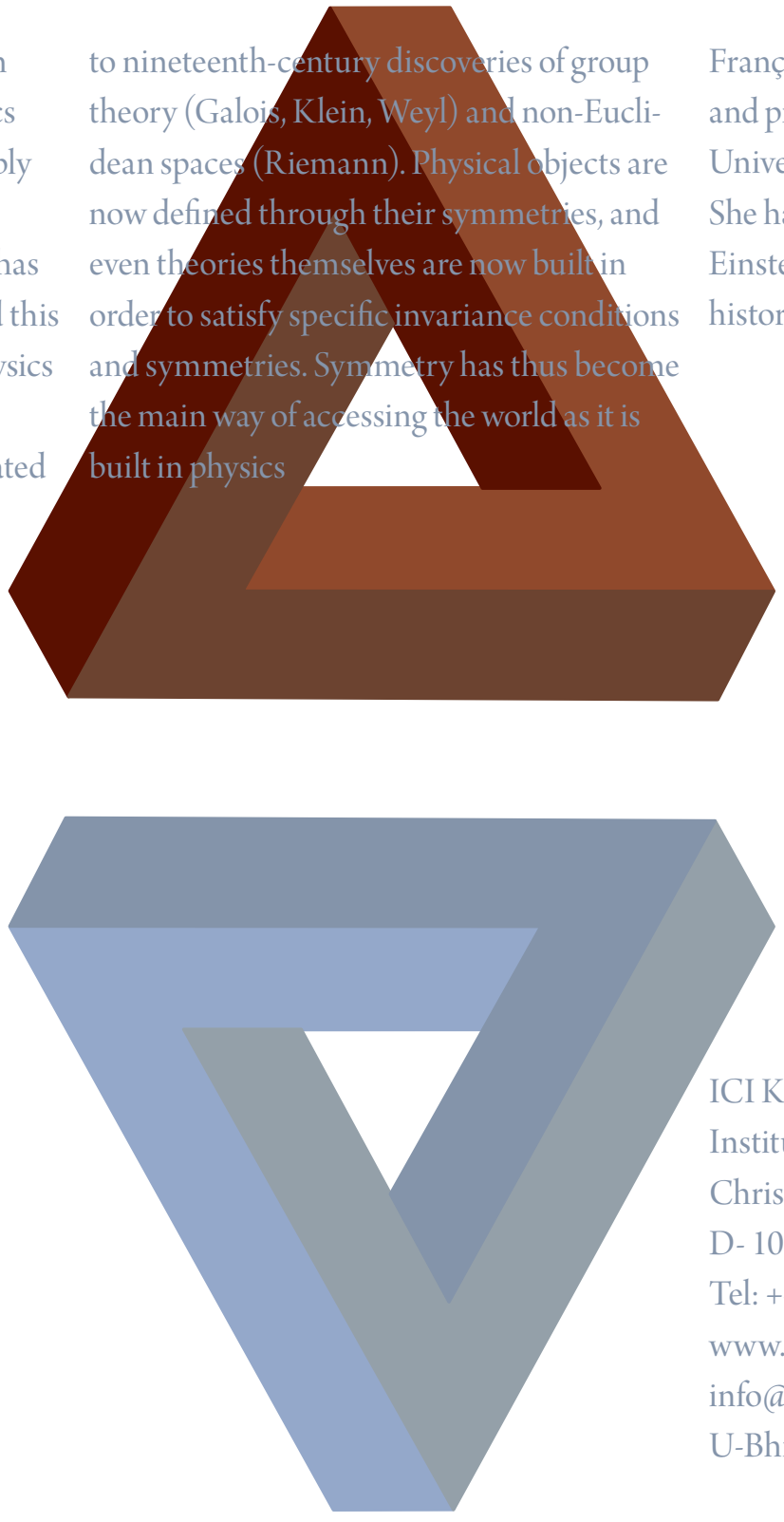
LECTURE

FRANÇOISE BALIBAR

WHAT IS A THING?

Martin Heidegger characterized modern science as the discovery that mathematics "touches upon things", and does not simply provide a means for representing them.
It would seem that this characterization has become more and more appropriate, and this talk will describe how contemporary physics characterises its objects through mathematical concepts of symmetry related to nineteenth-century discoveries of group theory (Galois, Klein, Weyl) and non-Euclidean spaces (Riemann). Physical objects are now defined through their symmetries, and even theories themselves are now built in order to satisfy specific invariance conditions and symmetries. Symmetry has thus become the main way of accessing the world as it is built in physics



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