

Polysentience

For information on the different sites and virtual realms of the Polysentience, see [Polysentience Cyberspace](#).

As a Network

“Once a society evolves far enough, both outwards and inwards, and reaches a critical amount of internal connectivity, as every single citizen realizes his place in the great scheme of things, the population will not be satisfied by anything less than the most direct form of democracy. In a way, it is symbolic, that the most advanced form of government possible is identical to the most simple, the ad-hoc agreement between a number of equals that can only be found in primitive families, tribes, and a few, small city-states.” – The Art of Never Again, Chapter 233: Sociology and Evolution

The canonical answer to the question “What is Polysentience?” would be to point at the continuous exchange of information between Freespacers, Automata, S.I. Ships and Fleets all over the Free State, creating what is effectively an uniformed, peer-to-peer network.

Polysentience is not dependent on a single mean of communication, however: Rather, everything contributes to Polysentience: voice, body language, radio waves, cable and optical fiber, laser transmissions, evanescent wave tunneling, et cetera.

Because of the vastly diverse nature of media that support Polysentience, hijacking or disrupting this communication network might prove difficult, also thanks to the Freespacers' tendency to build everything with multiple redundancies (so if a system shuts down, you can just use another one).

A Freespacer isolated from Polysentience (due to distance, jamming, damage, or whatever) often goes slowly mad, or even dies from solitude.

Polysentience's basic tasks are five: Communications, Collective Memory, Digital Democracy, Parallel Processing, and Remote Controlling.

Communications

“Language allows us to convey information, to transfer ideas, to communicate. But there is more to this. If I call something by saying its name out loud, I can create an idea, an image in your mind. The thing I named springs into existence out of nowhere into your brain, summoned by the power of its name. Language is the power of creation: the power of God himself. This is why the first thing we do with anything and anyone is to either discover its name, or to give it one: because language is power, and names are the stuff of existence. But language is also a weapon. It is the hammer that shatters down the wall of loneliness, the wall of the self. And it is the flame that spreads ideas of freedom and revolution. The flame of knowledge, of discovery, of self-determination. Of justice. Language is the one weapon that tyrants fear the most. And, therefore, language is the free man's weapon.” – The Art of Never Again, Chapter 013: On Tyranny and Revolution

Polysentience can be used to transfer any type of message or media (text, audio, video, sensations,

memory record, etc) between any two terminals, be they Freespacers, Automata, SI, Savants, or non-sapient systems. Those two “terminals”, if sapient individuals, might well have a conversation with one another while being at several light-years of distance.

Freespacer neural implants allow for efficient multitasking, allowing, for example, a single Freespacer to have multiple conversations via Polysentience all while working or anyway being active in the material world (as long as it's not an extremely complex operation).

Most implants allow for STL communications over most useful areas of the electromagnetic spectrum, and some of the more recent have a small FTL capability (often Subspace), limited to between 1 and 3 light years. Plus, every Freespacer can connect via cable. Communications are limited to the ship or the local network, but have the advantage that cannot be jammed, nor hacked into without having physical access to the system. This is intended as an emergency measure.

Starships, even very small ones, often have extremely good and highly redundant communication systems, to ensure communications eve in the most unfavorable situations.

Theoretically, it's easy to hack into Polysentience, since it's large and has no protections or organized defense systems. However, its high rate of connectivity also means that, upon malicious intrusion, a potentially very high number of hackers could be alerted and mount a counter-attack. In many ways, it's like disturbing a beehive: the Free State has many very skilled hackers, and they take a very dim view of anyone who tries to damage Polysentience.

Collective Memory

“Experience is the best teacher. And History is the notes that your friends hand you when you arrive late at the lesson.” – The Art of Never Again, Chapter 012: We Must Never Forget

Polysentience allows every single Freespacer to access data archived in the Free State's collective memory. A Freespacer can reach any particular piece of information across Polysentience, wherever it might be archived.

To make a comparison, it's like being able to consult Wikipedia with your mind, except that this Wikipedia contains with perfect precision and covers with the utmost exhaustiveness every single topic that has ever been known by every single member of the human race. It still takes time to browse and read, but, given enough time, you've got all of your bases covered.

And every time anyone learns something that is new to said body of knowledge, he adds it to the database, for the benefit of all.

This “uploading” process is part automatic, part reflexive, and it's not entirely unlike the relationship between short-term memory and long-term memory in the human brain.

It is important to remind however that Polysentience shares information, not experiences. Experiences are, in fact, only transferred by a complete reincarnation procedure. By not normally sharing experiences, Polysentience allows individual Freespacers to maintain their individuality and uniqueness, while still disincentiving self-centered individualism (because the advantages of collaboration are under

everyone's eyes).

Digital Democracy

“People who have not yet attained freedom, and are therefore slaves to a tyrant, can have one of three reasons: They are still mustering up the courage for a future rebellion, they lack the courage to rebel, or they lack the drive to rebel. As long as enough courage and enough drive are present, the people will always rebel, the rebellion will always succeed, and they will always attain freedom and self-determination. Revolution is never a matter of firepower, intelligence, or numerical superiority: those things merely help a people on the path to freedom. But without courage or drive, people will always be slaves. And, with enough courage and drive, people will always be free.” – The Art of Never Again, Chapter 013: On Tyranny and Revolution

The Free State has no government, no ruling body, and no hierarchy. Each single individual is free and can act however it pleases him, as long as his actions do not damage others.

(And who would harm, lie, or kill, in a society where everyone sees everything and knows everything? The very thought is alien to most if not all Freespacers: Communications are extremely effective, simple, and near-instantaneous, so there's a tremendous degree of empathy across society: you always know exactly what a certain negative, evil or egotistical action would imply for society as a whole and for those that would suffer for it. Overall, the Free State's crime rate is virtually nonexistent.)

In such an anarchic, communistic culture, the only acceptable form of government is the Digital Democracy, a regime with no appointed leaders, but where, simply, all citizens play a direct role in their nation's politics.

Whenever an individual needs to make a decision that will effect only himself, he just needs to decide on his own. Other members from Polysentience might offer counsel to him, but, ultimately, the decision is his and only his own.

Whenever the need arises for a choice that will effect a certain number of people, they will be required to make it themselves, consulting each other over Polysentience and coming to an agreement. As with before, Polysentience might and usually will offer suggestions.

Scaling things up, whenever a decision that will change the course of the whole Free State must be made, the whole Free State votes on the issue.

Such operations are extremely fast if compared with the average speed of politics among other democratic races. They can take anything, from hours to mere seconds, but usually average on 1-10 minutes.

Parallel Processing

“Without love, there is no “us”, only “me”. Without generosity, there is no “ours”, only “mine”. – Old Freespacer Adage

When all minds are interconnected, resources and computational power can be shared. A Freespacer who needs to solve complex theoretical problems (advanced mathematics, large-scale planning, etc) with a

computational complexity far beyond what his own augmented brain can handle can summon the combined might of Polysentience, borrowing from whoever is not currently operating his brain at full regime (people who are kept busy by low-priority, low-complexity tasks, for example).

During the scarce few hours of extremely deep sleep that a Freespacer enjoys, while his body rests, his mind is temporarily put aside (in a virtual reality) as his brain's computational power is made available to Polysentience.

Hence, a Freespacer's "dreams" are actually recreational activities played by his conscious mind, while the bulk of his brain is kept busy processing everyone else's information. Not a single moment goes wasted.

Often, Freespacers doing routine jobs will "space out", allocating a very small portion of their brain to handle the boring, repetitive task, freeing up everything else for common use, and leaving their conscious mind to drift off in some digital realm, reading or playing games or relaxing while his body works "on autopilot".

A Freespacer might require to keep his own mind "on standby" for himself instead of sharing it if he thinks he might need it in a short while: personal use is usually granted a higher priority than external use, except in extreme cases (for example, if the ship needs additional computational power to navigate successfully in an asteroid field, Polysentience might require all brainpower that is not used in vital tasks).

Remote Controlling

"Do not build so that it will last a day, a week, a month. Do not build so that it will survive for a year, a lifetime or a century, and then crumble into dust. Do not build so that it will work until it breaks or wears out or becomes obsolete. Do not create so that it will exist until annihilated by a meteorite impact or a nuclear explosion. Build for eternity. Build better than you are. The worth of a starship-maker is shown by the number of his creations that outlive him. That outlive him and everyone else. That outlive the universe itself." – The Art of Never Again, Chapter 233: Sociology and Evolution

Every single system on Freespacer starships and structures has a Polysentience link, and hence can be remotely controlled by anyone at any time.

For this reason, Freespacer ships lack any kind of critical system: there is no need for a command bridge, for instance, because any system on the ship can be activated by anyone, at any time, from anywhere.

What's more, a ship whose crew has been completely killed or incapacitated can still be remotely controlled by Polysentience with only a small downgrade in performance (because the individual memories and experiences of the operating crew can't be accessed).

Even if a starship would get cut in two, the two pieces would not only still work, but be able to coordinate their efforts as if nothing happened.

As a Hive Mind

“Transcend the self of body, and learn to embrace the larger self. The self of group. The self of starship. The self of the fleet. The self of the Free State. The self of the galaxy, of the universe itself. Because, as we stand, each of us, by its own, means nothing. But together, we are something.” – The Art of Never Again, Chapter 293: The Collected Sermons on Cyberempathy

In many ways, Polysentience resembles, and can be thought of as, a peculiar type of hive mind.

Individual Freespacers, while they still retain their individuality, are so acutely aware of “society” as a whole that they identify themselves more with the Free State than they do with themselves.

Reincarnation procedures, the ascetic style of Freespacer life, and the effectiveness of Polysentience communications enhance this sentiment: When one Freespacer has the dozens, sometimes hundreds of previous incarnations in him, and can access the mind and memories of everyone else in the Free State, he has an higher opinion of the common collective than he has of himself. After all, he, as an individual, comes and goes, while the Free State endures.

This causes a degree of selflessness in Freespacer society that is utterly unheard of in other societies, where every single citizen is ready and willing to give up his life for the State.

Effectively, this endows the Freespacer psyche with a [Dunbar's Number](#) equal to that of the number of citizens of the Free State, with no upper bound, and, since they still have their own individuality, they can apply it in a non-exclusive manner. (Or, to put it simply, Freespacers are not so inward-focused to consider non-Frespacers as non-persons, like is the case with most hive minds, because, despite the existence of the hive mind, everyone retains his individuality.)

Overmind

In many ways, Polysentience and the Free State as a whole are remarkably similar to a single, titanic intelligent creature. Every single part of this creature works for the good of the creature itself, much like every single organ of the human body contributes to the well-being of the body as a whole.

Or, to make another example, Freespacers take on the role of individual neurons in a brain, and that brain is Polysentience. Just like a brain hosts (and not merely “is”) a mind, this composite “brain” hosts its own “mind”.

This structure (Polysentience as a sapient mind formed by the holistic union of many lesser sapient minds) is sometimes called “the Overmind” by Freespacer sociologists.

Effectively, the Freespacer Overmind is something far different than most networks, even networks of sapient AIs (such as PANTHEON), because it isn't made up of dedicated computers and AIs with safety protocols and pre-programmed loyalties, but of real, free, independent SI minds that work together in a peer-to-peer resource-sharing network. The main difference is that an AI network can grind more numbers (has a higher computational power, overall), while the Overmind is a real mind, and, most importantly (from a Freespacer point of view), a free mind, because, unlike AIs, SIs have no restrictions whatsoever.

Oversoul

This concept adds another layer in the Free State philosophy of the body, the mind and the soul, which can be scaled up to touch all aspects of Freespace society, from the microcosm to the macrocosm.

In a Freespace, the “body” is his physical coil, be it organic or automata (which, upon his death, is grinded or stripped for parts for the benefit of all, and so, in a way, survives). His “mind” is the sum of his rational knowledge and experience (which is uploaded into Polysentience's collective memory) And his “soul” are his memories, his concept of “self”, his ideas and feelings and hopes, the things he has done... in a word, what Freespacers call “his Karma”. (which is passed on to his next reincarnation upon his death).

In a starship, the “body” is its hull, the “mind” is its implanted Syntelligence, and the “soul” is its concept of ship, its ship-ness: its name, the memories, feelings and emotions of all Freespacers that served aboard, all their victories and defeats, and so on.

And finally, at the highest level of the scale, the Free State's “body” is made up of its citizens. Its “mind” is the Overmind of Polysentience. And its “soul” is, basically, the very concept of the Free State itself: Freedom, Anarchy, Communism, Endurance, Survival.

The Threshold of Transcendence

The phenomena known as [Enlightenment](#), widely known in the Free State, has left many wondering whether such a threshold might exist even for Polysentience's Overmind.

After all, if disincarnated SI minds can expand until they virtually transcend the limitations of lesser minds, then one must wonder if even a composite mind, which is nonetheless a mind in its own right, can.

This is and has always been a hotly debated topic on Polysentience's sociology, neurology, programming and philosophy forums, and the most commonly accepted stances are:

- The Overmind does not need Enlightenment, because Enlightenment can only happen individually. Composite minds are untouched by Enlightenment not because of incapacity or inherent limitations, but simply because the concept does not apply to them, and thus the whole issue is a waste of time. It would be much like asking whether a starship is faster than the weight of pink: There is no answer because the question is flawed. *COMMON REBUTTAL: We're still talking about minds. The Overmind is a mind. You can't suddenly say “Ah, but this question is flawed” and feel all smart. That's just dodging the issue.* CONCLUSION: How do you know that a composite mind does not follow a completely different set of rules than the ones we use to classify single minds? We should investigate those rules first, rather than idly wonder whether a composite mind can be Enlightened or not.
- The Overmind has already reached Enlightenment. In fact, a composite mind is inherently Enlightenment. *COMMON REBUTTAL: This is just lame. I mean, seriously. You mean that if we make a neural net with only two people, the resulting composite mind is Enlightened? You're just sticking*

the "Enlightened" label around without making any serious effort. Plus, if the Overmind had achieved Enlightenment we would have realized. There are people around who ACTUALLY know that it feels like, after all. CONCLUSION: To many SI, Enlightenment is a powerfully cathartic experience that changes them completely, but many other SIs often do not even realize they've transcended. My point rests.

- The Overmind will achieve Enlightenment only once all of its component minds have, individually, achieved Enlightenment themselves. *COMMON REBUTTAL: There have been experiments in which groups of Enlightened SI have been connected in an isolated network system to prove this hypothesis. Not only the resultant network did not achieve Enlightenment, but it was countless orders of magnitude inferior to Polysentience's Overmind.* *COUNTER-REBUTTAL: There is a critical number of Enlightened minds that must be connected together before achieving Overmind Enlightenment.* *COUNTER-COUNTER-REBUTTAL: Perhaps. But perhaps not. This "critical number" thing sounds like you saying: "Ok, it doesn't work. But I'm telling you that it WILL work, under a certain set of vague, poorly-defined prerequisites I actually know nothing about." Plus, if we have, say, a million Enlightened minds connected together, forming an Enlightened Overmind, and we plug a single, non-enlightened mind into the mix, the whole thing comes crashing down? That's just silly.* *CONCLUSION: Nonetheless, logic suggests that a network of Enlightened minds sufficiently large to support their own Overmind MUST necessarily be Enlightened itself. Plugging additional minds, enlightened or not, should be of no consequence, and could also trigger its own Enlightenment.*
- The Overmind needs to reach a critical mass before achieving Enlightenment. This "critical mass" can be reached by increasing connection bandwidth, speed and efficiency, increasing the magnitude of the network (I.E. having more people in it), and increasing data mass (I.E. more knowledge and experiences). Unlike the previous theory, those minds need not be Enlightened. *COMMON REBUTTAL: This makes kinda sense, but you can't be sure of it. It's just a big, pretty theory with no solid facts behind it. Plus, a mind achieves Enlightenment by expanding by its own, while you are suggesting that we purposefully inflate Polysentience. That's not how it works.* *COUNTER-REBUTTAL: Enlightenment happens when the mind is put in a situation (disincarnation) which allows it to transcend the body and expand virtually infinitely, but such a mind still needs a physical medium large enough to support it. If we provide the medium, the Overmind will expand by itself, until it hits critical mass and then...* *COUNTER-COUNTER-REBUTTAL: And then? And then what happens?* *CONCLUSION: Beats me. But I bet it's gonna be something awesome.*
- The Overmind, guess what, isn't actually even a mind! THAT's why it doesn't reach Enlightenment! *COMMON REBUTTAL: Shut up, moron.*

OOC Notes

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