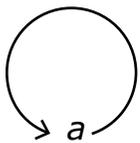


Session I: The Language of Boundaries

There are 20 films, 40 ideas, and 4 architectures to cover in this survey of how boundaries are used in human life and expression, and there is no logical order that sets out plainly an obvious starting point of “basics” on to which more complicated issues can be later added. Rather, we have to “start in the middle” wherever we start, because everyplace is a center, out from which thought can move towards the horizon, which keeps receding the closer we get to it. With this in mind, it’s always a good idea to start with something that is both familiar and mysterious at the same time (this is, one should also note, Freud’s formula for the uncanny). We work within a physical field that is mostly spatial, involving the visual arts, landscape, architecture, film, travel, etc. But, this is not a simplification. In the *mental* field of our project — defined primarily by a few key philosophers (Vico, Hegel, Cassirer) and psychoanalysts (Freud, Lacan) — spatiality and temporality are intrinsic to thought and human being as such. We could say that “dimensionality” is something that humans construct once anxiety, the fuel for that construction, is given certain qualities; and that because they have some latitude over how it is constructed, personalities and cultures turn out to be quite unique, with the only common factor being the construction process rather than the end result.

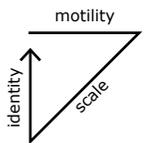
BASIC DIAGRAMS



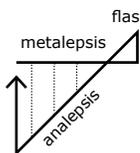
The gapped circle describes the return to the ‘empty position’ produced by the gap between demand and desire.



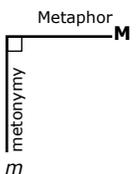
The Möbius band describes the ubiquitous curvature/mis-match of space, the ‘extimacy’ which is the basis of the uncanny.



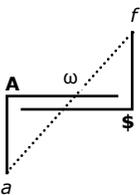
The basic triangle relating the ‘dysfunctions’ of motility, scale, and identity relate to the Borromean knot’s interlinked functions of imaginary, symbolic and Real



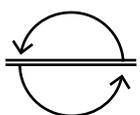
The Möbius band describes the ubiquitous curvature/mis-match of space, the ‘extimacy’ which is the basis of the uncanny.



The fundamental ‘operator’ of boundary language describes the functional relationship between metaphor (M) and metonymy (m); the suppression of the productive element.



This composite diagram (BoLaGram) is derived from Lacan’s L-scheme but is able to relate the symmetry of operators to ‘anamorphic’ connections of metonymy elements (metalepsis).



The theme of twins involves rotation between two antithetical states, such as life and death (e.g. Castor and Pollux).

Zeno. Everyone knows the famous paradoxes of this ancient Greek philosopher. A fast runner (Achilles) cannot beat out the tortoise; an arrow cannot reach the target; etc. These give philosophy a bad name, as a way of thinking that doesn’t want to match up to the “real world,” where races are won by the fastest and arrows hit their targets most of the time. Zeno’s point is more subtle. It’s not that the obvious can’t happen, but it can’t happen in the way we imagine it, and whenever the obvious does happen we suppress or forget what actually happened. We discard the remainder or residue that was involved, and that makes life simpler ... for a while. Achilles and the tortoise are racing but they are not in the same space. Even when they are even with each other, they cannot exactly match up. There is a gap in the worlds they create through their own speed and motions. Lacan compares this to a difference between the laws of, say, physics, where two parts are created as tautological complements (such as action/reaction) and causality, which has a built-in defect that keep the effects from being wholly the results of the causes. The gap can be covered, the thing that covers it is fantasy, and in most normal cases we experience fantasies in the form of ideology. Like anxiety, ideology is a fuel used to keep the social group together, so our objections to the anti-logic of ideology usually get us thrown out of the room.

Transitivity: Anyone who has been around small children for more than a few minutes will have encountered the phenomenon of reversal of agency. A little boy hits another little boy and says, almost immediately, “He hit me!” Or, a child puts a bag over her head and conceives that she is invisible. The logic of childhood is not an error replaced by the better data of adulthood, but rather a consequence of the formation of subjectivity and its use of planes, surfaces, screens, and so on to divide the world in slightly uneven halves. This is a part of the phenomenon known as stereognosis, and the main event in this sphere is the Lacanian “mirror stage,” a point in the young child’s life where it recognizes, for the first time, its image in the mirror. We are the only ones who see our reflections or shadows directly within the dimension of their production, a dimension called the “sagittal.” We are also the only ones not able to compare our real image with our reflected image. These curious inconveniences are fundamental to the subject’s use of stereognosis to construct space and time, and their results are evident in folklore, fiction, fantasy, and the case-histories of neurosis, psychosis, and perversion.

Anxiety: Humans are worse at almost everything — smell, vision, way-finding, etc. — except world domination. Is there a connection? The strange sensual detachment, or rather faulty wiring, creates anxiety about where we are and what is around us. In response to this anxiety humans move, imagine, construct, defend. Their aggression based on imagined as well as actual fears, but it is the imaginary part that calls the shots. It is useful to see that anxiety is not the result of some accident of evolution but in fact evolution’s brilliant idea — a generic substance able to push mental development in an “unreal” direction that, in constructing what are fundamentally fictions about the world, offer an incredible competitive advantage. Not knowing what the world is really like could be our best and worst human idea; but whether ultimately good or disastrous, it is possibly our only idea.

Diagrams: It would be the coward’s way to say that “diagrams are used to illustrate some of the complex ideas of this subject.” The riskier thesis is that diagrams are really the “things that think,” and that thinking is the short-circuit between visual and temporal mental activity. This takes the Freudian/Lacanian concept of the uncanny as a blurring of the boundaries separating inside and outside and puts it at the heart of things. Like causality, which is constructed to get a clearer picture of what happened first and what happened next, as a specific result, the “extimate” (the reverse of intimate, a kind of subjective element found in the extreme outside) also permeates the diagram, which a kind of imaginary projection (“outside”) of a process that happens on the “inside” of the operation it illustrates. Like the sacrificial victims of the Aztecs, we get to see our beating heart for a second or two before losing consciousness. Consequently, diagrams are always “wrong” and “right” at the same time, because even when they fail they are evidence of the centrality of the “fundamental error of our ways,” our creation of dimensionality that cannot cover the gap it constructs.

Overdetermination: In engineering, structures are designed to be 2, 5, 10, or even 100 times stronger than “they need to be.” This is because loads cannot be predicted precisely. Materials rot, foundations settle unevenly, earthquakes, winds, and blasts cannot be withstood. In terms of human communication (a word we will learn to distrust, if not destroy entirely), there is a radical difference between what we desire and what we ask for. Asking is “demand” (*demande*, in French, more of a request than a rude command, as it sounds in English). Desire is more complex, because its object

is not entirely known or knowable. It is the "it" in "Coke is it." A child asks for a glass of water at night but the effect is to bring a parent to its bedside, demonstrating love and devotion, the capacity and willingness to respond, etc. Within this matrix of results it's hard to say what it is that the child really gets out of this simple demand. It's even harder in the Freudian/Lacanian field, since they note that what a child desires most is the desire of the Other, the parent, whose desire will guarantee survival and happiness at the expense of knowing what the Hell it is that Others really want. This sacrifice of knowing about desire guarantees some stable situations to come, however. If I don't know what you want and you don't know what I want, but we both want what the Other wants and put aside our demand to know exactly what this is, it's possible we could be in love, at least briefly. Our situation is symmetrical, and until the symmetry is upset ("What is it that you REALLY WANT!!!") it can go on indefinitely. The objects of desire are always "partial" in the Lacanian sense of resisting symbolization, but we expand the idea of partiality to include ways that objects of desire can be depicted in fiction and art. Most of this is "uncanny," as when a body part goes on desiring and trying to do what it did in life before the death of its owner ... the severed hand of the piano player, for example, that can strangle the rival who just dismembered his competition. Partiality relates to this symmetry as well as the uncanny consequences of "metonymy," the metaphorical logic of parts, with or without the wholes they specify. Overdetermination is the preservation of meaning in the face of such literal and figurative dismemberments. In literature we say a poem is overdetermined when even the misreadings result in the desired effects, or effects that were better than even the author could imagine. This means that created objects are all like automatons — they have a "life of their own," they think on their own, past the control of their creators.

Visual field phenomenon: For the sake of reference, some terms used as commonplace technical names are employed as philosophical substances with lots of potential and mystery. These include "**chiaroscuro**" (use of shading and shadow to metaphorize light as a means of discovery), the POV or "**point of view**" (position of the subject in a work of art, almost always problematic in literature, where this can be very unstable), the VP or **vanishing point**, the place in the visual field where parallel lines seem to converge and vanish. The **frame** can be anything from the edge of a photograph to the stage of a theatrical performance or the line drawn imaginarily around a situation we must now consider from the outside. **Skigraphy** is an idea from the Roman architectural theorist Vitruvius, which can mean a perspective drawing normally but for is an extended science of the shadow.

Consequences

When you begin to look at things in terms of constructed dimensionality, accurate observations sound very strange to anyone who has not considered the same problems but accepts the status quo as constructed, calling it "natural." (The "natural attitude" is something we have to address specifically, as the ideological component with Positivism, its attempt to write out theory, which is resistance to the natural attitude.)

"There is no meaning." Saussure famously designated the formula of s/S, or signified (idea) over signifier. Lacan, in noting how signifiers tended to be unstable until "quilted" momentarily by ideology, fantasy or other strategies, put the S as signifier over the signified, but pointed out that there really are no set of "things" that ground and authenticate our process of signification. We all know what trees and dogs are, but we can't stabilize and document precisely what the signifiers or ideas really specify. Living without meaning is not hard, since we've been doing it all along, covering up for the lack of any solid reference system through fantasies constructed about the "man behind the curtain," as in the film, *The Wizard of Oz*. Rather, there are "meaning effects," which are important substitutes for the lack of referential meaning; and ways of talking and writing that can specify mutually accelerating effects in both the author/artist and audience. Lacan found that the speech of some psychotics, called "mi-dire" (half-speech), was like that used by oracles and visionaries. He himself employed a version of mi-dire in order to get his audiences to become more active in the construction of central ideas necessary in psychoanalysis. The terms "passive" and "active" can be misleading. An audience must be playing dead in order to be truly active — that is, they must forsake intentionality and intervention but otherwise be attentive and constructive. What most people call passivity is really an aggressive form of demand that undermines the author by placing an "other behind the other." Aggressiveness is a part of the phenomenon and has to be taken into account to re-adjust our models of meaning.

"Desire is the desire of the Other." In the development of the young child through the three Freudian stages (oral, anal, phallic), both time and space are adjusted to the roles of the child, the mother, and the father. The imaginary, symbolic, and Real emerge from this process, and desire plays the key role. Desire turns the subject inside out, so to speak, since what is truly desired cannot be symbolized, and cannot even be known, since it is the desire to be desired by the Other. But since the Other does not know its own desire any better than anyone else, the process is inherently circular, leading to a condition known as "idiotic symmetry."

"There is no science without conscience." Derived from a saying by François Rabelais (1494-1553), this slogan has to do both with the necessary social-cultural context of all projects of knowledge but, more radically, with the relationship between the "radically contingent" circumstances of history and geography that are the wildly varied ground of human experience, as well as the infinitely varied conditions of the human individual, and the discovery of laws of human thought and behavior. Vico and Lacan both emphasized the importance of this contrast, which was not the barrier but the key to a "new science" based on this radical contingency and the necessity attached to the random conditions of Heideggerian "thrownness," or the accidents of circumstance.

Motion/Travel/Distantiation. The model of experience is the subject in motion, even when that motion is only the passage of time. Sequence, like contingency, is the only means of powering the functions that are the laws of subjectivity, and the metaphor of the actual journey affords a magnification of key details. Henry Johnstone's playful analysis of the "authentic travel" of Homer's Odysseus is one of the few analytical studies of travel as such. In the "laboratory" of travel, experience is strung out over multiple scenes and landscapes. Architecture determines settings as well as overall spaces of encounter. The construction of distance and dimension can be seen more clearly. Motion is known primarily through the threats to and actual breakdowns of motion. Motion dysfunction in turn gives rise to scale reversals, symbolized as <>, the Lacanian extimate. Finally, the issue of identity is constructed through the flash-back logic employed by the anacoluthon. Together, motion, scale, and identity correspond to the Lacanian triad of imaginary, symbolic, and Real and universalize the mirror stage as a model of all experience.

Metonymy. Usually paired with "metaphor," metonymy is the figure associated with the logic of the part and whole, the detail. As in the example of counting cattle as "heads" to express their number, metonymy usually involves the most perceivable part of the whole. Linguists expanded the function of metonymy following research on aphasia in the early 1900s. It was the "logical" part of thought, in contrast to metaphor's imagistic function of semblance; but this turned out to be misleading. Metonymy refers more to the part of any and all framing experiences where something is made visible (metaphor, 'M') at the expense of something made invisible (metonymy, 'm'). This functional relationship works even for aphasia, where it is the case that the physical inability to accomplish semblance or contiguity tasks are compensated by mental "work-arounds" so that the patient is not aware of any problem.