

ENUNCIATING THE VISUAL: PROTOCOL FOR SPACE-TIME

The Lacanian 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*. Analyzed in terms of the 'classic' four Aristotelian causes (efficient, final, formal, material), with the supplements of natural chance (automaton) and human affordance/contingency (*tuchē*), a sequence of 'mathemes' shows how the circulation of meaning between metaphoric strategies (charging the signifier) and metonymy (absence) zig-zags meaning between the material defect (Riffaterre's hypotaxis) and analepsis, the point at which 'the letter always arrives at its destination'. Lacan also provides a 'visual protocol' that allows for a more specific identification of the vectors of visual perception, virtual movement, partial objects, and such standard visual landmarks as the point of view (POV) and vanishing point (VP). Critical to this protocol is the system of two frames (*encadrement*), identified with the 'external reality' outside the framed field (R1) and some inconsistency or anomaly within the framed field, a defect (∂) that constitutes an inside version of reality (R2).

The visual protocol resembles Lacan's account of the gaze, the 'fourth' of Lacan's system of five partial objects (breast, shit, phallus, gaze, voice). In a famous diagram, the gaze is symmetrically opposite the direction of the subject's look. Its point is a blur or rupture in the subject's visual field. This corresponds to a vanishing point, but with a much more portable range of actions (i.e. not limited to the horizon) and roles (it can be acousmatic as well as visual). R1 and R2 are managed by two frames, F1 and F2, respectively. Between the two frames, a radically anamorphic condition pervades spaces and objects. This can be modeled as a square-wave function, where there is no mediation between two alternative appearances/identities, as in the case of twins.

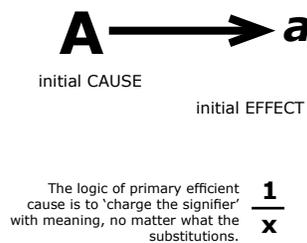
The key to the operation of the visual protocol is the 'obversion' of the role of *énoncé*/enunciating, where the 'cause' of an utterance becomes an effect ($A \rightarrow a$). As cause, *a* is the object-cause of desire; but it remains an object, i.e. an effect based on radical absence. The pair *a-a'* constitute the field by which a reversal of gaze can pivot from the VP opened up by ∂ , the defect in the visual field associated with the point of the gaze. These operations sound hopelessly obscure without the assistance of a few well-chosen 'meta-paintings' — Velázquez's 'Las Meninas', Picasso's 'Les Femmes d'Alger', and Antonello da Messina's 'St. Jerome in His Study'. Expansion into narrative examples shows how classic cases of the *énoncé*/enunciating distinction have a 'field aspect' that readily compares to the visual fields of these classic paintings. The frontispiece or *dipintura* of Vico's *The New Science* opens the way for analyzing G. K. Chesterton's short story, 'The Queer Feet'; the Cyclops episode from *The Odyssey*, and the films *Truman* and *Mulholland Drive*. Foundation rituals are queer ducks. Using Simonides' art of memory in combination with the story of Curtius and Romulus and Remus (from Fustel de Coulanges' *The Ancient City*) produces a useful matrix.

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*.

“BOMB!”

Imagine that someone runs into a packed room and shouts 'Bomb!' This case, cited as an example by Jacques-Alain Miller, shows that the *énoncé*, the literal causal basis for the ensuing action ('enunciation') need not exist in order to have a big effect. The defect of the cause is 'answered' or corrected in the response, which then assumes an 'as if' conditionality. In this way, the 'efficient cause' is the action that moves people scurrying out of the room 'as if' there were a bomb. The 'momentum' continues the 'as if' between two frames that constitute a field defined by the enunciation. The 'inversion' of the cause into an effect leads to an 'obversion' (double inscription, which does not alter the 'truth value' of the original. Through this momentum (preservation of value, durability) of obversion, the field allows for substitutions and absences that do not effect the 'value' of the field. This is a 'polythetic' logic, not a 'monothetic' one. Elements can be substituted, altered, cancelled, or inverted — i.e. the idea of the overdetermined text. See Jacques-Alain Miller's essay, "Extimité," in *Lacanian Theory of Discourse: Subject Structure, and Society* (1994).

énoncé (utterance): the literal contents of the signifier.

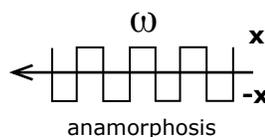


momentum

The logic of primary formal cause resulting from the 'momentum' of the original utterance is metonymy, based on the absence of the signified

enunciating

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'.



defect (∂): a blur or tear in the representation itself, akin to the vanishing point but portable, able to move freely within the visual field; the point of the gaze.

∂

metalepsis: the 'metonymy' of a metonymy', a recursive, self-referential element that constitutes a mirror-within-a-mirror.

$\overline{b} \mid b$

□

George Spencer-Brown indicated the condition of self-reference/inscription with this symbol. It is the key to the logic of metalepsis, a kind of metonymy2, the precondition for overdetermination.

frame 1

frame 2

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.

vanishing point (VP): can be taken up on either side of the field framed by F1 and F2. It is located the position beyond the available illusion of the field between F1 and F2, as in the case of the acousmatic voice.