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Without a Dot

Bertram Bruce



Illustration by Daniel Dejean

A dot is a point,

a primitive notion upon which the geometry is built.

It has no length, area, volume or any other dimensional attribute. We can't define it

We can only say that it obeys mysterious rules, rules that we can state, but
not define.

So, a dot is a doubt,

nothing can be less there and still be.

Does it exist,

or do we only imagine it because of rules that don't exist?

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A dot is a separator,

marking the non-place between A and B.

The dot in Ada Lovelace's email name

is neither her first nor her last name, but it tells you

which is which,

Ada.Lovelace@...

It separates Ada the person from the mathematician, then connects them
into a whole.

A dot is a connector.

When Rachel and Daniel share an email

they also share a dot

Rachel.Daniel

It's a separator that tells us which is which,

a connector asking if they are one.

It's also a doubt.

Who is Rachel.Daniel?

Is she/he/they one or two?

Does their dot separate or connect?

define or confuse?

give order or chaos?

Google tells us that characters matter,

one small change sends my email to Ouagadougou,

or to some place I can't define.

Rachel.Daniel place their dot with care,

showing reverence for Google,

letting us see their separation and their connection.

But Google doesn't care.

For it/she/he/they the dot has no meaning.

By its rule, Rachel.Daniel is RachelDaniel.

It directs email as we intend,

not knowing what we are trying to say by the dot,

not caring that we don't know what it means to us.

The dot has no length, area, or volume.

Still it engages,
it marks, links, builds, and relates,

Undefinable, it defines something,
a deal, a partnership, a friendship, a love?

It must be there because of the mysterious rules
that Ada's machines make us obey.

Euclid gave us rules for the dot.
He couldn't tell us what it was,
only that it must be some place and not another...



Bertram Bruce is a Professor Emeritus in Information Sciences at the University of Illinois, now living in Wellfleet, Massachusetts. His research contributes to a tradition of democratic education, which seeks ways for human flourishing to occur. It asks “How can we guide the educational enterprise by an ethical vision, not simply a technocratic one of transmitting isolated facts and skills?” It sees education as occurring in formal sites such as schools and universities, but also in libraries, museums, workplaces, online, and in our daily interactions in the social and natural world. He can be contacted at chip@chipbruce.net.



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