

Fig. 1—l'objet petit a/the object small a has been a subject of fascination among people in different walks of life: above is the image of a sticker that you can glue on your favourite thermos. It denotes the cause and failure of desire. And presents itself as a logical monster or chimera. It is linked to the existence of hysteria and the notion of the unconscious

Inconspicuous as it may seem the *objet petit a/object little a* is a chimera. It will call upon desire as it causes it. It will reroute, shift and multiply when it gets it. It will dismiss the coveted desire as it passes from being a seductive entity to becoming an object of desire. Seductive then dismissive it will multiply and shift its appearance. In language, it features that much debated moment at which a *sign (a)* becomes a *thing (a)*: or, let us write them *-(-a)—a sign—*and *“a” an object*. The **object little a** is these *two-in-one*. It moves and diversifies: in puns...virtual [Rube Goldberg \(RG\)](#) machines.

It plays out *causally* (RG machine), then shifts to *semiotics* (the pun): if not a language pun then, even better, the visual pun... which plays with cause: the *libido* as a cause. An ornamental drive producing visual puns caused by desire. And so with no real cause? A symptom as a *question*, and no other cause than the *desire* that responds to it. Whereby the respondent becomes guilty before the symptom in question. We find a commercial exploitation of beriddled entities in the [gadget](#). We are guilty as charged, we have fun and therefore we buy them. They elicit the impulse of spending.

Bataille gives us a theory of such spending in the [Accursed Share](#) (La part maudite). If we look at them from the vantage point of Lacan's discourses (the 3 quarter turns from *mastery* to *hysteria*, to *analysis* to *university*) there is no way around the *little object a*. If it is proposed as a *problem* it has *no* solution. If proposed as a *question*, answering is a *trap*. If contained by *expression* it is *violent*. But in all of these questions notice that no real problem is defined, no specific question is asked, and the expression leaves the *other* no space. S/he is taking hostage by the *object little a*.

But we have the choice of considering the **object little a** from two vantage points: from the vantage point of *illusion*, and the *fictional* vantage point. From the fictional vantage point—which is clearly the one we are adopting here—we are interested in the adventures of the *object little a* and how it fares in the world, with the work of time. From the vantage point of illusion, however, the **object little a** features as an unchangeable core: it is the result of a swap... it claims the place of [sub-stance](#). Or, claims to represent substance while keeping it captive. From the vantage point of fiction, it is therefore an impostor. It is accordingly a regular guest of the impostor syndrome.

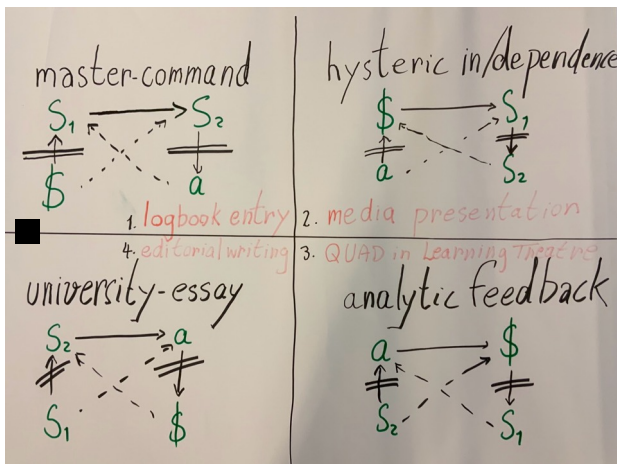


Fig. 2— The four Lacanian discourses brought together as a single model (i.e. a non-repetitive) series, linked by the quarter turn of the terms in the diagrams belong (moving clockwise). The black square marks a *punctum*. Break, pause, decision, new ground zero

However, it can only work in this way on the premise that *discourse* is ruling the grounds. That the **truth—>agent—>other/—>impact** sequence has been *substituted* for the **\$—>S1—>S2/a** consequence. Which means that if the object little a offers a discursive problem (*without* definition), a discursive question (which is a *riddle*), and in a discursive expression that leaves the other *no* space, it works in this way because discourse is by its nature *distributive*. If so, it cannot be worked out in conversation. We then have identified the *specific* point at which a therapeutic situation cannot be dealt with in therapeutic terms—or, therapeutic premises—and we have to move *from* therapy *to* teaching: that is a framework where problems are defined, questions improved and

expression leaves a space for the other. Which the sphinx will claim but never actually deliver.

That is, teaching as a psychoanalytical practice defined in a post-clinical era, in which criticality in **agent**—>**other** relations moves *alongside* therapy: that is, *contingently*—alongside and touching—to therapy, *resembling* it. That is, screening, intercepting and framing therapeutic practices in relations of *sameness*, *similarity*, *difference* and *otherness*. So, by asking for problems to be defined and questions to be refined, the teacher will attempt to impact making *space* for whichever truth there might have been in the matter at first (before the scam): i.e. *prompting* making.

The discursive swap is a residue of the *clinical* assumptions; resting on pathological ascriptions. While moving *from* therapy *from* teaching, leaves aside the pathological ascriptions—as desk theory—and instead develops *assignments* that might turn illusion to *fiction*. Accepting Lacan's *quarter turns* (90°) as an early repertoire bringing us beyond discourse *per se*, are early steps in this direction. The quadrants of Lacan's schemata then already have been transposed from a *distributed* definition (between agents) to an *operative* definition (within agents). It is a [homomorphism](#).

Which means that the *object little a* can shift between distributive and operative *modes*. In the operative mode it appears to work like Roman Jakobson's *shifter*—making and orienting space—while in the distributive mode it annihilates and disorients space. It is either a warping agent (*shifter*) or a chimera (a *sphinx*): a *fulcrum* at ground zero (0), or *placeholder* of the empty set (\emptyset). It is either a stowaway at every shift from the same, the similar, the different and the other (fiction), or it is part of a discursive contraption working by simulation, substitution and erasure.

Hence the understanding that there is no need to invent a gobbledygook language—tethered to *Lalangue* (Lacan)—nor a *sinthome* to live by/with trauma. These creations derived from the idea that the topics of psychoanalysis are made and resolved in language/discourse. Instead, we need to be weary of the attempts of distributive intelligence at annexing, colonising, suppressing operational intelligence. Here mastery, hysteria, analysis and having/making a point (which the university discourse arguably is about) are normalised in the sense of being *jointly* included *and* belonging.

That is, integral parts of the life-cycle of creative work where knowledge will be partly unknowing—which is the style and signature of the *unconscious* in psychoanalysis—or known only by snippets (*singularities*) or premonitions (*excrescences*). Using the language of Lacan's student [Alain Badiou](#). In this perspective, the quadrants of Lacan's quarter turns (**Fig. 2**) is a textbook example of a *desiring machine*. That is, in which desire is not held hostage but refined through the rungs of learning, to be a causing agent in a real sense: if only, in producing a living collective awareness.



Fig. 3—Jacques Lacan with his [Davidoff Culebra](#) in his teeth, passing the large A of anarchy tagged on an urban facade. His errand was with the small a, *l'objet petit a*.

That is, (a) collective in the sense of individuation as *assemblage*, (b) collective in the political sense of the acting *multiple*, or (c) collective in the trans-individual cultural sense of the *rhizôme*. But moving from Lacan and Badiou to Deleuze and Guattari, may amount to move from gobbledygook to balderdash. This does not derive from the discursive assumption—since D&G is tethered to agent-other pathways—but from certain mathematical assumptions that will need a separate treatment.

From [earlier work](#), however, we already know that the problem is linked to a different kind of chimera: the mathematical monsters of fractal geometry, their challenge to topological numbers and the ordeal of defining smooth and striated spaces for operative narratives. Walking alongside as the key to a contemporary approach and rub of the [learning theatre](#).