

Fractl Theatre™: A Modular Dramaturgical System

Stories That Tell Stories™

Author: Edgar Chisholm

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Abstract

What if a single play could be a tragedy on Monday and a love story on Friday—without changing a word?

Fractl Theatre™ is a dramaturgical system that treats plays not as fixed sequences, but as modular systems. Like a playlist where changing the song order changes the emotional journey, Fractl Theatre™ works contain self-contained episodes (modules) that can be reordered, recombined, or performed independently—each configuration revealing different meanings within the same dramatic canon.

Developed by award-winning playwright Edgar Chisholm, this methodology responds to contemporary performance realities: regional theaters seeking flexible programming, festivals needing scalable works, digital platforms requiring modular content, and artists exploring non-linear storytelling while preserving authorial intent.

How It Works:

Fractl Theatre™ reconceives dramatic works not as fixed linear narratives, but as modular structures composed of scenes, ritual moments, and thematic units that may be reordered, recombined, or selectively activated without loss of artistic coherence.

Unlike conventional theatrical models, which assume a single authoritative sequence of events, Fractl Theatre™ permits multiple valid configurations of a single dramatic canon. Each configuration produces a distinct audience experience while preserving thematic integrity, authorial intent, and narrative meaning.

This white paper documents the conceptual foundations, structural principles, and practical implications of Fractl Theatre™. It is intended to assist artists, producers, scholars, and legal audiences in understanding how Fractl Theatre™ functions, what distinguishes it from prior forms, and why it represents a new approach to storytelling across stage, digital, and hybrid media.

1. The Problem Fractl Theatre™ Addresses

Traditional dramatic literature operates under a linear paradigm in which a play progresses through a fixed and singular sequence of scenes from beginning to end. While this model has historically structured theatrical practice, it introduces significant limitations for contemporary production, distribution, and interpretation. Linear dramaturgy assumes one definitive narrative order, constraining directors, limiting adaptive licensing, and reducing a work's flexibility across diverse performance environments. As theatre increasingly engages with modular programming, digital presentation, and hybrid forms, these constraints become more pronounced. Fractl Theatre™ responds by redefining dramatic structure as a governed system of narrative units rather than a single prescribed pathway.

2. Core Concept: Stories That Tell Stories™

At the core of Fractl Theatre™ is the principle that dramatic works may generate meaning across multiple structures without sacrificing coherence or authorship. Rather than treating scenes as dependent steps in a fixed sequence, Fractl Theatre™ defines them as discrete narrative units designed to function independently or in authorized relation to other units.

In this system, narrative meaning does not rely on a single progression from beginning to end. Instead, meaning emerges through pattern, recurrence, and contrast across configurations. Each authorized ordering of modules produces a distinct interpretive experience while remaining anchored to a shared thematic and dramaturgical framework.

Unlike traditional non-linear plays that rely on random collage, Fractl Theatre™ utilizes **Narrative Entanglement**. Because each module contains **Recursive Nodes**—such as the migration of a scarlet cloth or a specific vow—the scenes remain self-contained yet structurally tethered. In this system, the 'past' is not a fixed memory but a variable state. By reconfiguring the sequence of modules, the director can change the 'future' outcomes of the characters without changing a single word of the text itself. The meaning is not in the script, but in the entanglement of the arrangement.

As a result, the same Fractl Theatre™ work may be experienced, in one authorized configuration, as a tragedy, and in another, as an epic love story—or as other distinct dramatic forms—without contradiction. These shifts are not reinterpretations imposed after the fact, but outcomes intentionally designed into the system by the author.

This capacity for multiple valid realizations is what distinguishes Fractl Theatre™ works as **Stories That Tell Stories™**. Each configuration reflects upon the others, revealing different aspects of character, theme, and structure depending on selection, sequence, and emphasis. The

system thereby preserves narrative integrity while allowing a single dramatic canon to unfold through multiple coherent expressions.

3. Modular Dramaturgy Explained

Fractl Theatre™ may be understood through an architectural analogy. Traditional plays resemble single buildings with fixed rooms, whereas Fractl Theatre™ works resemble architectural systems constructed from the same components in multiple valid forms. The author designs both the modules and the governing system, ensuring flexibility remains intentional and authored.

Structural variation in Fractl Theatre™ does not merely alter pacing or emphasis, but may transform the perceived genre, emotional arc, and ethical resolution of the work while remaining within the author's designed system.

A core mechanic of Fractl Theatre™ is the **Iterative Feedback Loop**. This occurs when a specific symbol, gesture, or linguistic motif (a **Recursive Node**) is repeated across different scales—such as different centuries or emotional contexts. Unlike static leitmotifs, these nodes are designed for evolution.

For example, a 'red cloth' may first appear as a queen's regal garment, then as a knight's bandage, and finally as a revolutionary's banner. As the audience encounters these self-similar objects in varying configurations, their understanding of the symbol undergoes a 'feedback' process; the meaning is not merely repeated, but deepened and transformed by each prior iteration. This creates a cumulative dramatic resonance that is unique to the specific sequence of modules being performed.

4. Structural Principles of Fractl Theatre™

The system is governed by consistent principles including modular integrity, recursive meaning, configurational validity, authorial governance, scale-invariant meaning, and medium independence. These principles ensure coherence across multiple realizations.

4.1 Modular Integrity

Each module in a Fractl Theatre™ work is designed to function as a complete dramatic unit. A module contains its own exposition, conflict, climax, and resolution. It can be performed as a standalone piece without requiring knowledge of other modules in the canon.

4.2 Recursive Meaning

Modules are connected through **Recursive Nodes**—repeating symbols, gestures, phrases, or dramatic situations that appear across multiple modules. These nodes create thematic coherence without requiring linear continuity. The meaning of each node evolves based on which other modules precede or follow it in a given configuration.

4.3 Configurational Validity

Multiple orderings of the same modules are equally valid as long as they remain within the author's designed system. Each configuration produces a different dramatic arc, emotional journey, or thematic emphasis—but all configurations are authorized expressions of the work.

4.4 Authorial Governance

Unlike devised theatre or audience-choice narratives, all valid configurations are predetermined by the playwright. The author specifies which modules may be combined, in what sequences, and under what production conditions. This preserves authorial intent while allowing structural multiplicity.

4.5 Scale-Invariant Meaning

A fundamental axiom of the system is **Scale-Invariant Meaning**. Just as a fractal leaf maintains its geometric character whether viewed as a single stem or an entire forest, a Fractl Theatre™ work retains its core thematic 'pattern' regardless of the number of modules activated.

Whether a production chooses to perform a single standalone module or the entire ten-module canon, the essential 'DNA' of the work—its signature conflicts, recursive symbols, and philosophical inquiries—remains intact and legible. This allows the work to scale from an intimate one-act configuration to an expansive multi-night epic without the loss of artistic coherence or authorial intent.

4.6 Medium Independence

Fractl Theatre™ works are designed to function across multiple platforms—live theatre, digital streaming, audio drama, site-specific installation, or hybrid performance. The modular structure adapts to different media without requiring textual revision.

5. The Calculus of Sequence: From State to Narrative Outcome

Fractl Theatre™ posits that a play is a collection of **States**—modular units that exist simultaneously in the work's 'narrative space.' While the text within a State is fixed, the **Sequence** of activation determines the work's final resonance. This creates a system of narrative logic where the arrangement dictates the outcome.

Consider a work with three modules: **A (The Ancestral War)**, **B (The Modern Betrayal)**, and **C (The Purgatorial Reset)**.

CONFIGURATION TABLE:

MODULES:

- **MODULE A:** The Ancestral War
- **MODULE B:** The Modern Betrayal
- **MODULE C:** The Purgatorial Reset

RECURSIVE NODES (present in all modules):

- Red cloth motif
 - "We're like this" vow
 - Hand-on-heart gesture
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SEQUENCE 1: A → B → C = THE TRAGEDY

The soul fights ancestral battles, fails in the modern world, and is reset to suffer the cycle again.

SEQUENCE 2: C → B → A = THE PROPHECY

The soul begins at the reset, survives modern betrayal, and realizes its mythic power in the ancestral war.

SEQUENCE 3: B (standalone) = INTIMATE BETRAYAL STUDY

A single 30-minute exploration of contemporary moral failure.

SEQUENCE 4: A + C (omit B) = MYTHIC CYCLE

Ancient war and cosmic reset without the modern context—emphasizes timelessness over historical specificity.

By treating the play as a System of States, the creator allows for multiple authoritative 'truths' to exist within a single dramaturgical canon.

6. Case Study: Wheel of Life

To illustrate how Fractl Theatre™ functions in practice, consider **Wheel of Life**, a dramatic work consisting of ten modular episodes following reincarnated souls across different time periods, cultures, and historical conflicts.

6.1 Modular Structure

Each episode is a complete 15-55 minute play that can stand alone:

- **Episode 1: Rio de Janeiro (Present Day)** — Juliana and Paulo, a Carnival competition and revolutionary solidarity
- **Episode 2: Lake Tanganyika (1200 BCE)** — Chipu and Takura resist Egyptian colonial invasion
- **Episode 3: 1915 Ohio** — Lucretia and Dunleavy navigate suffrage politics and reincarnation recognition

Each episode has its own:

- Complete dramatic arc (setup, conflict, resolution)
- Distinct cultural/historical setting
- Self-contained character relationships
- Standalone thematic statement

6.2 Recursive Nodes

Despite their independence, the episodes are connected through specific **Recursive Nodes**:

Physical Gestures:

- Crossed fingers (appears in all episodes as symbol of hope/connection)
- Hand-on-heart placement (recognition gesture across incarnations)

Linguistic Motifs:

- "We're like this" (phrase expressing soul-bond)
- Déjà vu moments (uncanny recognition without explicit memory)

Dramatic Situations:

- Public performance interrupted by authority
- Sacrifice of property/safety for the beloved
- Revolutionary action disguised as compliance

6.3 Configurational Possibilities

Configuration A: TRAGIC CYCLE (Episodes 2 → 3 → 1)

- Opens with ancient heroic sacrifice (Lake Tanganyika)
- Shows 1915 separation (Dunleavy and Lucretia part forever)
- Ends with present-day solidarity (Rio)
- **Thematic emphasis:** Progress is slow; souls keep fighting the same battles

Configuration B: ASCENDING HOPE (Episodes 3 → 2 → 1)

- Opens with 1915 women's suffrage struggle
- Flashback to ancient mythic resistance
- Ends with present-day victory
- **Thematic emphasis:** Each lifetime brings incremental liberation

Configuration C: SINGLE MODULE INTIMACY

- Perform Episode 3 (1915 Ohio) alone as 45-minute one-act
- Audience experiences complete suffrage drama without reincarnation context
- **Thematic emphasis:** Historical intersectionality (race, gender, property rights)

6.4 Scale-Invariant Meaning

Whether a theater produces:

- **1 episode** (30-minute standalone)
- **3 episodes** (curated evening)
- **All 10 episodes** (marathon across multiple nights)

The core 'DNA' remains consistent:

- Souls fight systemic oppression
- Love transcends individual lifetimes
- Resistance requires sacrifice
- Recognition happens through gesture, not memory

This demonstrates how Fractl Theatre™ enables the same work to function as an intimate character study OR an epic multi-generational saga without textual revision.

7. Practical Applications

Fractl Theatre™ unlocks new production, licensing, and distribution models that traditional linear plays cannot accommodate.

7.1 Production Formats

Single-Module Productions (20-55 minutes)

- Regional theaters can produce one module as a one-act play
- Festivals can program individual modules across different evenings
- Universities can assign single modules for student productions
- Each module stands alone with complete dramatic arc

Curated Multi-Module Evenings (90-180 minutes)

- Directors select 3-5 modules and choose sequence based on desired thematic emphasis
- Same modules in different orders create different audience experiences
- Example: A theater might program Episodes 2, 5, and 8 as *Wheel of Life: The Resistance Arc*

Full-Canon Marathons (Multiple Nights)

- All modules performed across consecutive performances
- Audience experiences complete dramatic universe
- Can be programmed in authorized chronological order or thematic groupings

Festival Rotating Configurations

- Same production performs different module sequences across run
- Tuesday: Configuration A (Tragic Cycle)
- Friday: Configuration B (Ascending Hope)
- Saturday matinee: Single module showcase

Site-Specific and Ritual Performances

- Modules selected based on location or cultural context
- Historical sites might perform period-specific modules
- Community events might select modules addressing local themes

7.2 Licensing Flexibility

Tiered Licensing Structure:

- **Single Module License:** Theaters pay reduced fee to produce one module

- **Configuration License:** Theaters license specific multi-module arrangement
- **Full Canon License:** Theaters gain rights to all modules with sequence flexibility
- **Educational Package:** Universities license 1-3 modules for student production at reduced rates
- **Digital/Streaming Rights:** Modular structure enables episodic release

Example Licensing Scenario:

A regional theater licenses *Wheel of Life* Configuration C: Episodes 1, 3, and 7. They pay for three modules and receive:

- Performance scripts for selected episodes
- Author-approved sequence and transition guidelines
- Marketing materials emphasizing their specific configuration
- Rights to perform the modules in designated order

The following season, they could license a different configuration (Episodes 2, 5, 9) creating an entirely different production from the same dramatic canon.

7.3 Educational Applications

Classroom Study:

- Single modules assigned as reading/analysis texts
- Students compare how same Recursive Nodes function across different modules
- Workshops explore how sequencing affects meaning

Student Productions:

- Theater programs can produce one module without committing to full-length play
- Multiple student directors can each stage different modules from same work
- Senior projects can explore configurational dramaturgy

7.4 Digital and Hybrid Media

Streaming Platforms:

- Modules released episodically like television series
- Viewers can watch in recommended order or create playlists
- Platform analytics show which configurations audiences prefer

Podcast/Audio Drama:

- Each module adapted as standalone audio episode
- Anthology structure suits podcast format
- Listeners can experience in any order

Interactive Digital Theatre:

- Audience members select which modules to experience in real-time
- Multiple screens/rooms present different modules simultaneously
- Viewers construct their own configuration path

7.5 Commercial Example

Scenario: A theater company licenses *Wheel of Life*

Year 1 Production: They perform Episodes 1, 3, and 6 as a 90-minute evening titled *Wheel of Life: Revolution Arc*. Marketing emphasizes contemporary resistance (Rio), historical suffrage (Ohio), and [Episode 6 context]. Production runs 4 weeks, sells well to politically engaged audiences.

Year 3 Production: Same company licenses Episodes 2, 4, and 8 as *Wheel of Life: The Ancient Cycle*. Entirely different production with mythic/historical emphasis. New design, different directors, fresh marketing to history enthusiasts.

Same dramatic canon. Two completely different productions. No textual revision required.

This is impossible with traditional linear plays.

8. What Fractl Theatre™ Is Not

To clarify the boundaries of the system, it is important to distinguish Fractl Theatre™ from superficially similar forms:

Not Devised Theatre: Fractl Theatre™ preserves complete authorial control. All modules and valid configurations are predetermined by the playwright. Directors interpret but do not create dramatic structure.

Not Audience-Choice Branching Narrative: Unlike choose-your-own-adventure formats, audiences do not select outcomes in real-time. The director/producer selects configuration before production.

Not Random or Generative Storytelling: There is no algorithmic randomization. Every sequence is intentionally designed by the author to produce coherent meaning.

Not Fragmentary Collage: Unlike postmodern fragmentation, Fractl Theatre™ modules are structurally complete. They contain exposition, rising action, climax, and resolution—not fragments requiring external context.

Not Traditional Episodic Drama: Unlike television episodes that must be watched in order, Fractl Theatre™ modules are designed for multiple valid orderings. Changing sequence changes meaning, not just chronology.

9. Authorship, Scope, and Prior Art

Fractl Theatre™ is an original dramaturgical system developed through the practice, authorship, and productions of award-winning playwright and director Edgar Chisholm. This document establishes public documentation of authorship, scope, and prior art. The methodology is proprietary and not dedicated to the public domain.

Furthermore, the proprietary nature of Fractl Theatre™ extends to the use of **Signature Gestures**. These are specific physical and linguistic motifs—defined as **Recursive Nodes**—that remain constant across varying modules, even as the historical or cultural context transforms.

In this system, a specific 'hand-on-heart' gesture or a 'staccato' rhythmic chant is not merely a performance choice; it is the **Proprietary DNA** of the work. These nodes serve as the 'connective tissue' that ensures thematic coherence regardless of the sequence activated. By documenting these nodes as fixed elements of the dramaturgical architecture, the author asserts IP protection over the structural 'pattern' of the work, distinguishing it from general devised performance or public domain tropes.

10. Conclusion

Fractl Theatre™ offers a framework for dramatic storytelling that reflects contemporary performance realities while preserving narrative rigor and authorial responsibility. By treating plays as systems rather than fixed sequences, it expands what a single work can be—enabling theaters to program flexibly, audiences to experience differently, and artists to explore structural multiplicity without sacrificing coherence.

The system addresses practical industry needs (scalable licensing, modular programming, digital distribution) while advancing dramaturgical innovation. As theatre continues to evolve across platforms and cultural contexts, Fractl Theatre™ provides a methodology that honors both artistic vision and adaptive flexibility.

For more information:

- Explore Fractl Theatre™ works at fractltheatre.com
- Licensing inquiries: [contact information]
- Academic and production partnerships: [contact information]

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