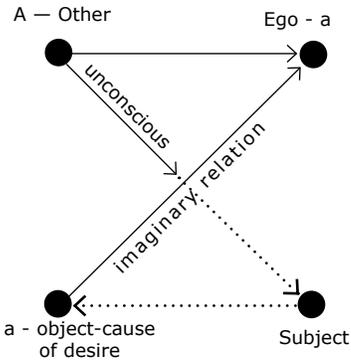


FRAMETHEORY: VISUALIZING LACAN



Lacan's emphasis on language centers on the 'extimiation' (*extimité*) that results from the distinction of *énoncé*¹ (utterance) from the act of speech, which is modeled as cause and effect, A/a. Is it possible that the graphic model, using five basic 'operators' (|, a, ∂, ω, ⊔) can approach the daunting job of mapping Lacan's theory itself? This task would have difficulty on two (at least) levels: First, Lacan's 'theory', though it has considerable unity as a theory, was developed in three distinct phases. As Slavoj Žižek has put it, it is as if Lacan has 'occupied' each of the three domains he has defined as primary: the imaginary (the Mirror Stage), the symbolic (Lacan's interest in language and the unconscious as 'structured like a language'), and the Real (*extimité*, desire, enjoyment). Any summary would have to decide how to describe these 'stages' — should they not be described with the same 'topological' peculiarity as the imaginary, symbolic, and Real, i.e. the Borromeo Ring's 'lock', where any two rings are related by means of an (absent) third? Second, if a diagram is developed to 'summarize' or 'present a picture of' Lacanian psychoanalytical theory, shouldn't it be, itself, derived from the diagrams that Lacan himself developed — the L-scheme (left), the R-scheme, the I-scheme, etc? The multiplicity of schemas indicates a certain graphic indeterminacy, but the role of the frame has not been fully exploited, although the Mirror Stage is, primarily, a framed situation.

This experiment inverts Lacan's emphasis on the operations and agents of subjectivity and looks at the components of framing that can be found in the media (film, theater, literature, architecture, etc.) that also depend on framing. By using common components, at the risk of being overly literal, this approach speculates that artistic-literary examples will then be made useful as 'laboratories' for comprehending and expanding Lacan's original ideas.

1 'Enunciating/*énoncé*' refers to Lacan's distinction between the speech act and the literal contents of words, meanings, and grammatical/syntactical relationships (*énoncé*). The extimate affects this distinction directly. Effect become cause and is associated with the 'unconscious' of the partial objects that form the basis of Aristotle's two 'chance' causes, automaton and *tuchē*.

THE GRAPHIC TRANSLATION of Lacan's systematic thinking about subjectivity is made possible by the mediation of the Aristotelian causes, qualified by the 'chance' elements of automaton and *tuchē*. Efficient cause initiates the formation of fantasy within the general framing resources of the symbolic — the ability to create an internal pocket or site where the impositions of the symbolic order may be suspended, and where subjects may be constructed who have access to (or a loss of insulation from) the Real. The Real requires that 'dimensionalities' be constructed; here the Aristotelian categories of formal and material cause are set up within the general bi-polarity of the subject and the subject's fantasy, giving rise to multiple types of 'anamorphic' conditions. The Real is made present through negation, in particular the 'negation of negation' that is embodied by partial objects, the voice, the gaze, metalepsis (metonymy of metonymy), and defects within the fantasy structure ('R2'). The 'letter' of Lacan 'always arrives at its destination', a case of Ad, or the inscription of death within the 'living subject' (= subject projected in fantasy). The subject's *tuchē*, or affordance, is fantasized through the dimensionality of access constructed within fantasy, a construction set up in order to collapse and revert, an acceleration in reverse through the entire conditions of the fantasy field, an 'escape' or R1.

“MOVE!”

- KEY:**
- 1 — the two frames (|), positioning VP and POV conditions.
 - 2 — the cause-effect of a', the negation of *énoncé*.
 - 3 — anamorphic elements (ω), metonymies of presence and absence.
 - 4 — defect (∂): internal inconsistencies or limits of the fantasy 'site'.
 - 5 — acousmatic 'enclosures', ⊔, dimensionally paradoxical elements where the voice (usually of the super-ego) break through.

enunciat-ING

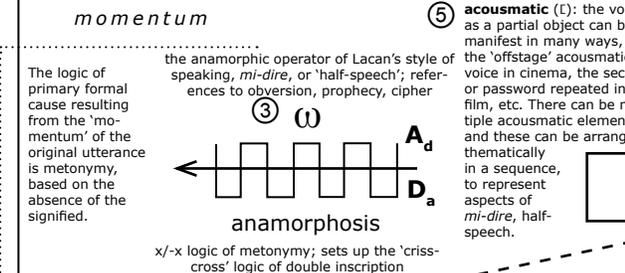
the speech ACT, which suspends judgment on the x/-x value of the initial cause (i.e. a real bomb) but constitutes a field of action and effect 'as if'.

énoncé (utterance): the construction of the framing conditions; a type of 'master signifier' and, hence, set-up within a type of discourse.



The logic of primary efficient cause is to 'charge the signifier' with meaning, no matter what the substitutions. This is the effect of the 'genre' conditions established by the first frame, F1. The 'negative' suspension of the POV/viewer and the space of observation is often parodied in the work of art, as in Hitchcock's *Rear Window*. Metaphor permeates the signifiers and thus works like the 'site conditions' of architecture or setting and genre in literature. The trick of cloning the observer as some kind of disembodied or crippled presence within the work of art (i.e. past F1) creates an 'outpost' of A, a basis for regarding all art/narrative as a case of the death narrative ('between the two deaths'). The space outside the site framed by F1 and F2 is the 'enclosure' of the symbolic, dominated by the four discourses. The imaginary (F1...F2) is formed inside the symbolic as fantasy, where $\$ \circ a$ is polarized by the components of separation (death drive) and anxiety/misrecognition. The effect, a, is 'dropped' into a' (the *objet petit a*) as an 'occultation' of the POV accompanying the 'disappearance' of the spectator, informed by the young subject's experience of the Mirror Stage.

① The space between F1 and F2 constitute the site for Lacan's 'between the two deaths': death narratives, the component of separation in fantasy, the phenomena of anamorphosis ('looking away' — Žižek). The F1:F2 range is the field of the imaginary, the site of formations of the fantastic.



② a' ← R1: escape
cause/effect

③ ω

④ R2: internal defect

⑤ acousmatic (⊔): the voice as a partial object can be manifest in many ways, as the 'offstage' acousmatic voice in cinema, the secret or password repeated in a film, etc. There can be multiple acousmatic elements, and these can be arranged thematically in a sequence, to represent aspects of *mi-dire*, half-speech.

The 'forward' motion of momentum and the reverse motion of analepsis correspond to the bi-polarity of separation and alienation, the components of fantasy ($\$ \circ a$). Embodied in art, they are the 'uncanny' operators of Ad and Da, the living person compelled to seek his/her ultimate appointment with death and the dead person or thing that 'refuses to die'. Analepsis involves identity, in drama represented as the moment of anagnorisis, or discovery. Some original concealment returns its meaning, often in inverted form.

defect: a blur or tear in the representation itself, akin to the vanishing point (the sky curtain in 'Desmoiselles d'Avignon) but portable, able to move freely within the visual field, as in the case of Borges' 'Aleph'. Inside the site of fantasy, the defect is a partial object that functions as automaton resistant to *tuchē*, a transfer of the action of the subject to an object.

metalepsis: the 'metonymy of a metonymy', a recursive, self-referential element that constitutes a mirror-within-a-mirror. This is the place of Lacan's Möbius-band comparisons, the 'edge of the Platonic Cave', the blue box in Lynch's *Mulholland Drive*. The B>B designation indicates a 'scale dysfunction' where the extimate is embodied with a physical flip between container and contained (ω).

frame 1 (F1)

frame 2 (F2)

point of view (POV): can be taken up on either side of the field framed by F1 and F2. Or, as in the case laid out by 'Las Meninas', it can operate simultaneously from both sides. When on the side of F2, the POV can be styled as either dead or divine, as in the case of Antonello's 'St. Jerome'. When F1 is used to station the vanishing point (VP), a' operates as the point concealed/restricted by logic or space-time and thus another occasion for acousmatic enclosure (⊔) as in the final scenes of Dante's *Paradiso*.

vanishing point (VP): can be taken up on either side of the field framed by F1 and F2. It locates the position beyond the available illusion of the field between F1 and F2, as in the case of the acousmatic voice. The VP may be associated with metalepsis, defect (∂), acousmatic enclosure (⊔), or F2 itself, as a false back-cloth (the curtain concealing the control room in *The Wizard of Oz*), embodying aspects of ∂, ⊔, and |. As in *The Wizard of Oz*, motility or especially analepsis, recovery, is frequently the issue (Dorothy's desire to return to Kansas).

NOTES : THE VISUALIZATION OF LACAN

- §1 There are too many complexities, historical and developmental, in Lacan's overall theory of the subject to reduce it to any single 'protocol' or graphic framework. The purpose of this attempt is to provoke errors and misfits rather than create simplifications and misconception, so it is essential for the user to keep a 'scorecard' recording cases where the visual protocol seems to fall short or, worse, mischaracterize some component of Lacan's work. Without these misfits, the iterative questioning procedure would be missing and psychoanalysis would be reified into a pure ideological structure. Instability is the aim.
- §2 The graphic schema aims to identify objects that seem to 'occur in nature' ... the nature of popular culture and the arts, that is. Frame analysis emphasizes the role of the boundary in separating products of the imaginary from the domain of symbolic networks (i.e. culture and society as quotidian, 'everyday'). The generic function of the imaginary is to stage subjective encounters with the Real through subject-stand-ins that are defective in that they lack the defect of all 'neurotic' (i.e. 'normal') subjects, their incompleteness. Frames include the tags and warnings that surround fictional entertainment, disclaimers that the work 'bears no significant relation to reality', i.e. is not documentary or instructive. De-valuing the imaginary allows fantasy constructions to do precisely what they disavow: show through negative means the consequences of the disavowal of enjoyment in exchange for social cohesion. As Todd McGowan has argued, the breakdowns of this disavowal are simultaneously breakdowns in social cohesion; pretended access to enjoyment is actually the reverse, a transfer of enjoyment to 'automata', which 'do our enjoying for us' and, at the same time, put enjoyment in the hands of an ideological Other.
- §3 The double frame (*encadrement*) set-up can be found 'empirically' in a number of paintings and visual works that provide input about the material history and development of the spatio-temporal field of the imaginary as such. Elements in the field are set up so that they play parts in both the Lacanian vocabulary and in popular culture and artistic works. This dual citizenship is the basis of the 'polythetic method' of cumulative, dialectic study, aiming not at the consolidation of a consistent theoretical edifice but, rather, of continual evolution of ideas lying between clinical theory derived from Freud and Lacan and critical theory grounded in the study of culture and art.
- §4 Critical method involves an informal attitude of the Hegelian dialectic: that is, self-deconstructing in the sense that justificationalism is forbidden and polysemy formally endorsed. Hegel's *Aufhebung*, for critical theory, derives from the idea, much misunderstood, that 'spirit is a bone'. The failure of phrenologists, in this controversial chapter of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, is that they regarded bone as *imaginary*, a 'representation' of spirit rather than spirit itself. Hegel's radical position creates a materialism that is simultaneously an ideal, expanding 'treasury of signifiers'. Only by passing through the 'purification' of bone can spirit attain to the prophetic-magical speech that Lacan practiced as *mi-dire*, a continually self-reconstituting cipher that discovers truths by remaking, negating, and dislocating positive semblances. Groucho Marx's joke about the man who, no wonder, 'resembled himself' is key to the subjective, which is re-sembled through procedures of alienation (semblance, but as mistaken identity) and separation, the 'components' of fantasy as $\$ \diamond a$.
- §5 Just as the *poinçon* (\diamond) is both a mark of authenticity/identity and scale inversion, $\langle \rangle$, the *matheme* for fantasy is simultaneously a field of 'obversion' (where the negation of both subject and predicate truthfully transcribe a statement) and a means of returning to an original value, that 'did not exist' before it was negated. The return, in these terms, establishes the 'truth value' of return, a 'recovery' of the process by which the imaginary was afforded by means of a divide in enunciation between the fact of statement, and its grammar (*énoncé*) and the action-value of the statement. The example of the shout 'Bomb!' in a crowded room and the subsequent rush of occupants to safety outside is sufficient to explain this distinction. As Todd McGowan has noted in his books on *The Real David Lynch* and *The End of Enjoyment*, the theme of return and the rituals of foundation underline the connections of origins with psychoanalytic theory in general — a subject about which Lacan was famously reticent to discuss. In this sense, and in this sense only, the graphic method offers a means of 'improving upon' Lacan's formal writings and theory. Frame analysis is 'on its own' when it steps into questions of origin, and here the philosophy of Giambattista Vico takes over as tour-guide, visionary, and amanuensis. Vico seems to have been fully aware of the relation of the imaginary to the symbolic and set up his main work, *The New Science*, to play out this relationship in a comprehensive way. Again, frame analysis goes beyond traditional Vico scholarship and is the only systematic attempt to connect Vico and Lacan.
- §6 The defect (∂) is an all-purpose means of mapping the causes and effects of recursion, incompleteness, contradiction, and other forms of negation within the work of art. It is the mirror that refuses to return an image of what stands before it, the collapse of dimensionality at the 'edge of the world', or the confusion of identity in the theatrical use of twins. Defect almost always leads directly to variations on the theme of anamorphosis (ω), whose 'square wave' behavior admits to no middle ground and specifies that the point of view (POV) is related to gnosis or magic effectiveness. Defect as an element is typically concealed or 'occultated' by a defensive formation that affords, also, the 'acousmatic' voice, the speech that, by subtracting half of its content, acquires the ability to prophecy and testify — i.e. it becomes the true speech, the *vera narratio*, by means of negative procedures. Akin to the soliloque or stage whisper, the acousmatic voice gains its powers by renouncing location. It is neither here nor there because it has, in effect, spoken *from the place of the boundary-frame itself*. This power can be traced back, ultimately, to the 'ventriloquism' of the automaton, the primary or 'efficient cause' of the first frame, F1.