



The subject, the object and the law : Jacques Lacan's object a and « Le Graphe »

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Abstract

In this paper, I would like to clarify two particular notions--illustrations--which Lacan used to present his own reading of Freud's model, a representation in fact which amounts to a development of psychoanalytical theory along what I take to be very freudian lines : the object and the law.

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We all know what psychoanalysis is about ; a simple formula sums it up quite well : « Conscious Stroke Unconscious ». It all started towards the end of the XIXth Century and definitely acquired a « scientific » status in 1900 with the publication of Freud's *Die Traumdeutung*. That this, however, was only the beginning of a very long « analysis » is also well known: the original formula--a structure in fact--, because of the radical change in our conception of human desire it implied, received various and sometimes contradictory interpretations, and the debate is still going on today. One of these interpretations, the latest I think, can be found in the works of Jacques Lacan.

In this paper, I would like to clarify two particular notions--illustrations--which Lacan used to present his own reading of Freud's model, a representation in fact which amounts to a development of psychoanalytical theory along what I take to be very freudian lines : the object and the law.

Already, then, we have a structure: what I desire and what controls my access to the desired object. As to what this object is, this is altogether another matter, the core of the problem indeed ! The oedipal triangle, which represents the first step in Freud's discovery, clearly defines what, for the child, is

prohibited: the parent of the other sex, but also the mother in the first few months of life. This however, was only the visible part of the iceberg and in the end we have come to realize that we didn't know what our « object » was or, rather, that our object was not what we thought it was.

Eventually, although not without hesitation, what was realized was that need and desire were not the same thing and this was a first and essential step. But it didn't define what desire was. This is where Lacan's object *a*—*objet petit a*—comes in, only a letter said he, to what we can add: a letter not unlike the *x* of the algebrist, a sign which tells us where to look. To say that it stands for what we have to look for doesn't help much, it is true, but at least it points to a particular place in the structure, and we can start from there.

This brings us nearer that other element of the freudian model, I mean the law or, as I call it, « the bar ». For Freud, and then later for Lacan, in a field which was not the one analyzed, correctly I think, by Marx—for whom moral was a social product, ideological, superstructural--, for Freud, then, a new field appears, entirely based on the idea of an original loss or of a fundamental incompleteness. With *Civilization and its Discontents*, in 1929, Freud endeavored to link law, desire and guilt, and this is a debate which Lacan took up again in two of his seminars, in 1960 and in 1969, with his introduction of the Other and of the object *a*.

Throughout the years, the signifier « Other » received several signifieds,¹ but in a particular instance at least, in the discussion touching Blaise Pascal's famous wager about salvation and the divinity, the word simply and openly refers to « God ».

The structure that I have in mind today and from which I would like to start [pour en partir aujourd'hui] is the original structure, the one in which an Other is involved [que j'appelle d'un Autre] [...] That Other, which is precisely the God of philosophers, cannot so easily be eliminated as one may think. (Le

¹ The sign « other »--*autre*--appears as early as 1953 in the famous « *Discours de Rome* », and for instance in the striking formula about the unconscious: « *L'inconscient c'est le discours de l'Autre* », which doesn't say what the Other is and simply replaces one sign by another, but presents the advantage of drawing our attention to the exteriority of what is here at stake, thus implying that the subject can no longer be thought of as a conscious entity. (See *Ecrits I*, Paris : Seuil, Collection Points Essais, 1966, p. 24). Another passage in the same text, page 146, enables us to identify a first, and quite simple, signified of the sign: « [...] the desire of man finds its meaning in the desire of the other [...] its first object is to be recognized by the other. » [...] *le désir de l'homme trouve son sens dans le désir de l'autre [...] son premier objet est d'être reconnu par l'autre.* ». A list of the various signifieds of the word « autre » would certainly include the unconscious, God, the other person in front of the subject--and therefore the analyst--, the other sex and, last but not least, the ideal ego, such a « progress » leading of course to a specific conception of the superego quite in line with Freud's own conception. In this 1996 edition of the « *Discours* », a footnote, page 135, adds a capital A to « autre » ; Lacan explains that the theory has now been improved [« nous avons affermi la théorie »] and that we are now dealing with a « grand (A)utre ».

Séminaire XVI, D'un Autre à l'autre, Paris : Editions du Seuil, 2006, p. 343 (June 4, 1969))

From the word « God » here mentioned in the debate about Pascal to « law », the distance is small, and we can interpret this as a first injunction: the sign that our birth brings about an inevitable loss.

Psychoanalysis defines object a for what it is, namely the cause of desire, that is to say the cause of the division of the subject, what it introduces within the subject which the cogito conceals, for by the side of this being of whom the cartesian subject thought one could be sure, the a is, essentially and from the start, want. (344)

La barre, yes, this is what we are talking about here: a lack, an absence at the origin of the whole psychological process, and, to begin with, my desire to deny the existence of such a fundamental lack and then my rage in front of such a prohibition to be « complete », whole, with the consequence that I will be terrified at the thought that my own rage be turned against me in return. (Using some aspects of object relation theory to continue my search, I have already analyzed elsewhere this anger directed at my Other or Others in order to explain my unconscious fears, *Angst*.)²

Among other topics, then, « the law » is discussed by Lacan in his 1969 seminar « *De l'Autre à l'autre* ». This may help us to clarify some of the notions he uses, and above all his mysterious object a, which he describes as what can be considered as a substitute for the subject's void [béance] and therefore « redoubles » the subject's split in providing it with a cause, a last remark which, I think, requires some explanation. Here is the complete paragraph:

The a comes as a substitute for the void [vient se substituer à la béance] which can be deduced [qui se dégage] from the failure [impasse] of the sexual relationship and redoubles the subject's division in providing it with a cause, which, so far, couldn't in any way be grasped, for what characterizes castration is that nothing can properly name it because its cause is absent. In its place, comes object a, as a cause substituted to what is, radically, the flaw [la faille] in the subject. (347)

Quite a difficult paragraph this, but if we read it carefully it seems we can draw one central idea from it, namely that beyond « the failure » of the sexual encounter (an « *impasse* » is a way having no outlet), what is stated and even

² See for instance « Malaise, mal être, *ma lettre* », *Psyart. An Online Journal*, 2012., and also, in French, « Variations sur le thème du désir de Freud à Lacan, » *Gradiva-Revue Européenne d'Anthropologie Littéraire*, Vol. XII, N° 2, Printemps 2012.

repeated is that the subject's division which is devoid of a cause³, that is to say which is there from our very first beginning, is not without having been provided with this object a which replaces—*vient à la place de*—the original absence. We have the « bar », causeless because it has been there from the beginning, and this very clearly represents the subject's utter solitude, always « barred ». So far, so good, this is a way of insisting on the subject's separation from the (lacanian) Real, the world out there,⁴ but we still have to understand how such a radical separation can be « *redoublée* ». It is in fact this very question that the present paper tries to answer. Is it possible that, as subjects, we should be twice separated, twice definitely cut out?

This, precisely, is what the above quotation says. Of course, if object a can now also be taken for a cause, we may wonder what happened to the original cause, the one with which it all started, at our birth, and which by definition must have preceded the other, the one Lacan mentions and calls a. Was there, in 1969, when the seminar lesson was delivered, some confusion, and may the orator have spoken too quickly?

We cannot tell what Lacan had in mind at the time, in June 1969, what intuitions may have been his and what the specific elements of his demonstration were, what he « knew » and didn't wish to reveal, but if we want to render his model completely intelligible, in a word understand what he is talking about, there remains one ambiguity which must be lifted if only to avoid any possible confusion.

The structure which does seem to correspond to the research carried out in the 1969 seminar on « the Other » and « the other » requires that we distinguish two different moments. First, we have *a time of separation*, that is to say the moment when, at birth, we lose the world-out-there, we become separated from it, and this can be said to be the « subject's division », a division, as I have just remarked, whose cause may be said absent since it necessarily accompanies our coming into the world. Next, following such original loss, comes the second moment, *the apparition of objet a*, that is to say of what comes as a substitute to the lack in the subject—the subject's flaw—, and this time, yes, as says Lacan, a cause can be named (although for me this small a which comes to fill the place of the void of the first day is a sign almost as mysterious as the void it replaces).

³ I read « in providing it with a cause » [*en lui donnant sa cause*] as related to the division of the subject—the cause of such a split--, a meaning that the word « castration », next, should enable us to verify. My hypothesis, I hope this is clear, is that Lacan, in his poetic, but ambiguous, formula, suggests that the apparition of object a—which he places within the void—founds this very subject which until then was unfounded, the effect of this « movement » being however its alienation. In the interpretation that will conclude this paper I shall call this « *redoublement* » of the subject's division our Law Number Two.

⁴ See Véronique Voruz and Bogdan Wolf's « Lacan's recognition of the irreducibility of the real and « the real as immovable » in a discussion of *Séminaire XX, Encore* (1973). (*The Later Lacan*, V. Voruz and B. Wolf (Edit.), Albany : State University of New York Press, 2007, ix).

Here is, then, what Lacan, after Freud, has to say about the subject's division, its « *Spaltung* », and on the consequences of this. We must admit the model is simple enough. And in the said model don't we also recognize the structure of language, a structure which describes sign and referent as separated by the distance there exists between the observer and the world?⁵ To which can be added that this also corresponds to the structure of the metaphor. Perhaps this is the reason why Lacan speaks of a subject's division that is « redoubled »?

All this, in any case, explains Lacan's interest in language: the words I speak escape me, they are endowed with more than one « meaning », and I do not always know what these meanings are, I do not know what I is saying. Freud's inference that I am not the master in my own house helps us to take one more step beyond Descartes' Cogito : alienation of the subject and symbolic dimension of discourse.

Which means that we can accept the idea of a subject twice divided, this naturally leading us to our understanding and acceptance of an object a which comes as a substitute of the original void, although we still have to understand how it can be considered as a « cause » ?

At this point, though, a parenthesis seems necessary. For we must not forget that the seminar session we are examining--« *Paradoxes de l'Acte Psychanalytique* »--was not only a presentation addressed to psychoanalysts but also dealt with the phenomenon of transference. Which may explain why so much was said in the session that concerned the relationship between therapist and object *a*.⁶ Fundamental as it may be, though, such direction of research doesn't throw any more light on the possible status of object *a*.

If we get back to the model I am trying to construct, then, what we have is a figure with two places : first a void [*béance*] and then an object whose function is to come and act as a substitute for it. It may be obvious by now that I interpret the said void as a consequence of the « bar », this insuperable space between me and the world. This is indeed another way of speaking of the radical distance that separates the subject and the real.

⁵ See R. Silhol, « C'est à quel sujet ? » *Le Sens, Cahiers Charles V*, Université Paris7-Denis Diderot, december 1993, 171-193 and « 'Me Jane, You Tarzan': On meaning, » *Compromise Formations* (Edit. Vera Camden), Kent (Ohio) and London : Kent State University Press, 1989, 1-14.

⁶ « *Au terme de l'opération, il y a l'évacuation de l'objet a en tant qu'il représente la béance de cette vérité rejetée, et c'est cet objet évacué que lui-même, l'analyste, va représenter, de son en-soi, si je puis dire. Autrement dit, l'analyste choisit, à devenir lui-même la fiction rejetée.* » (347-348) [At the end of the operation, object *a* is evacuated in as much as it represents the void of that rejected truth, and it is this evacuated object which the analyst himself is going to represent, in his inner reality, if I may say so . In other words, the analyst disappears since he becomes the rejected fiction.]



And one may of course also have recognized in passing what Lacan calls the *law of the father*, an expression he so often uses in his seminar. For if we can speak of « two » places, it is because there is something in between, something we can call the « bar ». In the end, our structure will have three elements: a separation and two places. The story, our history in fact, is well known: when we are born, what takes place is a separation of mother and infant, but also, as if at the same time, the apparition of a third party, who, by the simple fact of his existence, the simple fact of his presence—« There are three of us, not two »—, embodies the law I have called the First Law: « Thou shalt not reintegrate thy own product ». It is this injunction which Lacan, quite faithful to Freud in this, has so clearly commented. We have here the very foundation of the oedipal triangle, a structure at the origin of the psychoanalytical discovery. And if of course there is nothing to add on the chapter of oedipal desire, we have no reason to refrain from looking at what happens beyond--before in fact—just after the First Law has been pronounced.

In this research on the genesis of the superego, however, having recourse to the Law of the Father does not seem to help; we still do not know what the precise cause of our *Angst* is. Is it possible that we should feel guilty because we desire to go back to a time which preceded our coming into the world? That we are inhabited by such an unconscious wish at times, I have no doubt, but I cannot consider such a desire as the specific source of our guilty feeling. In short, I think there must be « something else ».

Thus are we coming to the hypothesis of the existence of a second « law », for me, much more than a second aspect of the law of the father. There is no doubt that the whole process is triggered by that first law, but something happens afterwards which remains to be analyzed. This, the nature of the superego, is the problem Freud set out to solve in his research in *Civilization and its Discontents*, and to do so he resorted to what he called our « death drive », *Todestrieb*. Lacan will take up the quest from there, adding the Law of the Father to the debate, therefore apparently accepting Freud's conception of a death instinct in us without shedding any more light on the problem.

But he left us his objet *a* and his « *Grappe* », a sign and a structure which in the end are going to be of help in our search for more light and enable us to fill in some of the blanks in the poetic formulation of his theory. For it's all there, in a raw state as it were ; all we have to do is to follow in his footsteps and continue the psychoanalytical quest.

Object *a*, « *l'objet petit a* », may not be so mysterious; Lacan himself says it quite plainly : it is what I desire(s), a third person I, as I have already

remarked. Naturally, in his « spoken » seminar, it may happen that the orator lacks clarity, somewhat giving the impression he is confusing instances, saying that he « means » the *subject* where we had expected *object*, but isn't this also a way of pointing out that what defines a subject for psychoanalysis is what he or she desires? This indeed is the crux of the matter; I will return to it in a moment. In fact, the formula—which of course reminds us of the algebrist's x —is a convenient way of pointing out the importance of the object while at the same time stressing the mysterious character of our attachment to « it », whatever *it* is.

I find in the *Graphe* the illustration of the subject's alienation: discourse and (unconscious) desire are given to me, sent to me by an Other—whatever that may be—, and this is what makes a subject of me, without this *I* would not exist. The Other, written with a capital O, is no longer God but, quite simply, my parents, my mother first—this is the most general case—, and then my father. It may not be easy to say, but that's the way it is and this is how I read Lacan's *Graphe*. Thus, besides the fact that Lacan's model tells us again what everyone knows (?), namely that need and unconscious desire are not one and the same thing, it stresses the subject's dependence and illustrates the trajectory followed by our determinations.⁷ Unfortunately, except for some passing remarks, the demonstration does not seem to go beyond this latter general observation and says nothing about the specific nature of object *a*.

I am not forgetting we are discussing the possible relationship between the subject, the object and the law, and I am not forgetting the importance of *Angst* either. We have just seen that the « subject », in the end, was only what it desired. As we saw, for each of us, object *a* is the x of our personal algebra, what we are running after without knowing that it is not what we think it is.

And yet, it is not as simple as it looks, and it is here, I think, that we can find the core of the debate on the law. I have already mentioned the First Law, the fundamental prohibition the « bar » perfectly represents, an interdiction impossible to ignore, so compelling that we have no other choice but abide by it. That is not all, however, and what I have in mind here is Lacan's Thing (*la Chose*), Freud's *das Ding*, which has nothing to do with « things », concrete objects, choses.⁸ And what is tragic, of course, is that we do not stop running after « that Thing » though it will not stop escaping us. Indeed, in an attitude

⁷ Perhaps a difficult paragraph in the 26 March 1969 session does more than this and seems to point out in which direction we should look if we want to decipher what I shall call the particular « content » of unconscious desire ; this would no doubt call for a whole article : S'il reste ici quelque chose qui, quoique toujours agité dans mon discours, et particulièrement cette année, n'a pas encore pris sa pleine instance... [...] Ceci est très précisément ce qui y introduit ce manque, cette barre, ce trou, qui peut se distinguer du titre de l'objet *a*. (*Le Séminaire XVI*, 252) [*If something remains here which, although always agitated in my discourse, and particularly this year, has not yet acquired its full weight...[...] It is precisely what introduces this lack, this bar, this hole, which can pride itself of the title of object a.*]

⁸ That « things » are not « The Thing » is brilliantly shown in the 1960 Seminar on Ethics (*Le Séminaire VII*).

which amounts to refusing that completeness is beyond our reach, we keep on imagining that the space which separates us from the said ideal object can be bridged, erased, reduced, vanquished, and that this suppression will not only do away with the loss attached to our birth but also put an end to our incompleteness.

In this force, in this « drive » which impels us to desire, you have no doubt recognized what Freud calls our *libido*; this is how I read the term in any case: a furious desire to live, to continue living in spite of a fundamental lack. This understanding of the word « desire », however, implies we are speaking of a structural trait, a general characteristic which does not say much about the particular features it will acquire in accordance with the personal history of each individual person, so that we must be careful not to use the generic as a screen which would conceal what belongs to the individual only. In short, this second meaning of the word « desire »--as I have just pointed out--leads us to the hypothesis of a Second Law which in turn amounts to providing the concept of « Other » with a second signified.

Let me repeat this: after the Law imposed on us by the « bar »--first Other, God, Father or whatever you like—, a second law. A second law which might help us to define with more precision the personal nature of the subject's unconscious desire. In fact, I am here speaking of what should perhaps be the final aim of an analysis or at least the subject matter of the last sessions of a psychoanalysis. And in the identification of what is specific in the subject's personal desire we shall naturally include his or her desire for completeness, for this is the other task awaiting our subject in analysis, a way to return to the generic in fact. For only in death do we stop desiring. To speak of the subject's desire for completeness is simply to speak of his or her furious desire to live, as we saw, that is to say of his or her *libido*. Which means that « theory » is now confronted with the problem of the articulation of the subject's personal unconscious desire with the existence in man of a desire for the absolute, for the ideal. No wonder the word ideal so often comes under Freud's pen when he writes about the genesis of the superego ! Whatever mythic unity we may dream of, there is no remedy to our tragic fate of ever wanting...what is missing. Which in turn suggests that one of the tasks of a psychoanalysis is also to reconcile us to this lack. An impossible task, of course, but all the same an enterprise that may succeed...*relatively*, « asymptotically » as it were.

For all is not lost, and in this impossible task of ours we have an ally. To the rescue comes *sublimation*, which will help our enterprise to be less impossible. Sublimation indeed occupies a central place in the freudian model, a model which Lacan, in turn, took up with his considerations on language. Confronted with the impossible task of bridging the gap between us and the « real », the marvellous structure of the metaphor enables us to go round what is prohibited. The replacement of the ideal Object O by a concrete object o' fraught with symbolical meaning is the operation that permits us if not to totally accept our incompleteness at least to compose with it. One no doubt

recognizes here the structure of representation, that is to say of the dream and of language.



Many times have I used these little figures—representation of representation—, an illustration of the trajectory of desire towards an impossible Object, a trajectory Freud first mapped out when explaining how our dreams represented unconscious desire. These two sketches illustrate the path followed by a concrete yet symbolical object in order to take the place of the ideal O we lack and cannot reach. But there is something these figures do not say. First, nothing is said about the conditions of production of this substitution of a concrete, but essentially symbolical, object. Why such a « choice »? What are the causes of this particular way of going round the bar, what unconscious desire « behind » this? Next, and the remark is fundamental, what of the success of the operation of substitution? Not that such substitution did not take place, but to what effect, with what result for the subject? In other words, if we cannot stop desiring (the impossible), if there is no absolute « bridging of the gap », and if we remain forever nostalgic about a lost paradise, how do we manage, *more or less*, to survive?

This is indeed what psychoanalysis is all about: the particular nature of sublimation for each of us, that is to say the symbolical dimension which organizes our concrete lives. And it is because the particular determination I have in mind here can be destructive that it deserves all our attention. In short, if we want to begin to understand something about our behavior we cannot satisfy ourselves with just the generic approach and must look into the very « personal » details of the structure, its contents as it were. For everything is double here, has a double meaning, and it is clear that object a, which is a satisfactory representation of the subject's desire in its generic sense—desire of the One, of God, of eternity and completeness—, also represents what is specific in each individual's unconscious desire, a sign with two signifieds in fact. So that we can distinguish two aspects of the Law:

Thou shalt not go to the other side of the bar but also
Thou shalt imagine thou canst go to the other side...
in such and such a (symbolical) way.

Our subject is permitted to bridge the gap, if only symbolically, but what must be added—this is essential—is that the symbolical dimension of his actions are no less concrete for that matter, take place, that is, in the concrete world, what Lacan so well expresses when he speaks of « *l'effet de signifiant sur le sujet* ». Such is, as far as metapsychology is concerned, and if I may be permitted again to repeat myself, such is our « human condition » : first, an *impassable void*, something like an insurmountable barrier, there at birth, but also, next, accompanying this interdiction, instructions designed to help us go round the prohibition : this is *sublimation*. Going round the bar, we cannot, but since we go on imagining trespassing is possible, we nevertheless keep on trying, and we do so in a fashion which is symbolical, that is to say which represents what we desire.⁹ I am of course alluding to the structure of « representation », a concept useful to understand not only the nature of language but also what is unconscious in us. It is this « chapter » of psychoanalytical theory which interests me here and this brings us back to Lacan's *Graphe* and to object *a*.

The « Graph », whatever its lack in precision, perfectly illustrates how the infant goes from « demand »—which I am going to call « state zero of the subject »—to « desire », a development which now constitutes him or her as a subject (but of course an alienated subject who is dependent on what has given its desire a specific content). The infant receives its orders from somewhere outside itself, from someone in fact, and we have here one of the meanings of that Other Lacan so often refers to, whose signified varied through the seminar years. In the end, what matters is that, with the *Graphe*, in 1969,¹⁰ we are given to understand what the relationship of a subject to the Law is—even though we have some difficulty in accepting the extent to which a subject is determined. The order given—*Thou shalt*—in any case is obscure, not readily decipherable, and all the more so as « what » or « who » pronounced it did not even know it was doing so: the message was sent, but its cause remains unknown. Thanks to Freud and psychoanalysis however—both products of History—, we seem to have a way to begin understanding somewhat more how the unconscious world which commands our destiny works or, in simpler terms, what (partly) causes unconscious desire. Naturally, we shall have no sure means of verifying what our determinations may have been—although a significant change in our life may well be considered as the beginning of a verification--and we shall never know « absolutely » why we were assigned such a task, and even what the task, precisely, may have been., but if one accepts the figure of the asymptote as a good representation of the way psychoanalytical knowledge proceeds, the structure of an Other and of a determined subject will have to be taken into consideration.

⁹ « Symbolic », needless to say, because passage into the Real is not possible.

¹⁰ This research is already adumbrated in the seminar session of May 4th 1960 (*Le Séminaire* VII, « La Pulsion de mort », 243-256). I hope it is clear that this is the direction I am trying to follow. These are important pages and certainly deserve to be read over and again.

What remains, now, is to find out what place object *a* occupies in the said structure, if only because whatever it is, or represents, is what makes me run. (One may remember Lacan's formula: what catches me at its hook.)

In a preceding paragraph, I placed object *a* on the other side of the bar, that is to say out of reach, and it is at this impossible place indeed that we must suppose it lays. Because it is « lacking », as we saw, we persistently try finding substitutes for « it », *sublimation* Freud says: from *O* to *o'* in one of my drawings. The journey from *O* to *o'* is what this article is about: the space—and here we may remember what Winnicott taught us—which represents the « order » given the unconscious subject: « Do this, say this » or, more psychoanalytically: « Here is how Thou must desire. ».

A necessary condition to the apparition of a Subject in me, the Second Law, as I call it, acting like a Commandment, is the condition of my desire and thus organizes my life, that is to say defines the details of the task assigned to me as a subject. What the Commandment is, I do not know and can only guess at its *raison d'être*. And if its meaning and precise origin are unknown to me, it is because the « message » which reaches me in its concrete form is only a representation of what we shall call with Lacan « desire of the Other ». What I am driving at here is obvious: my sketches make no mystery about who the unconscious authors of the message are. Yet, again, things are not as simple as they look, for even though I may have used the adjective « unconscious » out of *Angst*, the term was necessary to highlight the difficulty of an analysis of the message sent to me in order that I became a subject. As a representation, that is to say as the metaphor of what I must now call the Other's unconscious desire, it does not mean what it apparently seems to mean. To put it plainly, the Commandment that determined the subject's destiny was never consciously given, and to blame parents without further ado is not only a sweeping statement but doesn't in any way help in the analysis of its real nature or, as I feel to say, its concrete but secret content.

Lacan spoke of the phallus, and this cannot be disregarded; it represents an essential progress in psychoanalytical theory and occupies an unforgettable place in the structure of desire, but the observation remains a generic notation and once accepted it does not bring sufficient light into what is particular and personal to each of us.

Which brings us to the ultimate question, or questions: the interrogation touching what I owe, and then what *I* owes, and *to whom*, which the first, Cartesian, « I » may well have concealed. Quite simply, what the subject owes is obedience to the law, our Second Law. We saw how *le Graphe* clearly explained what the imperative order was: « Desire » (yes, perhaps more simply « Desire » than « Desire this or that), as if desire were the only fact of desiring or as if desire were nothing else than its object. Already, such clarification helps, object *a* seems less mysterious.

Can we take one more step? I think we can. For indeed that little *a* on the other side of the impassable barrier points out an object we may well think

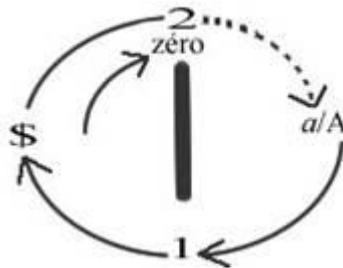
specific—even more so than the guy behind the bar!--, an object worth analyzing. Not only the concrete, material possibility given the infant to desire—as if out of the void-- , but the indication which provides the subject's drive with a precise content, and when I say « indication » I mean forced passage, « one way », which the word « order » only partially expresses, since it is an order which the subject obeys unawares; this is what, in one word, is « signified » to the subject though he or she does not know it.

Such a « *signifiant* », it is obvious, will depend on the particular history of each subject and it will be the task of a psychoanalysis to decipher its letter. Thus, beyond the generic and original dimension which founds the subject, can be discerned a specific signification, an unconscious injunction...which strongly resembles an unconditional demand for love; not only : « Desire » or « Love me », but « *Be my object* ». Or even, and whatever the content of that « Love me », yes: « Love me, even at the price of your own destruction », for this desire of the Other, although the necessary condition of the subject's coming to life, can be destructive.

At least do we now know with somewhat more precision who the unconscious givers of orders are: *le grand A*, in the Graph, the Other, with a capital O. In the structure as I see it, capital O and object *a* do occupy the same place, one covering the other, which amounts to saying that my object *a* is also the master of my desire, asking me nothing else but to desire « it ». ¹¹

$O = a$
or, in « lacanian » : $A = a$

Such is my reading of the Graph: from *zero* to *I* from where the subject, in 2, will desire as he or she « is told » (as *l'Autre* will have so signified).



Finally, not such a small little *a* as all that !

¹¹ Should we wish a « freudian » verification, it could easily be found among the pages of « Group Psychology and Analysis of the Ego » (1921), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of S.Freud*, Vol. XVIII (London : Hogarth), 69-143. See for instance: The object has so to speak consumed the ego. The object has been put in the place of the ego ideal. [...] being in love [is] a state in which the ego has introjected the object into itself.