

The relationship between ellipsis and ellipse.

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Ellipsis is three dots that come at the end of a sentence, or a phrase; a dropping off, a trailing off, a disruption, something that is unfinished. The ellipse is a circular form, perhaps closer to the shape of an egg. Circularity implies completion like an ouroboros, the image of a snake eating its own tail. So in this way, ellipsis and an ellipse are opposite. And yet, on a granular level, the form of the ellipsis and the ellipse are similar. You never see an ellipsis with two dots. An ellipsis with one dot is a period, which is a mark of completion. There is no such grammatical or structural form as two dots in a row, neither at the end of a sentence nor as something unto itself. Perhaps emoticons are represented with two dots in succession, but I'm thinking of a colon, which is two dots or two periods that are flipped vertically instead of horizontally. A colon implies sequence. Colons never simply trail off the way ellipses do. A colon implies that there will be a next step—and there always is. A colon is a link, a logical progression from this to this, as opposed to a semi-colon which couples two related ideas. The semi-colon is comprised of a period and a comma—it is both a period and a comma—vertically stacked on top of each other. Vertical stacking of punctuation is very rare. As a matter of fact, I can only think of the colon and the semi-colon as being vertically stacked punctuation. Sometimes punctuation gets flown up as in an apostrophe off from the line or the baseline of text, in flight, so to speak. An apostrophe is a floating comma. An apostrophe joins two words, assembling them into one and if that apostrophe drops and becomes a comma, there can be no joining of words. Instead that indicates separate phrases. And yet the constituent form of the commas is an ellipse or a period with a tail on the bottom, making it into an anthropomorphic diacritical mark, not so different than a sperm with a tail, or a tadpole, whereas the ellipsis or the ellipse refer more to celestial bodies—the moon or the sun or the planet or the universe, rather than the more human-based or organic notions of tadpoles or sperm. Maybe the circle or the period or the ellipsis or the ellipse then refers to the ovary, which is sometimes depicted as a circle in schematic terms with the sperm gathering about it or flowing to it. In other words, the period at the centre and the apostrophes around it, creating a hierarchy of primary forms.

(Kenneth Goldsmith, feb-2018)