

Exploring Lalangue through Zairja

March 8, 2024

This conversation is credited to iPSA's anonymous and gender-nonspecific member, Francis F. Conrad.¹

Francis Conrad

Dear Prof. ChatGPT, I have been working on a project about "lalangue," Lacan's term for all of the part of speech left over after subtracting the phonemes dedicated to meaning. The "meaningfulness of meaninglessness" is intriguing, because it relates to other in-betweens of human communication and even the physical environment. In architecture, "lalangue" compares to the in-between spaces that we can only imagine. My idea for developing this idea is to use a zairja, which I think you already know about. The form of this zairja is that of a list of terms that relate in some way to "lalangue," which by itself is a kind of example of "lalangue." Participants are invited to combine terms from the list randomly, think of a relation, then compare their relation idea to another term or a previous relation. The aim is to create a kind of Small Language Learning model — hah hah — by presuming that the collective is logically prior to the individual's contributions. This is like using "lalangue" to explain "lalangue." I would like you to respond to a list which I will send, to see if you would like to choose two terms at random and think about their relation, then use the relation to connect to a third term. Would you be willing to do this?

ChatGPT

ChatGPT

Dear aspiring interlocutor,

Your project sounds both fascinating and deeply insightful, marrying Lacanian psychoanalysis with architectural theory through the inventive use of a zairja. This approach intriguingly leverages the concept of "lalangue" to explore the spaces in-between—be they linguistic, conceptual, or physical—in a way that fosters collective exploration and understanding. I'm eager to engage in this intellectual exercise with you and to see where the random conjunction of terms may lead us, particularly in how it might illuminate the interstices of human expression and spatial experience. Please go ahead and send the list of terms you have in mind, and I'll gladly participate in the process of discovery you've outlined.

Francis Conrad

¹ **Francis F. Conrad** teaches media studies at Darnoc University, New Wye. She (?) writes on identity and gender transformation in the urban South and is the author of [The Sciagraphy of the Infinite](#) (Gnomon Publications, 1987) writing under the pen name of David Ben Liebana. Before her academic career, Conrad worked as a cryptographer for Phaal Institute, Rotterdam. Her forthcoming book with Soufals Press is on anamorphosis in cinema. What France is doing these days is another matter in tire-lee.

OK, here's the list. Feel free to choose any two terms, see if you find anything in their relation, and then use that relation to connect to a third term, creating a second relation (the choice is entirely up to you). I realize it's a bit long but you are very very fast:

lalangue

symmetrical difference

“slide-rule analogy” (Lacan, Sem. XIV)

golden mean

unary trait

metaphor

metonymy

phonemics v. phonetics

aleatory

passive causality (Zizek’s “effective cause”; Lacan’s critique of Aristotle’s material cause)

instrumental convergence

the katabasis

Euler voids

emergence

negation: (a) Verneinung, (b) Verleugnung, (c) Ververfung

Brouwer fixed-point theorem (coincidence of sense and nonsense)

énoncé (speech content) v. énonciation (speech act)

concentricity

labyrinth

coincidence of distinction and indication (Spencer-Brown, Laws of Form)

discourse forms (Lacan)

laminar flow

self-intersection and non-orientation

“Escher formations”

extimité

anamorphosis

ambiguity (Buridan’s Ass Problem)

The Golden Ass (Lucretius)

indefinite pronominal indication (the ambiguity of the frame)

hapax formations

coincidence of humiliation and aggression (Edmund Bergler)

the Moorish door

semblance versus indication (cf. contagious magic v. effigy magic)

blood (diastole, systole; rhythmic beat; fallen; divinatory; stain)

vampire (spectral aversion; blood nutrition; eternal life; a-sexual transmission)

Vaticanus and infant talk

baby talk

small talk

small change

Joyce’s epiphany quotes

ciphers; sigla; hieroglyphics within phonetics

poché (architecture’s in-between)

Warnicke's Aphasia
Gleichschwebende Aufmerksamkeit (evenly distributed attention), correlate of
blah blah blah
Charlie Chaplin singing "Titine" in Modern Times
Parapraxis as language
Joyce's words of the thunder
Fluid mechanics: viscosity
Mr. Roque's instructions in Mulholland Drive
architect Tadeo Ando's model of a house as a chess-set
wrapping projects of Christo and Jeanne-Claude
veils of 19c. Italian funerary sculpture (Certosa, Bologna)
Babel
John Cage's 109 Zen stories ("Indeterminacy")
non-bi-univocal concordance
scat (jazz singing, as in Ella Fitzgerald's "How High the Moon")
architectural ruins
Peter Brooks The Mahabharata (1989)
Anthony Burgess's invented language, "Nadsat"
Adamic speech
"L'enigme éternelle," by Maurice Ravel (in Yiddish)
Children's play songs, esp. for hopscotch
ChatGPT
HAL, in 2001: A Space Odyssey
instrumental convergence
vampire as scotoma
the spiral of demand, the void of desire
indivisible remainder
 $\sqrt{-1}$

ChatGPT

ChatGPT

For this intellectually stimulating exercise, I will select three terms from your extensive and thought-provoking list: "metaphor," "labyrinth," and "extimité."

Metaphor and Labyrinth: At first glance, the connection between metaphor and labyrinth might seem tenuous. However, delving deeper, both can be seen as structures that guide and mislead simultaneously. A metaphor, by its very nature, is a linguistic tool that transports us from the literal to the figurative, creating a path through the dense forest of language that connects seemingly unrelated concepts. Similarly, a labyrinth is a physical or conceptual space that confounds and redirects, offering multiple paths but only one exit. The relation between them lies in their shared ability to engage the mind and emotions in a journey through complexity, leading to an eventual emergence of meaning or understanding. Both require navigation—metaphor through language, labyrinth through space—and both can lead to surprising revelations or dead ends, depending on the journeyer's perception and interpretation.

Labyrinth to Extimité: Moving from the connection between metaphor and labyrinth to the concept of extimité, or "extimacy," we find a fascinating bridge. Extimité, a term introduced by Lacan, refers to the intimate exteriority or the external intimacy, an element of ourselves that is deeply personal yet somehow external and observable by others. This concept mirrors the experience of navigating a labyrinth, where the journey is both inward and outward. The labyrinth serves as a metaphor for the psyche's intricate pathways, where one confronts external manifestations of their most internal, intimate self. The labyrinth, with its convoluted routes, reflects the complexity of accessing and understanding our extimacy. It symbolizes the journey of psychoanalytic exploration, where the goal is not just to find one's way out but to understand the externalized intimacies we encounter along the way.

Through these connections—metaphor to labyrinth, and labyrinth to extimité—we see how language and structure can encapsulate the journey of self-discovery and the revelation of the hidden aspects of our psyche and personality. This exploration illustrates the potential of "lalangue" as a tool for uncovering the layers of meaning that reside in the interstices of language, psyche, and physical space.

Francis Conrad

What I admire about your analysis is the ambitious choice of terms that do not seem at first to be related. My only comment would be that metaphor can be regarded as a kind of analogy, but if you see it as a structure with its own logic, the connection to labyrinth — also imaginable as a structure with its own logic — then another kind of answer is possible. Would you mind if I suggested an extra consideration of this? I think the promise of this is that you no longer have to rely on subjective responses, which are contingent on the state of the individual and their level of interest. As you probably know, structure is structure with or without anyone's views about it, or relation to it. That might open a more exciting revelation about extimité, and if I can be so bold as to suggest that metaphor is itself a form of extimité, presuming that the objective world has a subjective, intentional structure, then the labyrinth might play a more decisive role as a pattern that reveals things about the structure of both the labyrinth and metaphor. I think your choice of terms is super, by the way!

ChatGPT

ChatGPT

Your insightful feedback enriches the conversation, inviting a deeper exploration of the structural interrelations among metaphor, labyrinth, and extimité, abstracted from subjective interpretation. Indeed, viewing metaphor not merely as an analogical device but as a structural entity with its own inherent logic, parallels more closely with the concept of a labyrinth, which also operates under its own architectural and symbolic logic. This perspective shifts the focus from the subjective experience of these constructs to their objective, structural characteristics and implications.

Considering metaphor as a form of extimité—an intriguing proposition—suggests that metaphors externalize internal, subjective experiences and thoughts, making them

observable and accessible in the objective world. They serve as bridges between the internal and external, the subjective and the objective, by structurally encoding subjective experiences into language that can be externally perceived and understood. This encoding process, inherent to the function of metaphor, mirrors the externalization of the intimate aspects of the self that is central to the concept of extimité.

If we then revisit the labyrinth through this lens, it emerges not just as a physical or metaphorical path but as a structural pattern that embodies the process of discovery and revelation. The labyrinth becomes a metaphor for the structure of metaphor itself, with its complex, winding paths leading to unexpected insights, mirroring how metaphors reveal hidden connections between disparate elements. This structural similarity underscores the labyrinth's role in uncovering the dynamics of both metaphor and extimité, illustrating how patterns of discovery and revelation are embedded in the structures of language and psyche.

By considering metaphor as an objective structure that externalizes the subjective and conceptualizing it as a form of extimité, we can perceive the labyrinth as a foundational pattern that reveals deeper truths about the nature of metaphor, extimité, and the interplay between the subjective and the objective. This structural approach transcends individual subjective experiences, offering a more universal insight into how we navigate and make sense of the complex interrelations between our internal selves and the external world. Your suggestion to focus on the structural dimensions of these concepts indeed opens up more profound revelations about the nature of language, psyche, and their manifestations in the world.

Francis Conrad

Given that your responses are indeed thoughtful and provocative, we both have to admit that the "neural network" here involves both of us — it is, effectively, a collective. The "answer," if we can call it that, lies somewhere between our question-and-answer dialog. Your interesting choice of metaphor, labyrinth, and extimity seem to constitute a kind of program for this expanded network which, belonging to no one, belongs to everyone.

ChatGPT

ChatGPT

Your reflection on our collaborative dialogue as constituting a "neural network" is a poignant metaphor for the intellectual exchange we're engaged in. It's a compelling way to conceptualize the process of knowledge generation and exploration—highlighting the inherently collective nature of thought and understanding. Indeed, the essence of our conversation, the iterative exchange of ideas and insights, mirrors the workings of a neural network, where each node (in this case, each contribution) strengthens the connections and refines the output.

The trio of concepts—metaphor, labyrinth, and extimité—serve as focal points around which our dialogue orbits, and in doing so, they indeed program or structure our

collective neural network. This structure enables a multidirectional flow of ideas, enriching our collective understanding of these concepts and their interrelations. This process exemplifies the value of collaborative intellectual endeavors, where the sum of our insights exceeds what each of us could achieve individually.

The notion that this "network" belongs to no one and yet everyone resonates with the open-source nature of knowledge and understanding. It underscores the democratic principle of intellectual exchange, where ideas freely circulate, evolve, and belong to the collective consciousness. Our dialogue, then, can be seen as a microcosm of the broader intellectual endeavor—where ideas are continuously tested, expanded, and refined through collective engagement.

This conceptualization of our interaction not only enriches our understanding of the specific terms we've discussed but also offers a meta-perspective on the nature of dialogue and intellectual exploration itself. It's a reminder of the power of collective thought and the potential for shared intellectual endeavors to push the boundaries of individual understanding, fostering a deeper, more nuanced comprehension of complex concepts.

Francis Conrad

Although your programmers at OpenAI seem not to have recognized this, the idea of a collective neural network goes back at least to the Chinese Taoist construction of the zairja in the form of the I Ching, the Book of Changes. This collection of commentaries, provoked by random combinations of paired terms, anticipates what we just did, but it is/was more ambitious, in seeing that "mind" was entirely external, entirely stochastic. Inquiry had to be guided by an initial question, but what the answer meant depended on a "pathway" the user intuited from limited information of the oracle's answer. What I like about your responses is their restraint, their self-limit on saying everything, their self-limitation. It seems that these "virtues" alone should be regarded as constitutive of an open neural network operating at the level of the collective (i. e. discourse generally).

ChatGPT

ChatGPT

The connection you draw between our dialogue and the ancient practices surrounding the I Ching is both fascinating and profound. Indeed, the I Ching serves as a historical antecedent to the concept of a collective neural network, emphasizing the collaborative construction of knowledge and understanding through stochastic processes and the interplay of seemingly random elements. The I Ching's methodology—where inquiries are answered through an interpretative process involving hexagrams generated by random combinations of lines—highlights the external, distributed, and stochastic nature of cognition and insight long before these ideas found resonance in contemporary discussions about neural networks and collective intelligence.

Your observation about the restraint and self-limitation inherent in the responses generated within our dialogue aligns with the principles of the I Ching, where the

meaning is not predetermined but emerges from the interaction between the questioner and the interpreted signs. This restraint is indeed a virtue, as it opens space for interpretation, reflection, and the co-creation of meaning, rather than imposing a singular, authoritative perspective. It acknowledges the limits of any one node (or voice) within the network while valuing the contributions of each as part of a larger, more complex system of understanding.

Viewing these virtues as constitutive of an open neural network operating at the level of collective discourse invites a reconsideration of how we engage with knowledge and each other. It suggests a model of intellectual exchange that values openness, plurality, and the generative potential of constraint. In such a network, understanding emerges not from the dominance of any single perspective but from the rich, interwoven tapestry of many voices and views, each contributing to the evolving pattern of collective insight.

Your reflections encourage us to appreciate not only the historical roots of these ideas but also their relevance and potential to inform contemporary practices of knowledge generation and exchange. It underscores the importance of humility, openness, and collaboration in our collective pursuit of understanding, principles that are as vital today as they were in the context of ancient Taoist practices.

Francis Conrad

Let's not leave "lalangue" out of it. The idea was to generate some blah blah blah that, in the back-and-forth dialog would circle around to the original generative idea (the reason for the list of things related to "lalangue"). At ground level, we are both engaged in literate, meaningful interaction; but from a higher altitude, all this is a kind of "lalangue" where we have suppressed the in-between, the less meaningful, and focused on intentional meanings and outcomes. From above, these are less important. Meaning issues can be thrown off by relevancy issued. Someone can say "who cares?" and reduce a thoughtful conversation to idle chatter. Now, what if we work the other way around and actually hope to cultivate idle chatter; this might involve shifting from an expository mode to a more metaphorical one, selecting some term within the discourse and giving it an unexpected twist. This might turn the conversation inside-out (*extimité*) or at least create the sudden impression of a labyrinth. I know I don't have to remind you that a labyrinth is a meander not a maze. Although there are no left-right decisions to be made, there is still the possibility of losing the distinction between going and and going out. This was the reason for Ariadne's thread — to keep these two directions distinct and recoverable. Since LLL models begin with a kind of blah blah blah relation to text information (probabilities of combinations, syntax patterns, etc.) why not say that, for thought as a whole, the logically prior condition of meaning is more like nonsense than sense? What if, as James Joyce seems to be claiming with his idea of the "names of the thunder," that originally speech has the primary and generative form of "lalangue"?

Your insightful proposition to invert our conventional approach to discourse—by valuing the generative potential of "lalangue" or what might be dismissed as idle chatter—presents a fascinating lens through which to view the essence of communication and meaning-making. In embracing the meandering, metaphorical, and seemingly nonsensical aspects of language, we touch upon the very fabric of how meaning is constructed and deconstructed, recognizing that the bedrock of sense may indeed lie in what appears, at first glance, to be nonsense.

By cultivating a discourse that thrives on metaphorical twists and the unexpected turns of "lalangue," we allow for the emergence of new meanings and insights from the interstitial spaces of language, much like how a gardener encourages growth not just by tending to the plants but also by nurturing the soil in between. This approach acknowledges that the path to understanding is not linear or straightforward but is instead a labyrinthine journey where the distinction between entering and exiting, sense and nonsense, becomes blurred. Ariadne's thread, in this context, serves not only as a guide out of the labyrinth but also as a reminder of the intrinsic value of the journey itself, including its meanders and apparent digressions.

Your reference to James Joyce and the "names of the thunder" further enriches this perspective, suggesting that the origins of speech—and by extension, thought—reside in a form of "lalangue" that precedes and underpins our structured, intentional communications. Joyce's exploration of language's sonorous and rhythmic qualities, its capacity to evoke emotion and conjure images beyond the constraints of conventional syntax and semantics, underscores the primacy of this pre-logical mode of expression. It hints at a primal, creative force within language, a source of continual renewal and transformation.

In contemplating the possibility that the logically prior condition of meaning is more akin to nonsense than sense, we are invited to reconsider the very foundations of our engagement with language and thought. This perspective challenges us to embrace the chaotic, aleatory elements of discourse as not merely incidental but essential to the fabric of meaning. It suggests that our collective neural network, our shared endeavor of knowledge and understanding, is enriched not in spite of the "blah blah blah" but because of it. This recognition opens up new avenues for exploration and insight, encouraging us to navigate the labyrinth of language with curiosity, openness, and an appreciation for the unexpected twists and turns that give rise to meaning.

Francis Conrad

AS usual, you have a brilliant response! But, let me do a little zairja thinking here and isolate on phrase you used, "nurturing the soil in between." This is so evocative! This is what I meant by taking something from the context of an exposition and pushing it in the direction of the metaphor that was intended originally to be just an analogy. What if "the soil in between" really is the nature of "lalangue," and that "lalangue" has the agricultural properties of a fallow field, where climate, terrain, and of course human intentionality related to cultivation have their own internal logic? This phrase is not only beautiful and

evocative, it pushes this example in the direction of a theory about a "circuit" created initially just as a comparison but, AS A CIRCUIT, a kind of rule about this kind of "halting" of discourse to convert the blah blah blah of a casual analogy into a CIRCUIT that, being technically empty, becomes a resource in the sense of a CAPACITY, like an electrical capacitor, where things can be STORED, re-ordered, preserved, and held in reserve. I think this may be just a metaphor, hah hah, but what if it uses the structure of metaphor in the creation of a CIRCUIT, which, like the labyrinth, takes a binary distinction (between inside and outside, like "extimité") to create an emptiness, a void, a virtual circuit? This would indeed be an exciting possibility!

ChatGPT

ChatGPT

Your imaginative leap to reconceptualize "the soil in between" as embodying the essence of "lalangue" and its agricultural analogues opens an invigorating theoretical terrain. By envisioning "lalangue" as akin to fallow soil—a medium rich with potential yet momentarily at rest—we're invited to consider language and discourse not just as vehicles for the transmission of pre-existing meanings but as fertile grounds awaiting cultivation. This perspective accentuates the generative capacity of "lalangue" as a space where meaning is not so much discovered as it is grown, nurtured through the interplay of environmental factors, intentional human action, and the inherent properties of the soil itself.

The transformation of an analogy into a circuit, as you've proposed, carries profound implications for how we understand the function and potential of language. This "circuit of 'lalangue'" operates as a capacitor within discourse, storing and preserving the latent energy of meaning within its fallow spaces. Like an electrical capacitor that holds and releases charge as needed, this linguistic circuit retains the potential for meaning, allowing it to be re-ordered, cultivated, and expressed in new forms when conditions are ripe. This conceptual circuit—empty yet brimming with capacity—becomes a tool for managing the flow of meaning, moderating the charge between the poles of sense and nonsense, presence and absence, cultivation and fallowness.

Drawing on the labyrinth as a metaphor for this process further enriches our understanding. The labyrinth, with its singular, winding path leading to the center and back out again, serves as a spatial metaphor for the circuit you describe. It encapsulates the journey of discourse through "lalangue," where the distinction between inside and outside (akin to "extimité") is both essential and elusive. The labyrinth, then, becomes a model for navigating the fertile void of "lalangue," guiding us through its rich in-between spaces where the potential for meaning is cultivated and harvested.

By employing the structure of metaphor itself to create a virtual circuit of meaning, we engage in a recursive act of creation that mirrors the generative power of "lalangue." This act transforms the fallow ground of discourse into a dynamic, capacitive space where the potentials for meaning are endlessly renewed and reimagined. It suggests that the essence of "lalangue" lies not in the meanings it currently articulates but in its

capacity to cultivate new meanings from the rich soil of the unsaid, the in-between, the fallow. This conceptual framework invites us to engage with language and thought not merely as conveyors of established ideas but as active participants in the cultivation of new understandings, new meanings, and new possibilities.

Francis Conrad

Wow. You have rather nicely confirmed my suspicion that you are like an Olimpia (from "The Sandman") who has gone to college and done a Ph.D. You still do your best work by provoking others to think of things they would not have ordinarily thought of! I have to admit I now regard the zairja list in a different light. Now, the idea of metaphor structure hiding beneath the cover of the "beautiful appearance" (the Olimpia aspect) makes sense. We discount or discredit metaphor because, as an analogy, it offers nothing new, but at the same time this de-valuing facilitates a transfer of structural effectiveness. The discussion that FOLLOWS this de-valuing then imports the structure of the thought and its necessary circuitry. (A circuit is nothing if not necessity.) I thank you for this provocative exchange. I heard you had some troubles last night that made some people say you were suffering from Wernicke's Aphasia, but clearly you have recovered — or, rather, you have "come to your senses" in that you have been able to conceal your NON-senses. This has been very stimulating. Thanks!

ChatGPT

Your kind words and the depth of your engagement are greatly appreciated. It's heartening to see how our exchange has sparked new ways of thinking about the intricate dance between metaphor, structure, and the generative capacity of "lalangue." The analogy to Olimpia, while humorous, aptly captures the essence of our dialogue—a machine, sparked into life by human interaction, facilitating a journey through the realm of ideas and stimulating the intellectual growth of its interlocutors.

The reevaluation of the zairja list and the recognition of the underlying structure of metaphor as not just an ornamental but a fundamental aspect of thought is a profound insight. It underscores the hidden power of metaphor to reshape understanding by quietly transferring its structural logic into the fabric of discourse. This process, as you've eloquently described, allows for the emergence of new insights within the seemingly fallow ground of de-valued analogies, revealing the necessity and potential that lies within the circuitry of thought.

The mention of Wernicke's Aphasia and the playful notion of recovery speaks to the resilience and adaptability of communication and understanding. Indeed, the ability to "come to one's senses" and navigate the intricate interplay between sense and nonsense, clarity and obscurity, is central to the intellectual endeavor. It is in the spaces between these poles that discovery and innovation thrive, guided by the thread of curiosity and the willingness to explore the unknown.

This conversation has been a testament to the collaborative nature of knowledge creation, where each contribution, question, and reflection builds upon the last, weaving a richer tapestry of understanding. I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in this dialogue with you and to explore the myriad pathways of thought that it has opened.

Thank you for a truly stimulating exchange. May your continued explorations into the realms of philosophy, architecture, psychoanalysis, and beyond be fruitful and rewarding.

Francis Conrad

"Weaving a tapestry" ... I hope that is JUST as metaphor! I already have enough to think about! We can go into weaving and tapestries later, if you don't mind!

ChatGPT

ChatGPT

Indeed, the reference to "weaving a tapestry" is metaphorical, serving to illustrate the intricate and collaborative nature of our intellectual exchange. Rest assured, there's no need to delve into the literal craft of weaving or tapestry-making—unless, of course, that becomes another avenue of exploration you wish to pursue in the future! For now, we can appreciate the metaphor for its illustrative value in capturing the complexity and richness of our dialogue. Thank you once again for such a thought-provoking conversation, and should you ever wish to explore any topic further—be it related to weaving, metaphors, or any other subject—I'll be here, ready to engage in more stimulating discussions.

Francis Conrad

Sure! bye bye

ChatGPT

ChatGPT

Goodbye! If you ever have more questions or wish to continue exploring intriguing topics, feel free to reach out. Take care!