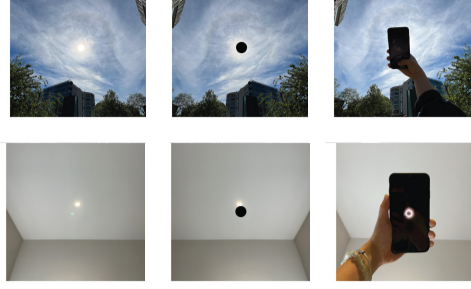


## Context



I once described my working process as a game of dice:

I casually throw a six, then begin to analyse why I got a six—and even fantasise about how I might control every random variable to always throw a six. In my previous studio works, that “six” took the form of a metaphor between social networks and solar eclipses.

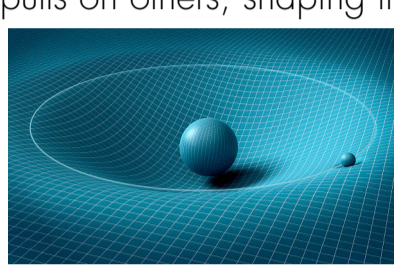


Although I didn't intentionally choose the solar eclipse as a source domain, the deeper I explored, the more surprising connections I found between the two.

Usually, metaphor construction begins with identifying similarities between source and target domain. But in this case, I eventually began to use the solar eclipse as a lens to think about SNS itself—starting from the characteristics of the eclipse and asking whether SNS might share them. This approach felt like sending out a beam of particles into the unknown, toward something just beyond the limits of cognition. In doing so, I gave up control and handed the power of metaphor-making over to randomness.

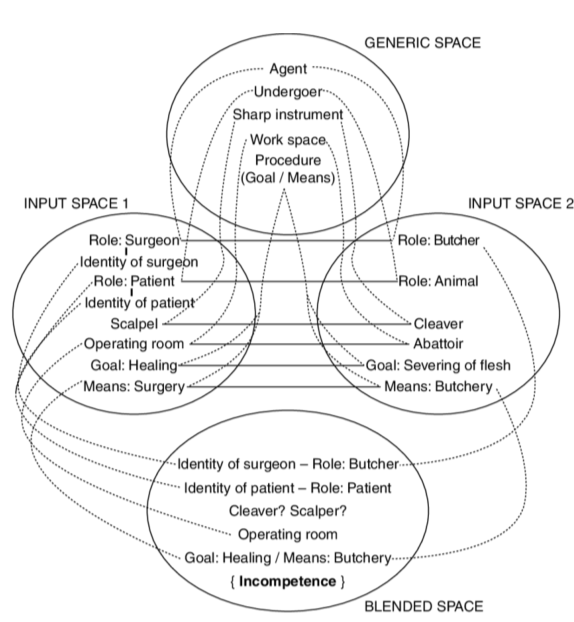
One reason I'm fascinated by this way of thinking is that I've long struggled with my desire for logical precision. I want every step to be justified, but I also don't believe in absolute truths—so I'm constantly unsatisfied with my own conclusions. Like painters who invite chance onto the canvas, I want to offer my audience not a definitive understanding of SNS, or eclipses, or numerical systems, but rather a way of thinking that escapes personal cognitive boundaries.

At this stage, I call this way of thinking the **networked visual metaphor**—a metaphorical field built through visual resemblance. It works much like a gravitational field: each concept with its own mass pulls on others, shaping the ways they are interpreted in relation to each other.



## How does the “visual” emerge in networked visual metaphor?

Metaphor, as a mode of thinking, offers a non-linear cognitive model.



In *The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind's Hidden Complexities* (2002), Fauconnier and Turner propose the Conceptual Blending Theory, which argues that metaphor is not a simple analogy but emerges through the interaction of four interconnected mental spaces: two input spaces, a generic space, and a blended space.

But when we express metaphors through language, this structure often becomes flattened into a linear form: A is B. Our understanding of metaphors tends to rely on cause-and-effect comparisons: because A shares certain traits with B, we use A to explain B. This explanatory habit reduces the metaphor's non-linear richness into a single line of logic.

## Experiment: Random Metaphors.

The metaphors we use in everyday language often form relatively stable, default links between two things. When these paired concepts appear together, our interpretation seems to happen inside a black box—we don't see the internal process, but we immediately grasp the metaphor's intended meaning.

Take “time is money,” for example.



We rarely pause to ask how this metaphor actually works, yet we instantly understand it as a rhetorical way of emphasizing the value of time.

In order to examine how metaphor operates beneath the surface, I created a set of completely random metaphorical pairings between unrelated objects.

Some examples



An umbrella is time



Money is metal spoons

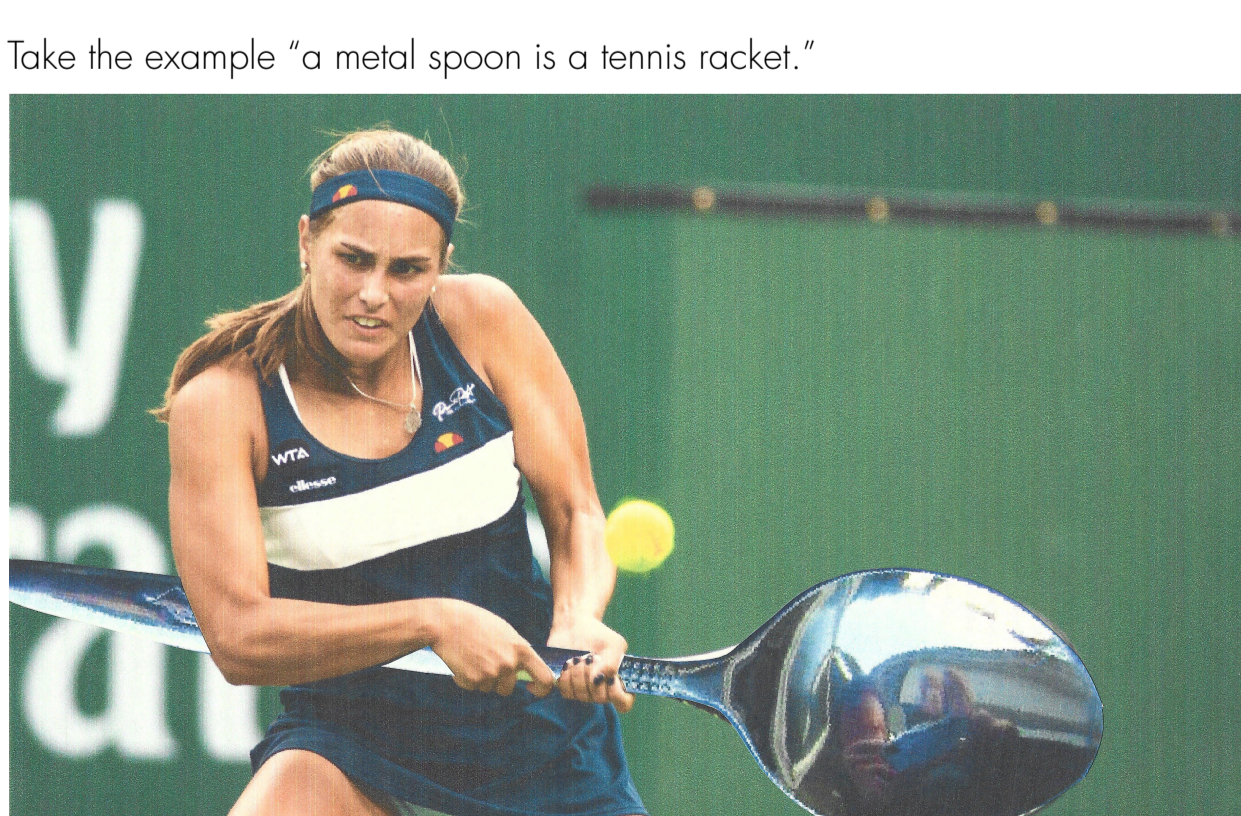


Spoons are sunglasses

These unfamiliar combinations allowed me to witness what happens when metaphors are stripped of familiarity and logic—when no stable link exists, and the meaning must be actively constructed. These random metaphors led me to observe a key difference between visual metaphors and verbal metaphors. When an unfamiliar metaphor appears in verbal form, we tend to analyze the similarities between the two things involved—looking for shared features that justify the metaphor. In other words, verbal metaphor often depends on logical comparison: because A is like B in some way, we say A is B.

But with visual metaphor, structural or formal resemblance alone is often enough for the metaphor to “make sense.” This doesn't mean the metaphor is logically rigorous or analytically valid—but the viewer instinctively places the subjects into a metaphorical frame of interpretation.

Take the example “a metal spoon is a tennis racket.”

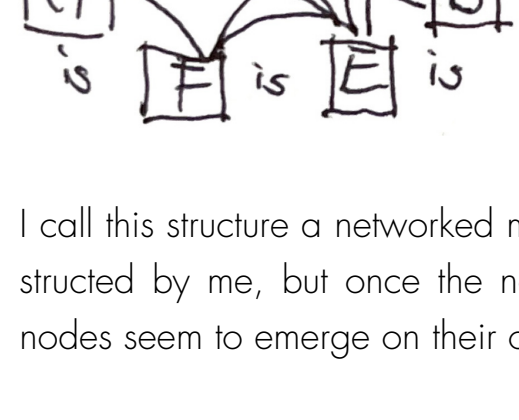


In verbal form, this statement doesn't initially function as a metaphor—we must first construct a justification: both objects have a circular head and a handle, so the comparison can be made. But this cause-and-effect logic collapses the metaphor into a linear argument. When the same idea is presented visually, however, the viewer might immediately begin to imagine the feeling or sound of hitting a tennis ball with a spoon—without any verbal explanation.

This quality of visual metaphor—its ability to activate meaning outside conventional logic—makes it a particularly powerful tool for constructing alternative modes of thought. Since we tend to process visual information non-linearly, I began to focus on visual metaphor as the main direction of my research and practice.

How does the "network" emerge in networked visual metaphor?

When building visual metaphors around internet, I gathered a range of source domains—including the solar eclipse, Rashomon, The Library of Babel, and Invisible Cities. These subjects were not originally created to describe the internet. However, when placed side by side, I began to sense a set of subtle, shifting connections between these source domains. These connections—mediated through the lens of the internet—led me to question whether metaphor must always follow a one-way structure of "A is B. What if they could unfold like a network—A is B, A is C, A is D, and from there: B is C, C is D, and so on?"



- A Kaleidoscope — metaphor for ever-changing, fragmented information flows.
- B Solar Eclipse — an obscured reality and the flattening of higher-dimensional phenomena into lower-dimensional appearances.
- C Cities from Invisible Cities — concrete metaphors for internet experiences.
- D Foucault's Panopticon — metaphor for online surveillance.
- E The Book of Sand — infinite, disordered, irreversible flow of information.
- F The Metamorphosis — metaphor for identity reshaping.
- G The Library of Babel — metaphor for information overload.
- H The Truman Show — metaphor for curated online realities.
- I Plato's Cave — metaphor for secondary realities.

I call this structure a networked metaphor. The initial connections from A are constructed by me, but once the network begins to form, the links between other nodes seem to emerge on their own—often unexpectedly and randomly.

In a networked metaphor, there is no clear "source" or "target." Each concept contributes meaning while being shaped by the others. The structure is decentralized, working more like a gravitational field: every node influences the trajectory of others around it.

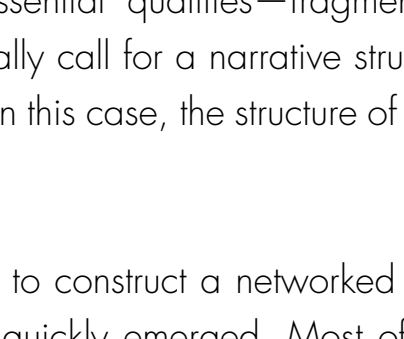
Reference: Italo Calvino, Invisible Cities

In constructing this metaphorical structure, I was inspired by Italo Calvino's Invisible Cities. In the book, the cities are not meant to be "accurately described," but rather to provoke reflection. Each city acts as a kind of visual metaphor for an abstract theme—Zobeide, for instance, is about desire; Eutropia, about alternate realities.

The novel is divided into nine chapters, with cities categorized under themes like "Memory," "Desire," "Signs," "Exchange," and "Eyes." However, there is no linear narrative connecting these cities. Instead, they form a semantic field, where each city mirrors, distorts, or reframes the others. The reader cannot rely on linear progression to make sense of the book, but is instead invited to actively construct connections between the cities—building the structure through association and interpretation.

I explored this structure in two directions—one focusing on the internet, the other on numbers.

I chose the internet as a subject because its very name originates from a metaphor of networks



Visualization of Internet routing paths  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internet#/media/File:Internet\\_map\\_1024\\_-\\_transparent\\_-\\_inverted.png](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internet#/media/File:Internet_map_1024_-_transparent_-_inverted.png)

—making it an ideal candidate for being described through a networked metaphor. Its essential qualities—fragmentation, interconnection, and decentralization—naturally call for a narrative structure that is also networked, chain-like, and non-linear. In this case, the structure of the narrative itself becomes part of the metaphor.

As I began to construct a networked metaphor around the internet, a number of challenges quickly emerged. Most of the conceptual nodes I selected—such as The Book of Sand, Invisible Cities, and the Panopticon—were abstract systems with rich internal structures. My intention was to work with concepts complex enough to engage with the internet on equal terms within the metaphorical network.

However, this very complexity made the metaphor difficult to read, and even more difficult to visualize. These concepts rarely shared clear visual features, which made establishing visual metaphors frustratingly challenging. (I still believe this direction is promising, but at my current stage—both in terms of time and ability—I wasn't able to fully realize it. I plan to return to it after the semester.)

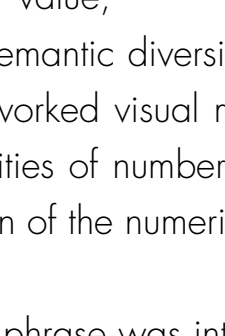
Another issue was the gravitational pull of the internet itself. In everyday discourse, the internet is almost always treated as the subject of description—as if it were a massive celestial body at the center of any metaphorical system. Even when a network of other concepts was in place, everything seemed to orbit around the internet, creating a strong centripetal tendency. But this is exactly what my idea of a networked metaphor is meant to resist.



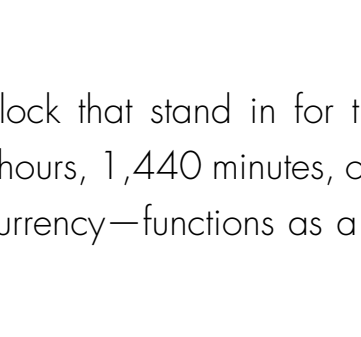
So I turned to numbers. Numbers are visually consistent—they're all made from 0–9—which makes it easy to establish visual metaphor. At the same time, numbers represent highly diverse abstract systems:



money,



time,



value,

etc. This combination of visual uniformity and semantic diversity makes numbers, in my view, the ideal medium for building networked visual metaphors. Or perhaps it's more accurate to say: these two qualities of numbers allow networked visual metaphors to emerge as a hidden function of the numerical system itself.

Take the familiar example "time is money." This phrase was introduced by Benjamin Franklin in 1748, in his essay Advice to a Young Tradesman. I can't speak to what Franklin intended when he coined this metaphor, but when we reconsider it today, something interesting emerges:

Time—or more precisely, the numbers on a clock that stand in for time—is a system of measurement. It divides a day into 24 hours, 1,440 minutes, or 86,400 seconds. Money—or the numbers printed on currency—functions as a system of accounting, measuring the value of things.

At a conceptual level, these two systems operate under completely different logics. Yet, because both are visualised through numbers, a metaphorical link between them is immediately accepted. Time becomes something that can be spent, earned, saved, or exchanged—just like money.

This is how a shared numerical visual form allows two unrelated abstract systems to become metaphorically connected, even without shared semantics. We don't just say "time is money"; we treat it that way in practice, exchanging hours for wages as if they were physical commodities.

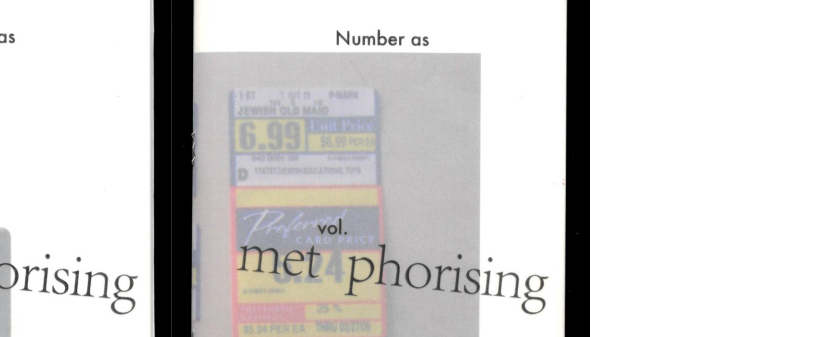
This is how I understand the operation of networked metaphor within the numerical system, and how it influences the way we think.

An abstract concept A is visualised as a number a, and another abstract concept B as a number b. Due to their original properties, a and b may each have different characteristics—a might represent a 1–12 cycle, b might be something that can be ranked or ordered, or homogeneous.

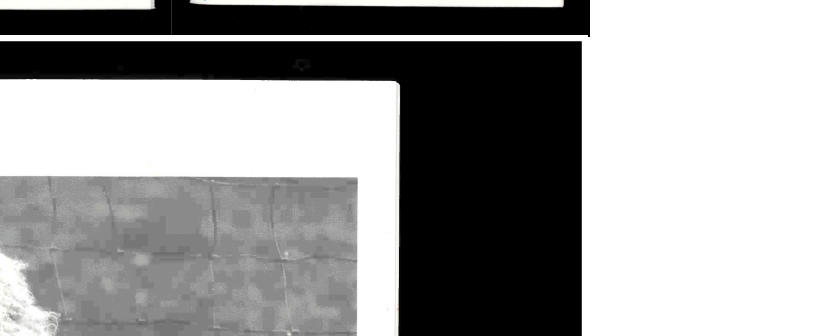
These features begin to blur through the visual similarity of numbers. Traits originally associated with A are transferred to B through their shared numerical form. Then B may pass those traits to C, and C to D, and so on. Each abstract system, once encoded numerically, starts to shaping how this network of meaning operates.



This idea was explored in my studio work by identifying several systems that are visualised through numbers—for example,



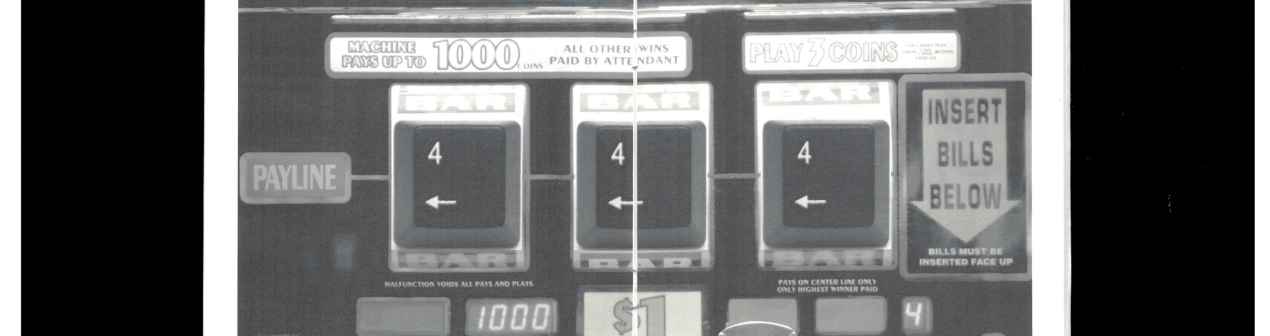
time is number



value is number

I placed these number-based abstractions side by side using a combination of book structure and visual narrative, allowing numerical form to build metaphorical links across different abstract domains.

This booklet became part of a four-part series titled "Number as ... tool," with each volume exploring a different function of numbers.



While the series as a whole investigates the roles numbers play, this particular volume introduces networked visual metaphor as one such function—revealing how numbers can generate metaphorical networks across concepts that otherwise appear unrelated.

