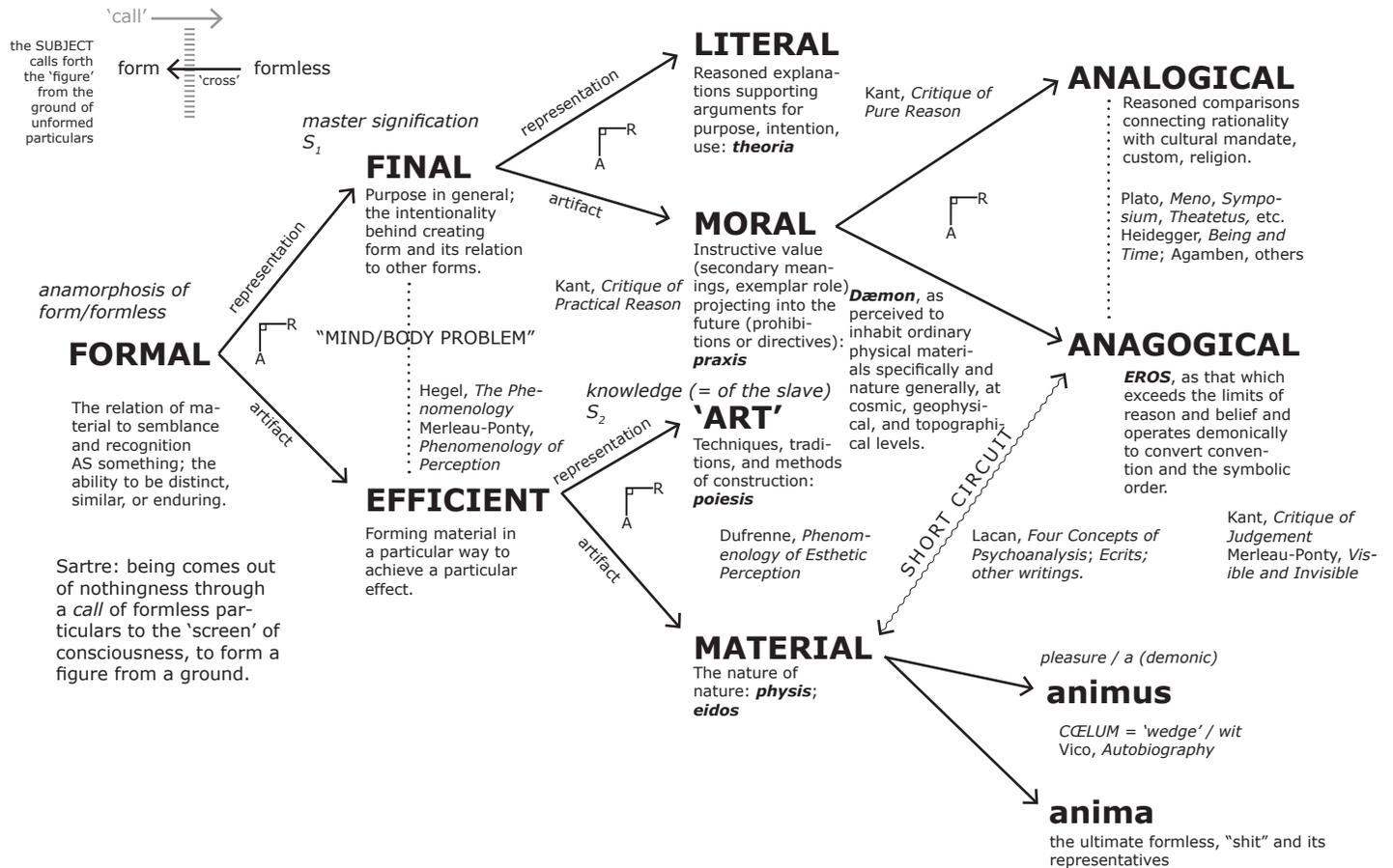


aristotle's four causes, parallax view

Aristotle famously distinguished four separate kinds of causality: formal (the shape and appearance of something), efficient (the way it got that way), material (the stuff that holds it up), and final (the reason for doing it in the first place). The classic example is that of a bronze statue of Apollo, whose form makes it recognizable and worship-able as the god, whose bronze gives it structural permanence, whose artisans relied on specific techniques of design and manufacture, and whose reason for being was that the people needed the statue of a god to worship. Simple enough! But, a closer examination shows how, between the causes, 'operators' separate these causes along the lines of representation and artifact, creating an order that emanates from form and establishes distances that can be 'closed up' by ideology or held open by the symptom/sinthom.



1. what's an operator and what is it doing here?

AN OPERATOR distinguishes between the 'representational function' (signification) and the 'artifact' (signifier, material support, etc.) to suggest the operation of a 'hinge-like relationship' that first maintains complete independence between the two vectors. Art, in all its forms, however, uses the artifact as a *poché* (space of concealment), a surplus space and time that at some point contaminate the representation through one of the many processes of self-reference ('iconicity'). In the ancient story of the contest between the famous Greek painters, Zeuxis and Parhassius, Zeuxis painted a bowl of fruit so realistic that a bird flew into the mural wall, breaking its neck (the 'ultimate test' of representation is that it fool an 'unmotivated' agent). Parhassius, in contrast, painted a curtain, which simulated the 'mere framing devices' that were incidental to the competition and unnoticed by the judges to be a painting. The artifact contaminates representation in this case by winning over it by means of replacing the unmotivated agent with the motivated agent, using motive directly to achieve the final effect.

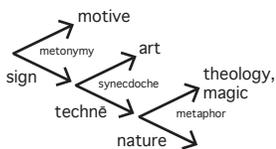
The anecdote illustrates the first-level division of the diagram above. The 'formal cause' (what the paintings look like) is judged by the unmotivated agent to 'prove' the quality of the final cause (the intention to create an image/form of a bowl of fruit). The efficient cause (the framing devices and techniques) used to bring about the painting were initially 'invisible' to the judges, who presumed that motivation was directed towards form, not finality — 'merely formal properties' rather than the form intended to 'look like something'.

The operator is used at first to distinguish and then 'short-circuit' the two dimensions of meaning that must be created simultaneously with any 'intended' sign. In Aristotle's system of four causes, the operators demonstrate that intentionality is present primarily in the use of form to signify, either through creation or perception, but that the component parts, finality and efficiency, can switch roles to create conditions of self-reference, suture, *mise-en-abîme*, etc.

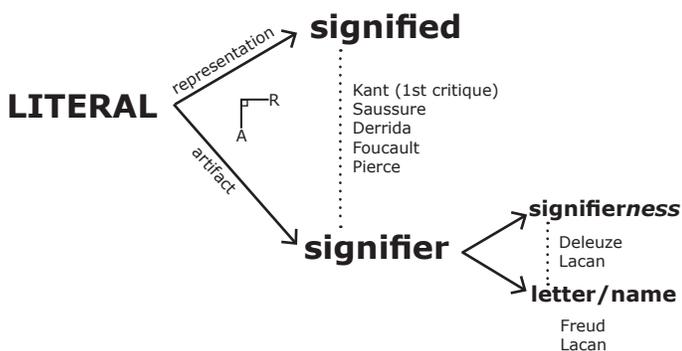
2. a 'Vichian' order inside the system of causes

The progressive structure from material to finality implies a sequence from natural *materia* to abstract intentionality, the sequence that Vico formalized through the cultural stages of myth, heroic representation, and modern conceptualization. Where mythic thought relied on a globalized form of metaphor, the heroic age depended on the logic of part for whole (synecdoche) and then a more rationalized metonymy — similar to the order that Roman Jakobson applied to language's poetic versus rational tendencies. For Vico, the final reflective stage of mind is powered by irony: the capability for reversal, dominated by the theme of self-reference. The advantage of looking at Aristotelian causality in this 'cascade' form is that it shows how the 'artifact' of each prior stage is converted into the 'representational' aspect of a higher developmental causality. The 'operator' of representation/artifact introduces Hegelian *Aufhebung* ('sublation', literally a means of cancelling while preserving). It is the artifact of myth, therefore, that gives rise to the Age of the Heroes, which 'cancels' myth's absolute religiosity and replaces it with the cunning of the tricky hero.

By emphasizing form as an action rather than a result, Sartre's characterization is able to introduce the analogy of the figure-ground distinction. In his famous anecdote of 'looking for Pierre', Sartre notes how the perceiving subject 'calls forth' the sense particulars of experience to an imaginary screen, where he attempts to create the desired 'figure' (Pierre) in contrast to a diffuse background, the confused particularity of the restaurant where Pierre has failed to show up on time. Through this staging, causality is something that is back-generated through the logic of the anacoluthon, apparently created in some 'historical' order but in fact sprung from the instance of the formation experience.



Aristotle's system of causes is in fact a 'brachiated' structure composed of cascading 'operators' (A/R) that create internal gaps allowing for short-circuits, silent partners, and conspiratorial subversion.



The sequence of magic, art, and (rational) motive and the corresponding domains of nature, *technè*, and sign provide a diachronic (historical) and synchronic (logically structured) composite model that reveals, through its discontinuities, the places where various philosophical projects have been set up. Kant's three major domains of interest, represented by his critiques of pure reason (sense experience, intellection, etc.), practical reason (moral judgment), and the esthetic and sublime (judgment itself) can each find its corresponding position. The first critique of pure reason takes its place in the literal and its artifact-representation (A/R) relationship between signifier and signified (although Kant would never have used this designation). Practical reason hovers between the analogical and analogical resources of the moral component of final cause. Esthetics and the sublime take up the analogical in its 'return to nature', the place of material cause and

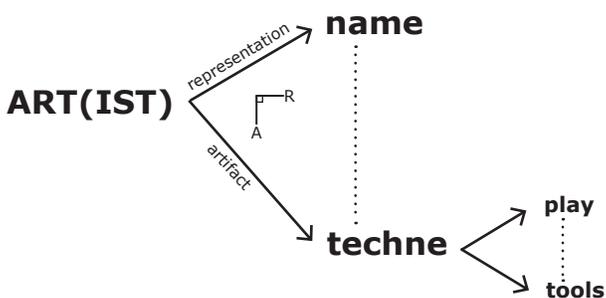
Each component has a 'fractal' quality that can be expanded (indefinitely? no — the system is internally circular). Each operator is itself an opening within which any 'strong theory' can take up residence.

its 'impossible' intentionality. Without doing an injustice to Kant, it is possible to see how later thinkers took up the same field, but with different emphasis, so that the present terminology of signifier/signified displaces Kantian terminology.

3. gaps, disorders, parallax, and moiré

The operator is simultaneously a conjunction and a disjunction, an assertion and denial of a functional relationship, a suppression of one element (artifact) in favor of a salient one (representation). Because each operator involves a sublation which at the same time negates and preserves, the whole system of causes creates pockets (*pochés*) capable of subverting, converting, or deconstructing (in the old Derridean sense) meaning. Form is, in a very serious and straightforward sense, in its very nature a process of the deFORMATION, of deFORMity, of dissolution. Despite the intention to set figure against ground or any of the other strategies aimed at clarity, formation, signification, intentionality, etc., dis-order is built into the process by means of the operators that, at each level where cause is sequentially distinguished — and it is the sequentiality that insures that each cause involves all others — suppression as well as expression is a co-result.

This is what lies behind Kant's extraordinary antinomies, which lay the groundwork for Hegelian dialectic: a demonstration that space and time themselves were conditions for any experience whatsoever and thus beyond 'predication' (definition, conceptualization) although they both entered into each and every definition and conceptualization. In the supplementary 'tree' diagrams shown



The operator model forces a consideration of components that are not traditionally included together, such as the role of the artist's identity (represented by a signature, a style, an idea of a 'voice', etc.) with *technè*.

on this page, it seems as if brachiation can go on indefinitely, but in fact the process is not linear but circular: the system folds in on itself at any point. Its discontinuities are potential occasions for short-circuiting. And, certain philosophies — such as Kierkegaard's for example — take advantage of the 'openings'. Kierkegaard capitalized on the gaps left in theories of time (as repetition) to show how to connect this 'natural' phenomenon with morality.

The fractal quality of the operator invites 'an operation' to take place that dramatizes the conversion, flip, contamination, capsize, rupture, twist, or other surprise attack on stability. Here, the entire project of the causality system becomes a 'staging ground' to be filled with interlacing narratives.