholy genius was widely known in Vico's day, from humoristic lore that had established links connecting cosmological, medical, poetic, and behavioral qualities. Authors could draw on it to set their work and personalities within a preferred heroic stance. See Raymond Klibansky, Erwin Panofsky, and Fritz Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy, Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, Religion, and Art*, New York: Basic Books, 1964.
13. Some of this ground has been covered by Zakiya Hanafi, *The Monster in the Machine: Magic, Medicine, and the Marvelous in the Time of the Scientific Revolution*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000.
14. Ed Pluth, *Signifiers and Acts*, p. 63-64: "To understand something about desire in Lacan's work, we have to see how desire comes about from the experience of not having a place in the Other after one already experiences having a place. ... Instead of using the distinction between demand and desire to think about this difference, Lacan made a distinction between fantasy and act. ... [W]hat Lacan calls an act is something that cannot be reduced to a demand structure: in fact, the difference between fantasy and act

[Vico: melancholy and choler] is defined ... by the presence or absence of demand. An act, unlike the fantasy, does not make a demand on the Other and is not aimed at acquiring recognition by the Other.” It is precisely this same division that marks off the text-as-fantasy) of *The New Science* from the frontispiece-as-act, or more generally Vico’s *New Science* from his *Autobiography*, where the former makes a minimal but impassioned gesture to the reader and the latter boldly constructs a false self outside the demands of the Neapolitan intelligencia that was his Other: a case of Lacanian “false false,” the negation of a negation that becomes a form of *mi-dire*, or half speech. Note also the Edenic undertones of Pluth’s characterization of desire as coming about through the experience of “not having a place in the Other after one already experiences having a place.”

15. It is interesting to compare Vico’s swiddens, which have an anthropological basis, to the Biblical story of the Garden of Eden, where God’s presence is limited to the sound of rustling footsteps. In film theory, the “acousmatic” or off-screen voice is defined by the quality of its absence. In Eden, the issue of voice is related to blindness; Adam’s invisibility follows directly after his violation of “God’s word.”
16. The publication of the new edition of *The New Science* was to be underwritten by the Venetian architectural theorist, Carlo Lodoli. Lodoli withdrew his support after a disagreement, leaving open the matter of what to do with the pages reserved for the dedication. Vico was dissuaded from publishing his contentious correspondence with Lodoli. Instead, he claims that the frontispiece and its explanatory materials were assembled at the last minute as a substitute. The well thought-out composition of the image known as the *dipintura* and the tight composition of the commentary cast some doubt on this explanation. Although many elements of the Rosicrucian-style image were in popular circulation through the emblem books of the day, some devices (the perched globe, the cracked statue) were specific to Vico’s theory. Also, the text’s silence on the presence of the helmet of Hermes, which coordinates later textual references to the role of the reader, would have required some prior planning. The *dipintura*’s general role is that of the subject in front of the mirror, pulling itself erect, able to see through the scattered symbols towards a unified idea of culture in the text beyond but aware of its fragmented nature through the hypotaxis of accidental objects in the field of the image.
17. Lacan was careful to point out that transitivity was an important indicator of the mirror stage’s transformation of space’s causal function. After the mirror stage, children frequently commit an error of transitivity. Hitting another child, the perpetrator will say “He hit me!” That this account is an error in need of correcting in order to understand the proper order of agents, causes, and effects shows how the mirror stage’s primary error is just such a confusion. The effect of unity/mastery is presented prematurely. The condition of fragmentation is back-projected through the mechanism of the future anterior tense. Inside and outside, cause and effect, past and future are a part of the symbolic order, but the subject is split by the bar that places it in both the symbolic and the imaginary. Behind the screen of the subject as “photo-graphed” is the subject-in-pieces. Add to the child’s misconception of causality the transitivity (error) of blindness/invisibility. A child who puts a bag over his/her head imagines him/herself to be invisible rather than blind. Blindness can be indicated also by the invisibility of the head, a common motif in Eighteenth-Century emblems showing Justice or other allegorical figures as headless, when in truth their head has been made invisible from the point of view of those below, who cannot themselves see the invisible realm penetrated by the head of the figure.
18. A full program of Hermes’ interests is given in Norman O. Brown’s excellent study, *Hermes the Thief, the Evolution of a Myth*, Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1947. Brown notes that Hermes’ highly varied qualities and powers derive from the central function of the boundary, particularly the boundary between life and death.
19. Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1973.