HOW LACAN INVENTED THE OBJECT (a)

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Strange as it may seem, despite the quantity - kilo upon kilo of glosses - of introductions to Lacan and other dictionaries which are supposed to ease access to his work (but end up getting readers lost on the way), no one has as yet, at least as far as I know, accurately defined what the invention of the object (a) consisted of, how it came about or when it took place exactly.¹

The lost “veinte” of speech closed

Lacan invents the object (a). Given its strangeness, something must first be said of what this object might be. Instead of the unending course of lectures that would be necessary here but, dealing with an unmarkeable object, would not be especially appropriate, here is a turn of phrase which could indicate what we are dealing with. It is a quite common Mexican Spanish expression, often uttered as an exclamation: “Me cayó el veinte!”. To say it another way in the same language (but also to defer the difficulty of the translation), the expression might correspond to something like “Me di cuenta bruscamente”, “I suddenly realised” (accounting for something), as if in a flash of light, a sudden illumination. In Spain one would say “caí en la cuenta de que...” in which the verb caer, fall, from the Mexican expression, is found. In this usage, equivalents for caer can be found in French (one stumbles on an idea in French (tomber sur une idée) or an idea falls into place in one’s mind - une idée vous tombe dans la tête) as well as in German (the

Freudian Einfall also associates the coming forth of an idea and falling. An Argentinian equivalent would be "Se me prendió el foco", a turn of phrase which has the advantage of highlighting the idea that the seat of the fire - my head, my brain - came alight (as opposed to any action of my having lit the fire - a neutrality all the more marked if one notes that, textually, in the Spanish, it is not my "foco" but the "foco" which came alight... not the seat of my fire, but the seat of the fire which was alight... where I stood - my only claim to it being then to be its focus). In the same way, in "Me cayó el veinte", a certain object, a 20 cent coin, un centavo de peso, fell "to", that is to say "from" me, from my pocket, from my body; the coin is the grammatical subject of the sentence if not really the agent of the action. Indeed, with "Me cayó el veinte", it is just as if the coin and I were caught up, each in its own way, in a single action, an action such that there is no ground for making clear the agent. So much so that I do not think the relative misunderstanding into which I fell when that expression was said to me for the first time was wrong or even abusive. It was one of those interesting misunderstandings due to the unfamiliality (Unheimlichkeit) of a language which is foreign but well-known to one. I understood, in fact, the context doubtlessly aiding, moreover, something like "I got pulled up short", or "I got told off", or "that shut me up". It means more precisely something like "Eureka!" or "Yes, of course, that's it!" and one can easily imagine a Mexican Champollion shouting out with joy, just as he discovered he had deciphered the hieroglyphs: "Me cayó el veinte". The misunderstanding accentuated the part of the Other in the utterance, even tended to make that Other if not the agent at least the instrument of the action, of the closure of the utterance, of the utterance... strictly speaking... concluded; but the mere fact that, in this expression, "me" is but someone to whom something happens - the coin falls from me, is enough to show that, in the end, with all due deference to a linguistics which is as impoverished as it is summary, there is no "I" who masters speech, but that it is, on the contrary, speech which itself, of itself, concludes - or does not conclude, in which case "I" is still able to delude itself that its mastery is intact.

* English in the original

It can be noted here that the sexuality too is pronominally neutral. It would be premature to say of the sexual act "I take pleasure in it", or even, "I make love". The bodily pleasure in question does not seem to have much to do with an "I" as we learn from the fact that the misfortunes of sexuality - impotence, frigidity and all the rest - are in part linked to the illusion if not the belief that "I" fuck: they come to show, in the real of the symptom, that such is precisely not the case.

On the neutrality of speech, one of course cannot but refer to Michel Foucault quoting Beckett's famous "What does it matter who speaks?" at the very beginning and at the very end of his lecture "What is an author?"

But how are speech (put in its place as we have seen) and the object in question in "Me cayó el veinte" bound, or unleashed? To answer, let us question: where does the formulation which, literally, would read "the twenty fell (to me)" come from? No, it is not a roulette story in which the gambler wins thirty-six times his bet when he plays twenty and twenty... falls; it is not to a profit that speech is tied, but to a loss, to a falling, as our little cross-language investigation showed. It is a story of telephone booths which in Mexico, before telephone or credit cards were silently, insidiously, regularly and obstinately eaten up by machines, worked with a twenty centavo - the peso twenty cent coin. A not insignificant sum for someone who called from there and had no private phone. The caller had to put the twenty cents into the box, then dial the number he wanted. At the moment when the person called picked up the phone, a characteristic noise told the caller that the machine had swallowed up his twenty cents. It could be like the end of a kind of mad hope: "If I got my twenty cents back, rather than have them taken (from me)". Nothing of the kind, as soon as the conversation starts, it is gone, done, "me cayó el veinte". Remarkably, the meaning of the expression puts the fall at the end of the speech act: a "eureka", a sudden "realisation" is a conclusion, is not a question but an end put to a question. The expression short-circuits things then, since the object lost at the beginning, when speech begins, is equally lost at
the end, at the moment of the eureka, of agreement, of the final drop in tension.

Such is Lacan’s object (a), an object lost at the outset whose loss is realised by any speech which concludes. “Everything is cooked,” says the Indianist Charles Malamoud about the thought he studies, “one can only recook.”

That Lacan produced this object, no-one contests.

The invention of the object (a)

The moment of this invention is no ordinary one. As for a good number of real theoretical innovations, it was produced against a background of panic. All bearings are lost, even as far as the foundations of problematics which seem to be unsteady too. All this in ... L’angoisse [Angst] (the Seminar of 1962-63). So much so that, were one to keep just one single session of Lacan’s Seminars, this would have to be the one: January 9, 1963, including Lacan’s passage to the act (as one must call it), the trace of which is recorded in the stenotyped version through pages which are as indispensable as they are untidily bound, filled with crossings-out, inopportune underlinings, corrections made in Lacan’s hand, annotations made by students, all sorts of mistakes. If the material contained in these pages had to be reduced to two or three lines, I would choose those which mark nothing less than the greatest step taken by Lacan since the invention of the tripartite structure symbolic imaginary real in 1953. The invention of the object (a) takes place ten years later, and it is now thirty-five years since it happened.

I In Crisis

In order to present it, let’s begin with the panic, the uncertainty of Lacan’s working through. The crisis can be situated not in one or other point of his teaching but involves the whole of it. There are several clear signs of this in L’ANGOISSE.

- In the formulations with which Lacan was trying at the time to put words to the division of the subject, the term “other” remained ambiguous, sometimes object, the remainder of the division of the subject, sometimes image, the other of the mirror. That ambiguity was such that Lacan himself did not step back, against his own algebra, against the graph, from writing as (a) the object of fantasy with which the barred subject has a relationship of poinçon.

- A further sign of the serious crisis that Lacan’s working through undergoes in 1962: the impossibility of deciding, today still, in the transcription of this Seminar, on many occasions, between “Autre” (Other) and “autre” (other). A critical edition of these passages would undoubtedly do better today, rather than to force matters where solutions stay out of reach, to use an invented word in French - such as the word “otre” (other) which has the advantage of total homophony, to write the impossibility of distinguishing little and big uther, an impossibility which marks the limit of a conceptual distinction which is thus revealed to be subject to strong contestation.

Well, from January 9, 1963 on... it is over. Object (a), as an object, will have nothing further to do with the little other. Such is the major, decisive, crucial step. It is contained in a very simple sentence whose consequences are also immediate, manifold, explicit and capital, and perfectly recognisable as consequences, as we will see in the closing part of this presentation.

Lacan, at the beginning of this session, very quickly comes to rehearsing his thesis by which anxiety is a moment in which the object (a) comes into the Heim, into the “house of man”, the locus of an absence whose place is marked, in the diagram of the inverted bouquet, by the neck of the vase in the place of the Other, in other words in the mirror plane of the Other. That theory of anxiety is clinically confirmed notably with the subtle remark that it is not the absence of the breast which creates anxiety but its presence blocking up the hole of the Heim in the Other, and the same for the look, the voice, etc. Lacan speaks at that point, textually, of:
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[... something which I will designate straight off first of all with the letter (a) which you see here enthroned above the outline of the vase.]

The “straight off” seems strange to say the least... On the one hand the designation does not date from that day; on the other, it foreshadows the decisive sentence that I am bringing forth, here, step by step.

Thus “straight off” must be (falsely) literalised because there is something which is not or is no longer contained in Lacan’s very construction. What? What antimony of the ternary logic (SIR) do the signs we have just noted come under? This one: it has become impossible to persist in calling “little other” 1) the vase in the Other; and 2) the bouquet of flowers which comes in the neck of the vase, the object whose presence in the Heim provokes anxiety. It’s all the more difficult as Lacan identified this, via Karl Abraham, in the Seminar Transference: that this partial object is exactly a remainder which escapes the play of the libido which is reversible between i(a) and i’(a). Except in the greatest confusion, the letter “a” cannot therefore represent at the same time, in his algebra, the other and what, essentially, escapes the other - even if the other can happen to have it in the neck.

An essential positive factor, which will decisively contribute to lifting this ambiguity at last, comes from topology, the non (geo)metric science of surfaces. Since the seminar Identification, the year before L’Angoisse, Lacan has been able to tell the difference between two different sorts of object, specular objects (they have an image in a mirror) and those that are not specular. From there to relating these two sorts of object to the two little others which, up to this point, are not “confused” but, in their terminological non-distinction, linked together in a way that remains confused, there is but a step which will definitively be taken on January 9, 1963. It is precisely the very step which leads Lacan to invent the object (a) (his most important invention, he will say later). But it is important too to know how he invented it that day.

How Lacan Invented the Object (a)

We have noted a first point of panic in Lacanian algebra which is legible on the diagram of the inverted bouquet. There is a second point, a second incidence of these two little others, no less panicked, this time on the graph. One can in no way fold one on the other, two levels which the graph distinguishes precisely as belonging respectively to the symbolic and to the imaginary (the middle level and the upper one). Now, if i(a) is written in the place of the “little a” of fantasy, when i(a) is, as it should be, located at the imaginary level, the setting out of the two levels comes to nothing and the graph is ruined, which thereby paradigmatic distinction between the symbolic and the imaginary. Try though he may have in a previous session, Lacan can no longer fail to recognise that this state of affairs is impossible.

So we have two major mathemes, the graph and the inverted bouquet diagram, in a bad way. Lacan it clearly in mind that he is going to have to go back to the drawing board. Moreover, for some weeks people have been pestering him. For example, on November 28, 1962, he begins the session by saying that he is being pressured to set forth more clearly the “Mirror Stage” and the “Rome Report”, which comes down, in the rather reductive minds of those who are questioning him, to the imaginary and the symbolic. Here then is the text of January 9:

It is clear that this [i.e. the problems which have just been briefly reviewed] implies a further step in the situation of making clear what we mean by that object (a). I mean it is just that object we designate using (a) [an echo of the remark which has just been made on the letter a would be heard here]. I note that this algebraic notation has its function.

There. Everything is said. That last sentence, simple as it is, is the pivotal point after 10 years of teaching based on SIR, for everything that will follow on from that teaching.
The decisive step.

Certainly, the sentence may seem to be both too simple and opaque, even for those who perhaps remember that, in *Lettre pour Lettre*, writing about Hans, I thought it necessary to underscore the fact that, for Lacan studying the historical case, formalisation is the clinically decisive move. ¹ So let us follow the explanation Lacan gives for that last remark. It is the immediate continuation of the quoted text:

It [algebraic notation] is like a thread meant to allow us to recognise, through the various occurrences in which we encounter it, identity. Its notation is algebraic: (a); precisely to meet the objective of pure [my emphasis] pinpointing of identity, it having already been posited that pinpointing with a word, with a signifier, is always and could only be metaphorical, in other words leaving, as it were, outside the signification induced by its introduction, the function of the signifier itself.

The assertion according to which the letter “a” is algebra constitutes an expurgation. The invocation of metaphor comes to mark here the distance between word and thing, the fact that language, as Ferdinand de Saussure definitively established, is not a nomenclature. In the step taken here, it is not a matter of putting an end to the irremediable gap between words and things; quite the contrary, it will be about confirming the gap, locking it in. How? By radically dropping the metaphorical value of the letter “a”, its reference, in other words, to the little other. To put it another way, by noting that (a) is algebra, Lacan makes a cut, a cleaving between the signification of the letter (its metonymic reference to the specular little other, the letter “a” being the first letter of the word “autre” (other)) and its function of designation (of the non specularisable object). There is a cleaving that separates the signification of the signifier and the function of the signifier as such. The signifier does constitute, by designating it, an object in its identity, but at this cost: it must no longer signify anything at all.

As if to drive home his point, Lacan adds (and this will be the last of our quotations):

The term good, if it engenders the signification of good, is not good of itself and far from it, for it immediately engenders evil.

In fact this sentence is one of those on which Lacan corrected the stenotypist. She had written:

The term “bridge” [good = “bon” whose minimal pair “pont” - they vary only in that the initial consonant is voiced on the one hand [bɔ̃] and unvoiced on the other [pɔ̃] - equals bridge], if it engenders the meaning of bridge, is not bridge of itself and far from it, for it immediately engenders [the sentence does not continue]

As the stenotyped sentence seems not to be finished, Lacan adding “evil” with his fair hand, as, moreover, it is unlikely that Lacan said “is not bridge of itself” - that offends the ear (one might expect, despite its “Gongorism”, “is not a bridge of itself”) whereas “is not good” does not, I propose to put down to the stenotypist the appearance of “bridge” (if indeed the letters overwritten with the handwritten “good” should be read so). This certainly does not settle our account with what is overwritten. But, for the moment, it will be enough for us to treat the term “other” as “bridge” and “good” are treated here, letting us conclude that, as the term “good” is not good (nor the term “bridge” a bridge), so the letter “a” is not other.

Here there is the rift which constitutes the object (a) as such.

And Lacan goes on to add deed to speech and to writing. The cross-caps, more precisely the inscription, making a certain cut on the object having allowed him to isolate the object (a) there, here we have Lacan giving his audience the object (a) made out of cardboard. The formulation of
the giving is moreover as surreal as could be. He tells the audience, in his passage to the act:

The residual part is here. I constructed it for you, I'll pass it round. It has its small interest because, let me tell you, this is (a). I give it to you like a host, for you will make use of it later. Little (a) is made like this.\textsuperscript{15}

This passage to the act is important. It is part of the invention of the object (a). But how? But why is it as if called forth by the algebraic invention? Why, in any case, does it go with it?

Let us summarise or condense the matter: a cut, produced by a pure signifier, is itself constitutive of the object (a) as remainder, as fallen object, separated, lost. We evoked the invention of the ternary structure SIR; it can be seen that, in July 1953, the production of the object (a) covers that ground again and so confirms it. The symbolic must indeed be distinct from the imaginary for the signifier, defined in a much more drastic way than linguists do, to occur as a cut.

Literalisation, formalisation is therefore the decisive step. Lacan, in his interpretation of the dream of Irma's injection, gives that same function to the chemical formula.\textsuperscript{16} This feature is therefore capital three times: in the invention of analysis (the dream is said to be inaugural by Freud himself), in that of RSI and in that of the object (a).

There remains a remainder of that formal production of a remainder. The passage to the act is the immediately present clue to the working of another mode of transmission, beyond the purely formal one of the exact sciences. Even though in the exact sciences too, as Lacan noted, speech could not be done without entirely presenting the purely formal play of little letters.

Consequences.

There would appear to be four major inventions of Lacan, not one more than that. Four decisive steps which is a lot for a "doctrinaire" (as he called himself) as can be seen from the fact that Buddha only made two in all:
1/ the discovery that, desire bringing on suffering, the latter could only be done away with by giving up the former,
2/ the discovery of the middle path (refusal of strict asceticism).

For Lacan, the four steps could be said to be the following (each able to be dated to within a second)
1/ the invention of the mirror stage (1936)
2/ the invention of the ternary structure SIR (8 July, 1953)
3/ the invention of the object (a) (9 January 1963), dissimilar to the three others in that it is a consequence of cipherings although itself a ciphering

Let us now mention a certain number of immediate consequences of the invention of the object (a), for these consequences are so many clues to a major theoretical event having indeed taken place on January 9, 1963. Added one to the other, these consequences prove the existence of the event in question, a bit like the existence of God was proved by the incomprehensible presence of the idea of infinity in the human - in other words limited - mind: an infinite being had to exist for the idea of the infinite to have been put in such a limited mind.

I Consequence on mourning.

On January 23, 1963, the Seminar begins a reformulation of the problematic of mourning which shows there is a before and an after January 9, 1963. Mourning had indeed been discussed on November 28 of the preceding year. What did Lacan say about it at that time? He situated the "regressive identification" of mourning described by Freud (at least, presented by Lacan as such) as an identification with the
object; Hamlet's with Ophelia is exemplary. Seeing Ophelia sacrificed, dead, Hamlet enters into a "fury of the feminine soul". In this fury, Hamlet accepts everything, including the struggle against his own specular image: Laertes.

We have here the distance, the difference that stands between two sorts of imaginary identification: the identification with (a) i(a), the specular image such as it is given at the moment of the scene on the stage [Lacan had indeed shortly before identified as Hamlet Lucanus, the criminal in the play]; the more mysterious identification, the enigma of which begins being developed there, with something else, the object, the object of desire as such [...] [i.e. Ophelia]. [That object] is reintroduced on to the stage precisely through identification, in as much as it has just disappeared as an object [...] It is in this perspective that the return of Hamlet can be placed [...].

As can be imagined, this distinction between "two sorts of imaginary identification" seems most problematic after January 9, 1963, since only an enantionomorphic object can lend itself to such an identification and that the object (a) as topology realises it, cannot offer such a possibility. A real and notable change can therefore be expected in the theoretical landscape between November 28, 1962 and January 23, 1963. Indeed:

- In November, in a way which remains unclear, (a) is in play in the imaginary identification with the Lucanus (Hamlet III, 2, 120 ff) of the pantomime (the hesitation "(a)/i(a)", which we cannot attribute clearly to Lacan or to the stenotypist, is, in any case, significant). So much so that, belonging to the same unclear nature of what must be understood by (a) (image or object), Lacan has great trouble distinguishing from that identification another no less imaginary one, which he says is mysterious, enigmatic, with the lost Ophelia.

- On January 23 (careful, the doctrinal shift is small, even if it is clear and distinct), we are no longer dealing with two imaginary identi-

fications but with the regressive movement which, in mourning, turns love into identification. Now in love, the function of the object (a), under the name of agalma was isolated by Lacan, shortly before L'Angoisse, in the Seminar Transference... "one is a lover with what one does not have". If "what one does not have" is also what "one does not have anymore", in as much as one has tipped from a position of eromenos to a position of erastes (precisely by having lost the agalma), then identification with the lost object of Freudian mourning is explained: it is an identification which, regressively, regains the object one no longer has. But if that object really is (a) and not the little other, the identification will be "with the being" of that object, not with the image of the other as object lost. And Lacan goes on to cross the t's and dot the i's (the remark concerning the case of the mourner regressively identifying):

In this regression, in which (a) remains what it is, an instrument, it is with what one is that one can, if you will, have or not.

One is a lover with that instrument: a lost little (a), found in the other as Alcibiades located it in Socrates. The regressive identification of mourning retains its function of instrument for the object (a). But the instrument has become the being of the subject whereas it was its being lack.

It can be seen, then, in relation to mourning, how capital important the topological distinction between two sorts of object was, and notably how it removed certain unfortunate ambiguities from the session of November 28 about mourning.

This turnabout concerning the regressive identification of mourning goes in tandem with another and no less crucial change which will only be noted without comment here. In November 1962, the object of desire was Ophelia, taken as object towards which desire was directed, as object of the "desiring intention" - so to speak just long enough to make oneself understood - , in other words as phenomenological object, as
object preceding drive; in January 1963, in regressive identification, the object cause of desire will be involved, the object succeeding desire, the object bringing on desire through its lack rather than being desired.

II Consequence of autoerotism

Another major clue to the change that has taken place through the founding cut of the object (a): immediately following the remarks on mourning on January 23 there is an absolutely new Lacanian definition of autoerotism. Autoerotism is “disorder of the little (a)’s”, in other words “lack of self”; this self will, in fact, be given with the imaginary identification of the mirror stage, an identification which owes the founding power of the image to little (a). (Lacan does not say that autoerotism such as he has just repositioned it hardly deserves its name any longer, being rather an alloerotism - he undoubtedly thought he was turning things upside down enough without taking on the believers and followers of Freud.)

Does the importance of what is at stake here begin to be clear? Such a paradoxical definition of autoerotism is unthinkable in the framework of Freudian doctrine. The latter takes as its starting point, in fact, quasi axiomatically, the existence of a psychological subject, or of a psychological apparatus. It is not therefore only the conception of a psychological subject that gives way here, it is also the fact that this psychological subject is given the value or status of an axiom positing an existence: such a subject exists.

Via the setting up of the SIR ternary structure in 1953 and now the invention of the object (a), it is the invention of the mirror stage in 1936 that goes on wreaking havoc in metapsychology. This subversion of the idea of auto erotism is moreover (like the two above-mentioned inventions) also a consequence of a different approach to the psychosexual, the latter in effect are quite deaf to any account flowing from an initial psychological subject structuring experience; when the other pulls the strings, how can any claim be made for the pre-eminence of the psychological subject?

But it is also the very first consequences of the birth of little (a), which are important to us. In fact, some of the major consequences of this invention are already there on January 9, 1963, precise, well-developed, rigorous.

Immediately after the topo-algebraic invention of little (a), there follows, in the text of that session, the definition of a field which could be called that of objectality, different from that of scientific objectivity in so far as transcendentality could be said to have shaped it. And Lacan’s mentioning here of what he claims to have introduced and calls, at that time, his real, symbolic, imaginary “division” will not surprise. Nor will his reminder of the no less seminal mirror stage.

III Of two very different sorts of object.

Having brought forward these fundamental givens, he can base himself on what I will call his “circumcision” of little (a) to single out clearly now two sorts of object.

So the mathematical structure i(a) changes value as soon as the object (a), the object without a specular image, and the little object, which is to be put in the class of enantiomorphous objects are to be separated. Thus the mathematical structure i(a) must be read differently from now on while being written the same way. It is no longer: i of (a): “an image, of the other” which is to be read, but: i: “image of the other”, of (a): “sustained, in its brilliance, by the object (a)”. This new reading is another formulation of the invention of the object (a).

The successive distributions of features in one or other of the categories of object go almost without saying, a bit like, in bridge, a whole series of tricks can sometimes be taken very rapidly as soon as an essential trick has been successfully taken.

Of course, it is the situations in which there is shift from one status to another of the “same” object which especially hold Lacan’s interest, notably in that they confirm, by their very strangeness, that there indeed
are two different categories of object. Lacan mentions the Unheimlichkeit, in which the eye is no longer held by the specular image, or is no longer contained in that image, whereby there is shift from the specular image to that of the double, accompanied by a feeling of strangeness and anxiety.

 [...] this is the point at which something happens of which, I think, by our articulation of that function of little (a), the generality, the function, the presence can be shown, in the entire phenomenal field [...]

This shift from the specular image to the double allows a first distribution to be made: there is the object which can be exchanged, communicated, and the private, incommunicable object, “correlative of fantasy” adds Lacan without going into it, for the moment, any further.

The other case of strange shift, or shift towards the strange, which today takes on the full extent of its importance if one thinks about organ donation cases, involves the castrating mother’s “I’ll cut it off”. Being very Lacanian, Lacan, far from being frightened by it, involves the threat in the threat of its own logic, following the gesture up to its final consequences. Where would the object in question be, he asks, once it were cut off? The answer: this worse-for-wear phallus will have become a common object, able to be exchanged. There is a strangeness as soon as the object is taken thus, the manner of making of it a utensil would contravene its status. It becomes a phenomenological object (a new feature), removable (another feature) or again an object of sharing (another feature still).

 [...] there are two sorts of object, those that can be shared, those that cannot. Then I see those that cannot circulating all the same in the domain of sharing, with other objects whose status rests entirely on competition (that ambiguous competition which is at one and the same time rivalry but also agreement), they are quotable objects, they are objects of exchange... but there are “others” - and if I put forward the phallus, it is, of course, because it is the most famous in the light of the fact of castration -, you know, others that you are familiar with, the best-known equivalents of this phallus, those that precede it, the scymbalum, the nipple [...] when they enter [...] this field where they have no place, the field of sharing, when they appear there, anxiety tells us of the particularity of their status, the status of the objects which precede the constitution of the status of the common object, the communicable object, the socialised object. That's what the little (a) is all about.

Let us make a list of the differential features:

**Object (a)**
- non mirror-able
- non exchangeable
- non communicable
- non common
- non shareable
- non utensil
- non-removable
- non-quotable
- non-socialised
- correlative of fantasy
- anterior to the common object
- related to loss

**Phenomenological Object**
- mirror-able
- exchangeable
- communicable
- common
- shareable
- utensil
- removable
- quotable
- socialised
- non-correlative of fantasy
- posterior to the object (a)
- not immediately related to loss

IVA catalogue become possible.

An essential pathognomonic confirmation of the fact that Lacan is, at this point, working his way through to a tenable distinction is the following consequence: from this point on it becomes possible to constitute a catalogue of objects (a). Indeed, if there exists an effective possibility of classification, of including any given object in (or excluding it from) this list called a catalogue, this is, as J Goody
observed, because there is a distinctive feature which is functioning, operative, at work, to the point that any ambiguity that comes along can be lifted; a feature such that one no longer wonders (this is Goody's example) if the tomato is a fruit or a vegetable. To begin to set up the catalogue of objects (a), as Lacan does first of all by mentioning three of these objects (a) (nipple, scybalum, phallus), then by saying that there are probably five in any case, is to demonstrate, in action, that there is now available to us a precise criterion capable, given any object whatever, of telling us if it is an object (a) or not.

Certainly there already was, in psychoanalysis, something like a list, more or less easily put together, of objects of drive. On December 12, 1962, again, Lacan spoke of the “first objects, those which have been identified in the structure of the drive”, and mentioned the breast and the scybalum. However, something remained then very ill-determined in the list of objects of drive - perhaps too because Freud taught that the object was, among all the defining features of the drive, the one most independent of the drive.

If one refers to the oral anal genital sequence, the list of objects of drive comes down to three. Put together, they are, however, rather heterogenous in their status, since the phallus could be said to take advantage of investments which, for that very reason, are called “pre-genital” and since, conversely, these investments have been recognised in analytic experience to be already phallic.

If, on the other hand, the inventory of drives is expanded, as it was in Freud's work, other objects will have to be added to the list of three (hence the look for the scopophilic). But cases will arise in which it will be difficult to define the object in question, such as when the sadistic drive is spoken of. What is the object of the drive to master (Bemächtigungstrieb)? What different objects do the aggressive drive (Agressionstrieb) and the drive to destroy (Destruktionstrieb) have? In short, before the mention of the object (a), the list of drive objects does not hold together well and, on December 12, 1962, Lacan tries to give it a certain coherence by saying that it is all only about

On January 16, 1963, eight days after the invention of the object (a) and a month after the sentence quoted above, Lacan, according to his own fantastic turn of phrase, “enters the catalogue of the series of these objects”. He does so in the following terms:

 [...] for it is not true, if you think you can know the function of the maternal breast, or that of the scybalum, you know full well the darkness that remains in your mind about the phallus, and when the immediately following object is concerned, I'll give it to you all the same, so as to give some scope to your curiosity, that is the eye as such, there you know nothing at all.

Not only will there be, from the time of the invention of the object (a), a list, closed to boot, of objects (a), but the listed objects will be able, moreover, to be written on to a graph. This graph marks the fact that there are, between the objects, certain relationships. Here the graph is in its inverted V form. It would not have been possible on the simple basis of a vague list of objects of drive; it is proof of the heuristic value, for the clinic, of the invention of the object (a):

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1 oral
2 anal
3 Phallus
4 look
5 voice SUPEREGO
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This graph can be called the “graph of the levels of the object”, since that is the very word that Lacan uses several times. On June 19, 1963, he even ends up numbering the levels of this graph, thus indicating two things:
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- that it is indeed a graph, and as such oriented
- that this graph includes a point of inflexion at the top, having a special status as little (a). So much so that this graph, equivalent in form to the graph of desire, can also be called, using a Lacanian play on words, the “graph of making love to death”

The problem thus formulated is important to us for it is, indissociably, that of “making love to death” and that of analysis. Why is there this common problematic involving two issues which are all the same different? Because the phallic little (a) is the stage in which takes place the disjunction between desire and pleasure (session of June 19, 1963); now this is precisely the problem of analysis as an exercise of desire.

The scope of the remark about algebraic notation, the letter (a) as such, can be seen here. It opened the possibility of saying both that, in the list of objects, little (a) is involved each time, and that little (a) is never involved, as is shown, for example, in the session of the Seminar devoted to excrement, in which the function of loss is referred not to the excrement but to the phallus, in which the loss of the excrement is sometimes only taken to be very problematic in so far as it involves not the excrement, but the phallus.

V Consequence for sexual relations

One of the major consequences of the invention of the object (a) will not be developed here: the one concerning the theory of “making love to death”, in other words of fucking, a term which is less doctrinally loaded today than that of “sexual relations”. Like those that have just been presented, this consequence is immediately present, involved. But that involvement remains as if a minima, and only what follows will see its full extent developed. A study of the stages of that development could not fit within the limits of an article.

Conclusion

Let us conclude with a summary. The invention of the object (a) by Lacan on January 9, 1963, resolved (at least for the time being) a serious crisis in his working through which was under threat of internal contradiction. The threat was real. The way out of it passed through an act of formalisation, supported however by a passage to the act which spoke clearly of its limits from the point of view of the transmission of psychoanalysis. Proof of the fact that there took place that day one of the rare major events of Jacques Lacan’s journey can be found in the consequences that he himself drew from it almost immediately.

Notes

1.

On this subject, André Green’s article, “L’objet (a) de J. Lacan, sa logique et sa théorie freudienne”, Cahiers pour l’analyse (No 3, mai 1966), cannot be considered to be recommended reading. It is an example of what has been much repeated since: paraphrase of a process of writing-thinking through, a process which has now been demonstrated to have as one of its stylistic properties to be unparaphraseable, to disappear in the process of paraphrase through becoming... another process.

My thanks go to Marcelo Pasternac whom I consulted on this and who gave me the information which I relay here.

In the same way as the popular speech analysed above, Marguerite Duras’ “on dit”, the consummate form of subjectivation, stands as a severe and definitive correction to the remarks of someone like Martin Heidegger according to which “one”, being “not-me”, is the very figure of inauthenticity.
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5. Foucault, M.


6. Malamoud, C.


7. On the nodal character of the invention of the ternary structure symbolic imaginary real, as well as on the limits of that invention, limits which Lacan himself explored in his last workings through, the reader can be referred to my book *Freud, et puis Lacan*, Paris: EPEL, 1993.

8. Lacan, J.


9. A presentation of it can be found in the text “Remarque sur le rapport de Daniel Lagache”, Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, Paris, Seuil, 1966. Reading the text, it is important not to neglect the fact that the use of the optical diagram again in *L'angoisse* precisely makes major points, present at the beginning of the 1960s, out of date.

10. Lacan, J.

*L'angoisse*, p. 3 of the January 9, 1963 session.


12. Ibid., p. 17 of the November 21, 1962 session.

13. Allouch, J.


14. One would expect “is not a bridge of itself” or, better: “not of itself a bridge”.

15. Lacan, J.

*L'angoisse*, p. 29 of the January 9, 1963 session.

16. Allouch, J.


17. Lacan, J.


“Two asymmetrical figures which are images of one another are said to be ‘enantiomorphic’, Martin Gardner, *L'Universe ambidextre, les miroirs de l'espace temps*, Paris, Seuil, 1985.

This same problem will be dealt with again on January 30, 1963 (pp. 21-22 of the session): “We mourn someone of whom we can tell ourselves: ‘I was her lack’ [...] we did not know that we fulfilled that function of being in the place of her lack”. What we give in love is essentially what we do not have; and when what we do not have comes back to us, then there is assuredly regression [a concession to Freud?], and at the same time revelation of the way in which we were lacking for that person in order to represent that lack. But here, because of the irreducible character of the misunderstanding concerning this lack, the misunderstanding is simply reversed in that the function we had consisting in being her lack we now believe to be translatable as our having been lacking for her, whereas it was precisely by virtue of that that we were precious and indispensable for her.


On this loving couple, Claude Calame’s *L’Éros dans la Grèce antique* (Paris, Belin, 1996) is very informative.

That analysis confirms the remark in my study of the *Érotique du deuil* according to which mourning makes the mourner an erastes - while regressive identification establishes or re-establishes him as eromenon. It would thereby have a quietening effect, producing, if only by illusion, the mourner’s not having lost everything since he gets back not the lost object which he mourns, but the object whose loss made him the lover of the object he has lost.
FROM ABOVE AND FROM BELOW

Gustavo Etkin

I always felt great admiration for some who would speak of topology with so much enthusiasm and ease. The turns of the Torus, the Cross-Cap, the bottle of Klein, The Moebius Strip. One surface, the a-sphere, there is no inside or outside, only turns which are a writing. A writing which is a cut. And identification which - Oh, what a marvel! - has the same name in topology as in psychoanalysis. A coincidence which is intensified when we discover that that homeomorphism is the result of the continuous transformation of one point into another. Not to mention the interior 8, where we psychoanalysts humbly situate ourselves in the place of the semblance of (a) always careful of maintaining that ethical distance from the Ideal and the Phallus so that the turns of the Torus may continue to be made, so that demand and desire may be enunciation in act!!!

And my admiration was transformed into extasy when once I heard say: “My clinic is like this. It is that.”

An other intuition which is not that of two spheres speaking amongst themselves, with their respective insides and outsides, makes necessary then, another geometric consistency for the speaking-being. This is obvious.

I recalled the comic strips in which the characters, as they spoke, had little balloons coming out of them, strips of words or letters coming out of their mouth. In the place of that, Moebius Strips, Projective Planes

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