

FRAMETHEORY: A POLYTHETIC METHOD

Frame Theory is a method that disavows, from the beginning, what most methods regard as essential: the guarantee of consistent outcome. Such methods are called 'monothetic', partly on behalf of this goal. Polythesis deals, however, with an 'imperfect' world where single effects can be the product of multiple causes, where single causes have multiple and changing effects, where some effects become causes and *vice versa*. Human experience is disjointed and discontinuous, placed in its own perilous position between the realms of the symbolic, the imaginary and the Real. We do not, technically, 'have' our own identities, our own thoughts, or our own pleasures. The dividing line between subject and object, inside and outside is continually blurred; the polarities shift. Yet, while things seem to flip and dissolve, other things manage to coalesce. And, in the realm of the arts, we see the greatest evidence of stability. Audiences still laugh at jokes written hundreds of years ago; the Coptic face painted on the ancient casket is still beautiful; Odysseus's exploits are still exciting. Certain symmetries built in to human consciousness manage to preserve a Rosetta Stone of effective design, despite the contingent, changing conditions that continually redefine standards, techniques, and paradigms. The polythetic method notes that these symmetries have mainly to do with acts of framing.

'The frame abides' by virtue of its economy, by which the job of the frame, separating the imaginary from the symbolic, becomes apparent only if it slips out of joint. The symbolic suspends the relationship to enjoyment on behalf of cultural-social cohesion. The imaginary shows the barred subject what its counterpart, a disguised, misrecognized subject, might do if this suspension were itself suspended. The Real is now on stage, but most often in a negative form: a gaze or voice that cannot be located or mapped, a void, a stain. The dynamics of the Real lies in its power to return an object or force to its origin. The 'letter always reaches its destination', in Lacan-speak, meaning that the model of time as a series of branches, only one of which can be taken at any point, grows outward and inward at the same time. Divergence and convergent occur simultaneously. The uncanny abides. The stage of the imaginary bends time and space with Einsteinian precision: there is no curve *in* space, space *is* the curve we mistake for a defect. The curvature can be calculated because its physics of self-reference is not symbolic: it is optical and acoustmatic — wave-like forces that look like vectors from one angle, like packets of energy from another. By virtue of this split personality, curvature can 'look at itself' and 'meet itself in the future'. Artists, architects, and writers have known how to diagram this kind of sentence: the Λ that serves the short story and poem as well as the mason measuring out the proportions of the cathedral, called by the former chiasmus, the latter by a variety of names (the Brunes star, World Soul, squaring the circle, etc.). The lambda requires a *templum* or point of exchange (ω), a system of pairing, and an escape route from internal defect to an unspecified 'beyond'. The five terms of frame analysis ($|$, a' , ∂ , ω , \square) translate the lambda into the optical-acoustmatic field that makes the primarily narrative device pictorial and architectural. Polythesis, the result of this translation, allows for bridging over missing elements, finding work-arounds in limited material circumstances. Such is the logic of the *bricoleur*, who must make do with resources lying at hand but whose outcome is also constantly evolving in the face of such limitations.

Polythetics is not relativism. It does not endorse pragmatic approximations of theory. It invests in the embedded polysemy (sliding) of the signifier and the 'structure of the unconscious as language' as a means of precision and determinacy but cites representations of theory as inherently inadequate, hence Lacan's use of *mi-dire* (half-speech) and Vico's employment of the 'unreliable narrator' technique in *The New Science*. The 'science' of the New Science is actual; practical. It is knowledge in terms of the fate of thought, its historicity and utopias (and dystopias).

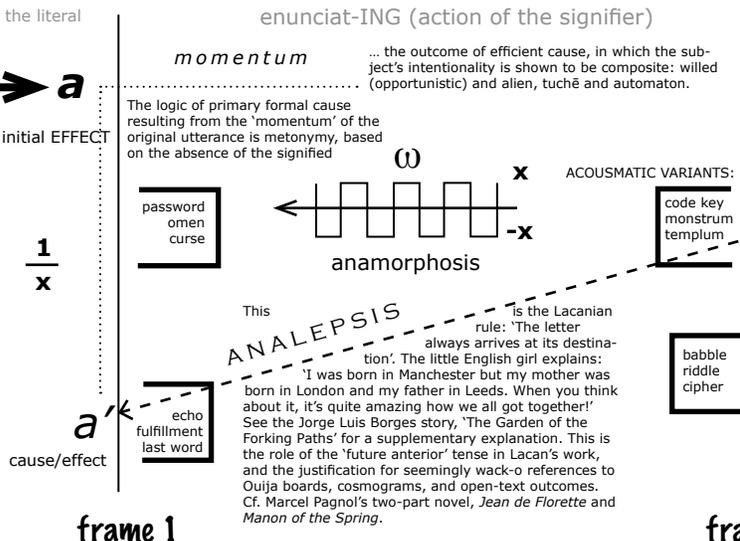
“ENJOY!”

'Desire is the desire of the Other' says Lacan, and by this the logic of the extimate (objective intimate, intimate object) begins in full by inscribing at the center of subjectivity an alien presence, manifest as a demand to enjoy that self-cancels so that the opposite is the effect: subjects suspend their access to enjoyment in exchange for their symbolic unity as subjects, and the object of that suspended desire (which never really existed) is generated retroactively: a subject or condition of maximal enjoyment ('primal father'), a Golden Age lost without ever having existed in the first place (making the inscription of this command ineradicable). The external counterpart to this retroaction is the partial object that, like a fallen star, carries its periphery with it, a privation converted to prohibition, an inaccessibility inscribed within an otherwise field of free access, the *femme-fatale* of film noir or *Mount Analog* (René Daumal) of science fiction. Such impossible-subjective objects serve as points of exchange, such as the 'herms' of silent trade, because prohibition trumps rationality with rules of silence and invisibility. The purloined letter is invisible though plainly on display. It is an artifact rather than an object of our own looking, a mirror object.

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



The logic of primary efficient cause is to 'charge the signifier' with meaning, no matter what the substitutions. The effect of the genre as a framing condition is to set in place 'universal conditions' that act like a spell. Thus, enunciation as *énoncé* has its origins in the magic incantation or curse, whose meaning is obscure but whose pronunciation and syntax must be entirely accurate. Cursing, as the term suggests, emphasizes binding, wrapping, encircling — an intensification of the framing act and thus a good 'primitive' model to cross-check Lacanian thinking. The enchanters do not exist but are generated through retroaction, as in the case of *Don Quixote*. The curse/turn 'partializes' the object of the curse, and 'sets it apart'. Ancient spells were written as texts and concealed; complete cure required finding the hidden text. This is the formula for Lacan's theory of discourse and its relation to ciphers, where the text is 'hidden' inside a freely available text.



defect (∂): in method terms, ∂ denotes a limit or anomaly, an artifact of method.

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

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.

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. It's a production/consumption dichotomy, or a choice between a first or third-person narrator.

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 acoustmatic voice. This can be converted to the classic POV of the death narrative, where the last moment coincides with the first (Billy Wilder, *Sunset Boulevard*, 1950).