# DIAGRAMMING LACAN'S FOUR DISCOURSES

There's a relationship between the ways each of the elements of Lacan's formula for the four discourses metonymizes itself in order to circulate meanings. This amounts to a 'stepping aside' (symbolized by a bracket indicating an independent 'orthogonal' relationship between a metonymical signifier and metaphorical signified) so that a meaning effect can be created to focus audience attention while, in the background, surplus remainders work with machine-like precision to allow the work to reach completion. The structure works so that no single interpretation is possible, that the real 'work-within-the-work' actively resists meaning. The key is to deploy Lacan's seemingly illustrative analogy of the logic of the name, which has both a '-x' (privative) and '1/x' (prohibitive) function. Lacan put these together in an algebraic demonstration of the a-symbolic nature of the Real ($\sqrt{-1}$), but this analogy, uncannily, turns out to be revelational.

The diagram is designed to set up 'grammatical sentences' to paraphrase what happens in a film, building, painting, novel, or other work of art. The value of the sentence is based on a kind of 'Turing Proof'. If the sentence reveals something about the work, then it 'amounts to' a kind of intelligence, even though the source is known to be nothing more than a 'machine'. But of course, what else is the unconscious than a machine that seems to make sense every now and then, only to elude precise determination?
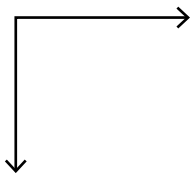
The basic distinction between metaphor (the basis of 'meaning effects') and metonymy (material signifiers) constitutes the basic symbol of the diagram.
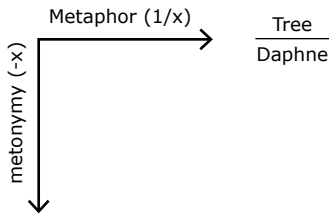
Meaning effects are created by sublimating the material conditions of the sign in favor of a 'collective-consensual' although never fully satisfactory correspondence with 'empirical' situations. The 1/x signification of metaphor is afforded by the 'x' (privation) of metonymy.

Employing the Lacanian theme of the 'future anterior', devices are installed temporally and spatially before and after the structure of agency. The agent/agency metonymically steps aside to allow the 'meaning effect' of action, one of the two components (action, exposition) of film content. The agent has two temporalizable relationships: one to 'truth', which must be materialized only under the devices of the negative, another to production, which is the artifact of the work — its mechanical and material support. This metonymy is a part of the structure of the Other, the 'addressee' of the work, but not to be confused with the work's literal audience. The other's 1/x 'meaning effects' include the components of action and exposition, the metonymies (-x) of which are agency and truth.
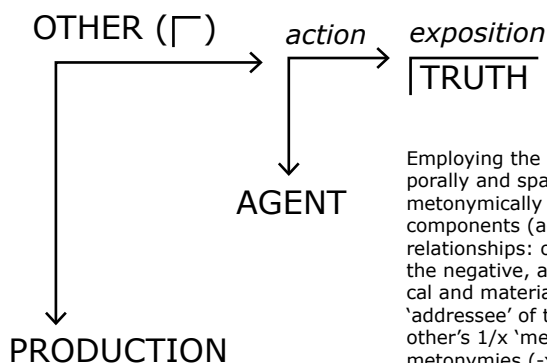
With Saussure's s/S (signified over Signifier), prominence is given to the common meaning (s) over the conventionally accepted signifier (S). Lacan inverted this relationship to emphasize the materiality, priority, and indefiniteness of the signifier and to bracket meaning as an effect that is beyond the empirical realm of scientific investigation. S/s expresses the problem of how one cannot know precisely what is in others' minds. This is not a problem in Lacanian semiotics; it is the basis for the "minimum buy-in fee" that everyone pays in order to participate in networks of symbolic relationships: give up hope for knowing exactly what the other means, and you can participate in language. Lacan then looks at the fee. What persuades us to "give up hope"? And, what do we get in return?

The fee pays passage across a margin, which must be traversed in silence, for its essential substance is silence (as negation). Signifiers may not go "far enough" to determine meaning; this is no reason to call a halt to the ongoing (dialogic) process of symbolic exchange; in fact it is a key to the ability of signifiers to "slide past" one another to create surpluses and gaps, margins where meaning is deficient, or in surplus, or simply absent.
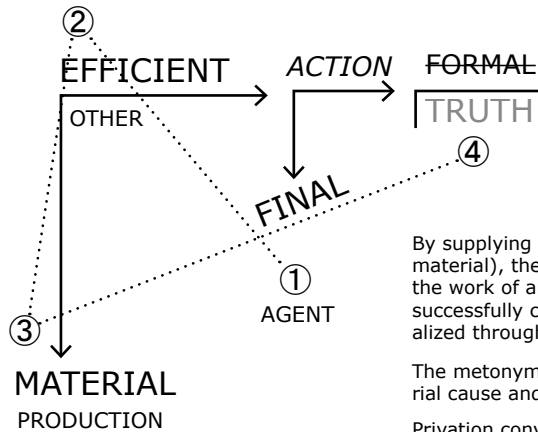
Instead of determinative, corroborative meaning, Lacan substitutes the idea of "meaning effect," the result of metaphoric constructs. These, as the word metaphor suggests, "carry meaning across" a bar to allow one kind of material substance to speak, to signify. A tree may thus be a maiden transformed, as in the case of Daphne, who becomes a tree to escape the lust of Apollo in Ovid's *The Metamorphosis*. Dark clouds may be angry. What Ruskin called the "pathetic fallacy" may be honored as a rule of the imagination, seen to originate in primitive perception of nature's "demonic" interior.

Metaphor is accomplished at the "expense" of metonymy, by dropping out or suppressing the part-to-part relationship that binds into a whole the material basis of metaphor. In the previous example of Daphne, the relation of leaves to branches to trunk are exchanged for a relation of fingers to arms to the body of the maiden. Just so, all material conditions of a sign are suppressed (-x) in order to allow them to serve as components of a meaning effect.

The orthogonal (= "independent") relationship between metaphor and metonymy is the basis for the Saussurian claim that language is conventional; but the re-assignment of signifier and signified to metonymy and metaphor shows that Socrates' arguments about this in his *Cratylus* are more to the point. Socrates compares the choice of a

② EFFICIENT · ACTION · ~~FORMAL~~ TRUTH
OTHER · FINAL · ④ · ① AGENT · ③ MATERIAL PRODUCTION

By supplying the corresponding four forms of Aristotelian cause (formal, final, efficient, material), the role of metonymy in concealing (-x) the intentionality and materiality of the work of art becomes clear. In other words, no formal aspect of a work of art can successfully constitute the 'intentions' of the artist, but nonetheless truth can be materialized through operations that are essentially negational.

The metonymy of final cause establishes the 'zone' that serves as a link between material cause and the negative form of formal cause, under the sign of metonymized ~~truth~~.

Privation converts to prohibition within a formal matrix whose 'in-between' elements function as anamorphs. The Aristotelian cause that corresponds to exposition, "formal," is the structural overlay for Lacanian "truth," understood as a place to be occupied, in succession, by a master signifier (S_1), knowledge (S_2), the *objet petit a* (*a*), and the barred/split subject(ivity), $. The sequence of causes begin with the intentionality of final cause, then the "means" cause, efficient, next material means, and finally the formal "result." This seemingly natural order is not necessarily the only one, but it does correspond to the fixed Lacanian sequence.

word to the artist's choice of a color to express a quality. —Note that the dialogues employ irony in almost every argument. This, however, suggests how a material "forecourt" could involve an "operator" (orthogonally paired terms) to combine, as a Lacanian Other, the site and material basis of production to the action/intervention that is the only basis of "representing" intentionality (Aristotle's "final cause"). Intentionality is the sticking point with Saussurian semiology and the central void in Lacanian theories of subjectivity. It cannot be represented. It can be manifest only through "anamorphic" constructs that plant images within images, so to speak, in a (topological) violation of scale: <>. Lacan depended on this inversion expression to set out his famous "mathèmes," or standardized relationships, such as the mathème for fantasy, $◊a (read ◊ as <>, "both contains and is contained by"). The "action" that is the metaphoric presentation of the subject's intention (although the subject does not know it) is thus ambiguous and, in the work of art, open-ended.

Why? The diagram-template for the four Lacanian discourses aims to establish the basis for a specific kind of proof, namely the "Turing Proof." Alan Turing devised his famous test for intelligence using a time-honored technique. Students of Parminides were not allowed direct contact with the master; rather they conversed with him sitting behind a curtain. Later, the curtain was the significant "tell" in the contest between the painters Zeuxis and Parhassius. In more modern times, the curtain has been employed as the secret to the power of the Wizard of Oz. The negation (symbolized by a bracket) stands also for a combination and sometimes contamination of a signifier and the signified, metaphor and metonymy. Negation takes a form that combines a "-x" (privational) quality with a "1/x" or transfer quality, where a change of medium. By this "logic," privation is converted into prohibition as what is technically inaccessible is perceived as purposefully withheld or denied. The curtain is a privation device that conveys the intention to conceal, which has allowed the subject to conceive that something of value exists, although in negative form.

The enthymeme (rhetorical syllogism) is also constructed in this way, converting the "effects" of the speaker into mental "causes" for the listener. This transfer is intensified by the figure of aposiopesis, where the speaker suddenly breaks off. The audience's silent supply of sympathy, whose momentum has been equal to that of the speaker's, cascades forward suddenly, giving the audience the impression that the feeling has come from an external source.

The "Turing Proof" uses the template of the four discourses to develop sentences describing the effects of specific works of art or other situations. The template requires calibration of the four elements of discourse (subject, master signifier, knowledge, petit objet a) in relation to the four "sites" of agent, other, production, and truth. The diagram supplies supplementary conjectures concerning the "priority" of the other, the relation of the sites to the four Aristotelian causes (final, effective, material, and formal), and the role of metonymy in creating "anamorphic" linkages joining the three "operators" — (1) Other, efficient cause, metonymized by material cause, the site of production, (2) the metonymy of final cause, or agency, leaving a metaphorized "action" as its trace, and (3) the site of truth, or ~~truth~~, self-metonymized through some strategy of double negation.

The Turing Proof simply asks if the "sentence" appears to be a legitimate voice of the work; if it has not in fact allowed the work to "speak for itself." Clearly, this cannot be claimed as an interpretation or discovery of some truer structure concealed within the work. Rather, the analogy is like that of an amplifier that works best in the presence of an optimum amount of background noise (stochastic resonance).