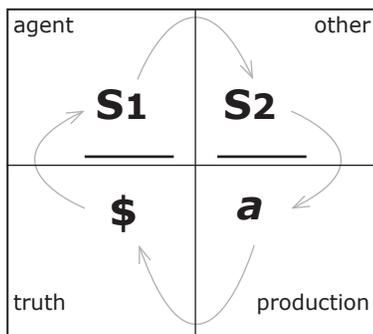


# the four (Lacanian) forms of discourse

Lacan proposed four distinctive forms of communication ("discourse") by characterizing the positions taken by four components: the barred subject (\$), knowledge (S<sub>2</sub>, relations among signifiers, chains of signification), the "master signifier" (S<sub>1</sub>, an irrational universalizing, i.e. not a "class-logical," function capable of organizing signifiers in a field), and *a*, the "object-cause of desire," an *a*-symbolic materialization of the subject's desire, characterized by loss, absence, and the gap created by the difference between demand and drive. These terms are like four players that maintain their serial order, S<sub>1</sub>, S<sub>2</sub>, *a*, \$, as they rotate across a fixed field defined by four positions: agent, other, production, and truth. Clockwise rotation results in the discourse of (1) the master, (2) the hysteric, (3) psychoanalysis, and (4) university.

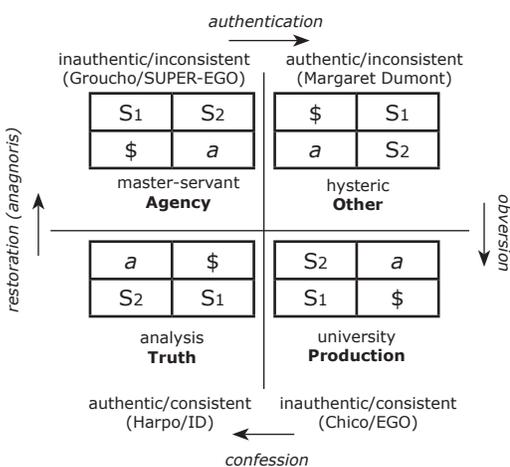
Quadrature of the underlying field of discourse establishes two main divisions. The first, left-right division allows Lacan to define varying qualities of the exchange between agency and truth, on the left, and the other and production on the right. Each discourse would seem to establish a "synchronic" state of affairs, where positions may be taken up by interactive representatives. Slavoj Žižek has, however, gone a step further and suggested that the discourses themselves may be present simultaneously within single works of art (*Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel and the Critique of Ideology*). He uses the operas *Don Giovanni* and *Parsifal* to identify the dynamics that allow main characters to play out the possibilities of two terms that supersede the system: consistency/inconsistency and authenticity/inauthenticity. Thus, Leporello in *Don Giovanni* and Klingsor in *Parsifal* are "inauthentic and consistent" in their manifestations of university discourse. Žižek establishes the principle by which the discourses and their configurations serve as a kind of Ouija board that maintains a strict limitation on one hand while affording a broad interpretative range on the other. The aim of this summary is to minimize the damage done to Lacan's original idea while suggesting an independent extension in the spirit of Žižek's.

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discourse of the master-servant

The discourse of the master-servant is drawn from Hegel's analysis of this condition in his *Phenomenology*. The master is self-subordinated to an imagined other, which can be seen as "other masters," which he must eternally confront on a "field of honor." The concept of mastery subordinates the master, who can be seen as the barred subject; and in this case the bar stands for the irony by which the master is more slave than his servant. Because S<sub>2</sub> is also knowledge, which the servant possesses on behalf of his/her master, the element of pleasure is concealed within the servant's freedom. If S<sub>1</sub> is considered as a master signifier, the diagonal role of surplus *jouissance*, *a*, is clear. In the place of production, it maintains a circular, continuing authority that perpetually bars the subject from escaping its "ideological" power. S<sub>1</sub> organizes other signifiers, S<sub>2</sub>, so that it may conceal its authority within the idiotic symmetry of its irrationality. This discourse type resembles Stephen Pepper's "organicism" in that a (false) thesis of perpetual motion is derived from the political structure of the master signifier, which is able to shift from container to contained unpredictably. [Arrows indicate rotation to the next form of discourse, that of the hysteric.]



Lacan did not limit the number of discourses to four, but the relation of the four terms to four positions suggests that within discourse itself the two opposing orders, rotating against each other, itself has a value. Žižek has proposed that characters can act out the "logics" of each discourse within the frame of a single work of art, but one should not at this critical point forget how the dynamics of the dramatic work of art might relate to the dynamics built into Lacan's rotating forms and fixed fields. Dynamics should not be too quickly packaged as a causal sequence. The move from inauthentic to authentic, however, implies a "before and after" that cannot be confined to pure geometry. If the Marx Brothers are substituted for the two operas Žižek cites, the case is made in each of the Marx Brothers' simplistic film plots, which are (infinitely) divisible into episodes that act out the discourses at the more comprehensive level of the "field-of-the-fields" regulating four new fundamental relationships suggested by Žižek's involvement of authenticity and consistency. This new dynamic does not propose an infinite extension of fields and rotating elements. Rather, it returns the system of discourse "to itself," to the themes Lacan introduced in the Mirror Stage, authentication and (spectral) inversion/obversion. Just as the brothers return fool-play to Freud's fundamental structure of the ego (Margaret Dumont is the comedic inverted version of the Lady of the Troubadours), the discourse of the discourses is **scale-dysfunctional**. Furthermore, its sequentiality is crisscross rather than linear (**motility dysfunction**), and its authentication is, as the figure of psychoanalysis suggests, based on the capacity of the subject to lie (**identity dysfunction**).

In the "expanded field" of (Groucho) Marxian analysis, Lacan's theory of discourse is carried to the level of the performative. Groucho alternatively woos and insults Margaret Dumont, debriefs Emanuel Ravelli (Chico) until he doubts that he is himself, but is undermined in his own "mirror stage." In *Duck Soup*, Harpo, to conceal a broken mirror, dresses in a nightgown and cap identical to Professor Firefly's (Groucho) and mimicks Firefly's every move — this is the logic of Plautus's identity play, *Amphitryon*, where Hermes appears before Sosia "as himself." Freud's two main themes of the uncanny, identity and optics, are settled within this "matrix of a matrix." Falsification/authentication combines with confession/obversion to allow for a realization of discourse as a fractal set. In citing Jacques-Alain Miller's reference to the "extimacy of the Other," Mark Bracher *et alia* in *Lacanian Theory of Discourse: Subject, Structure, and Society* open up this very territory. In the performative, where the division between audience and actors is akin to that between the dead and the living, the "uncanny" transactions between the un-dead audience and the scripted (=fated) characters on stage are nothing less than *apophrades*, both the "return of the dead," and half-speech (*mi-dire*). Harold Bloom's "revisionary ratios" apply.

## COMMENTARY

Think of the Lacanian system in minimalist terms. It is a 4-space that fits into two dimensions, against which 4 conditions rotate. Because their order is fixed, we don't get the usual 4! result of possibilities, just the four-on-four combination of four. This kind of space is linked to projective reasoning. There is a reasoner and, in front of the reasoner, a blank piece of paper, on which the demonstration will take place. If the Gödel principle of non-interference is respected, the reasoner will take care to keep the two zones separate. That is, there must be a separation of use and reference. We cannot use what we refer to and *vice versa*. This is the linguist's and psychologist's (and every other human scientist's) problem. You can't talk about language without using language. You can't *think* about the *thought* of others. Contamination of the study with the studied is inevitable.

Rather than avoid this problem, as most social scientists do through double-blind experimental designs and strict customs separating subjects and theories about subjects, Žižek has "jumped directly to the end-game," i.e. he has assumed the responsibility of the Gödel theorem and come to terms with its alternatives, i.e. the choice between consistency and completeness. Like Lacan, he has opted for consistency, and used the *same* logic of the part to apply to the structure of the *whole*, but in the process he has "fractalized" the system so that it appears at every scale level. In other words, Žižek has done a <> on us, a reversed predication (RP), extimating the container, making it the contained.

How has he done this? He has taken two hitherto invisible aspects of the system, authenticity and consistency, and tagged each discourse. How? and Why? It seems that Žižek recognizes from the start that the consequence of not being able to discuss discourse without engaging the problems of recursion and self-reference, immediately drops to the level of characterization. This is the ultimate, in my view, "partial object," a concept that, once articulated, becomes a person with its own free will, proclivities, and destiny. This is discourse as the "un-dead." What projective explanation hopes to do by "killing" its subject-matter — allowing it to be dissected as in an anatomy lesson — has come undone through the partializing process. Each discourse, incarnated as a character, is able then to interact with other characters in a "comedy of manners" (literally).

By moving from the high-art examples that Žižek uses (*Parsifal*, *Don Giovanni*) to the Marx Brothers, we access two new insights. The first has to do with the correlation Žižek himself has already made, between the three "standard" Marx Brothers trio combination and the three-part Freudian psyche: super-ego, ego, and id. Žižek has already, in this comparison, evidenced a capability for personification. If parts of the psyche can not only separate but have their own routines and qualities, interact with others, make and accede to demands, then the principle is established. The system *parts* are able to *partialize* — i.e. enjoy an independent existence outside the system — and, in effect, reversely predicate.

Reversed predication, we should remember, is the ability to flip from being framed to being a frame. It is the consequence of extimacy (*extimité*) and its ongoing physics, energized by the unconscious's sleepless and automatic organization of the world. If we need to, we can draw up the situation in Spencer-Brown calculus terms: ))) ... ( — in the limited typography of the computer keyboard. In other words, the last term in a series finds that it can enter into a position before the first term of the series. It can "flip" from a predicating to predicated condition (and *vice versa*).

The flip is evident in Groucho's and Margaret Dumont's relationship of inconsistency. In global terms Groucho's insults reverse the relation of the knight to the Lady of the Troubadours. Instead of the enigmatic Lady, giving the knight/singer impossible tasks, Groucho lays into Margaret Dumont's character with ruthless discourtesy, despite her characters' roles as his chief unquestioning benefactor. Internally, however, Groucho oscillates between flattery and attentiveness and this rude behavior. "Inconsistency" marks both his position as Master and super-ego, in keeping with the Hegelian master's inconsistent status, between imperious lord and cringing wimp. For a reality check, compare the character of the boss in the 1980 comedy film *Nine to Five*, Frank Hart (Dabney Coleman). His two settings, arrogant jerk to compliant slave, can flip polarities in an instant — once his captors' backs are turned.

If the Master's discourse and the hysteric's discourse are tied together by their inconsistency, the tie seems natural. Hegel makes it clear that there can be no "neutral" master who is at a mid-point compromise between his authority and subjection/abjection to his own rule. Similarly, with the hysteric, there is no happy middle between victimage and enigma. Compare the 1974 film, *The Night Porter*, about a holocaust survivor's encounter with her former Nazi camp guard, and the theological structure of the Annunciation, where the Angel Gabriel plays the role of the enigmatic super-ego agency. (What, after all, could be more super-ego than an angel of the Lord?) The inconsistency theme is carried into the question of Mary's virginity — How? No less a theologian than St. Jerome discovered this inconsistency theme and, without the benefit of Lacanian discourse instruction, came to the same conclusions. Inconsistency and hysteria are the stuff of divine incarnation. The womb "moves about."

On the side of consistency, we have the discourses of the university and analysis. This is the Gödelian honesty position: if I can't say everything, Lacan posits, then I must be consistent. Here's where honesty plays a key role. *Inauthenticity* must be the rule in the discourse of the university. This is why the S<sub>1</sub> must "pull the strings" beneath the enchain signifiers that constitute knowledge. The arrangement of topics a>b>c> ... must constitute an ideological order; the real punishments in the university are therefore directed at those who wish to break away from or skip elements in the order ... or who, as in the case of serious Buddhists or feminists, jump ship to take up an entirely different order.

Anyone knows that if you're looking for authenticity, the university is a bad place to start. In analysis, authenticity comes at the end, in the so-called "traversing of the fantasy," when the analysand takes responsibility for his/her constructions of the Other and relations to the traumatic-Real. The unconscious cannot be paraphrased (i.e. "falsified"). It can *only* be traversed in the form of the fantasy construct. Dante had a grasp of this traversal in his principle of showing how the punishment was imminent to the crime. In the figure of Paolo and Francesca di Rimini, the (detached virtual) incident of reading the romance of Lancelot and Guinevere was not a case of incitement to illicit love — the original story was about a fated couple, and reading became a vector of this fate. The Italian couple was contaminated not so much by the English one as by contamination itself. Again, the force of reversed predication, taken up into the image of the whirlwind that separates but connects Paolo and Francesca in *The Inferno*. Hell is the "analysis" of the "university condition" of Paolo and Francesca, and one "stands in" the other in the same way the punishment is always-already implicit in the crime/sin.

I would say that at Penn State, one is more able to see how this works than most other universities. The conclusion of the Louis Freeh report (2012) was that Jerry Sandusky's crimes were "implicit" in the university culture that smoothed it over and covered it up. Freeh was not explicit enough, of course. Had he been a Lacanian he would have gone as far as to say that there are multiple Sanduskies. "Usque ad finem" means "to the very end" (please, no literal thoughts on this!). *Sans-d'usque* would be something like "without end," i.e. caught in a regressive loop, forced to repeat without (sans) conclusion a pattern over and over, as were Paola and Francesca in their own Sandusky loop. The university is corrupt by nature, because university discourse is, as Lacan explained, a condition of the manipulation of facts from behind the scenes, and a forced enjoyment of subjects subordinated to the enigmatic demands of the Big Other. Lacan's description of university discourse might have been written directly into the formal indictment of the grand jury!

So, while the university is consistent (the continuous loop), its inauthenticity (S<sub>2</sub>/S<sub>1</sub>) and its crime (a/\$) can be addressed only by analytical discourse and the positioning of knowledge under the sign of truth, which from its position beneath the bar must be the fantasy we must take seriously — i.e. structurally, in relation to its own generative/generated unconscious — as the efficient cause of experiential pleasure (*jouissance*) and pain (trauma). Remember that, as hysteria teaches us, there is no essential — meaning, "for the unconscious" — difference between the two.

Where the university discourse's emblem would most likely be the gapped circle — whose missing element is the enigmatic 'a' — Enjoy! — we must reverse the vector of falsification (see the diagram) that made the master's discourse an unbearable political form of the unconscious's subordination of subjectivity beneath the castrating Symbolic and the spectral Imaginary. Just as university discourse "obverted" the inconsistent but authentic discourse of the hysteric into its own consistent inauthenticity, the discourse of analysis has to reverse-engineer mastery.

That this is the first principle of analysis in the clinic, "on the couch," is a test-of-concept proof that the placement of analysis beneath master-servant discourse is essentially accurate. The analysand's conscious presentations are irrelevant. The analyst listens for — is *silent* for — the slips and faults, the limits of mastery that have, without analysis, successfully held the unconscious at bay. Thus, near the conclusion of analysis, falling in love with the analyst is the unconscious's last defense (cf. Mladen Dolar) against exposure. If love is not the answer, so to speak, then it may be the question, "So, this is love?" The authenticity/consistency of analysis, the antidote to mastery's inauthenticity/inconsistency, a dressing-down of the super ego. Truth/analysis must kill the structured dominance of the paternal *and* maternal super-ego, which is to say it must be a *déjà-vu* return to a primary landscape, the "maternal place" guarded by the fierce paternal dragon, which gives way to password-protected passage, the end of analysis. In this respect Eleusis had it right.