

1. The Lacanian Subject

Chapter Overview

In contradistinction to the self-certain Cartesian subject, this chapter will present an understanding of the Lacanian subject as constitutionally divided and coincidental with its own pulsational emergence. Such a conception of the subject will allow us to account for the impossible conjunction of being and meaning which challenges any attempt to conceive of the subject as self-conscious, self-adequate, or as ‘individual’ in the etymological sense of the term. Against such conceptions of the subject, the Lacanian subject will be posited as unstable, impermanent and as coterminous with its own assumption, an assumption which cannot be reduced to the illusory self-image of the ego but is rather, given its pulsational status, an assumption of, and thus a position of, subjectivity which must be perpetually repeated anew.

Through an examination of the various stages of Lacan’s Graph of Desire, the chapter will demonstrate the retroactive logic of the subject’s constitution in and from the place of the Other - the field of language and law as it manifests for the subject – and the subject’s consequent and constitutive division between symbolic and imaginary identification. As the subject can only be conceived from and on the basis of a language or system of thought to which it is necessarily irreducible, a language or system of thought which is Other to itself, the subject, as it arises in the field of the

Other, experiences itself as lacking. In addition to the lack in the subject, it will be shown how the Other is also experienced as lacking and how these two experiences of lack are such that they cannot be taken to coincide – that is to say, the subject and the Other are neither reducible to one another nor are they complementary in the sense that they would seal each other to form a whole. The persistence of lack in the subject and in the Other will be shown to give rise to a movement of desire, a desire to recapture the unity which will be taken to have preceded the disunity with which the subject necessarily experiences itself and a desire to shore up the lack experienced in the Other, to complete the Other. This movement of desire will be distinguished from the other ‘forces’ which would affect the subject – need, demand and the drive - and explained in terms of both *jouissance*, as the purely presumed completion which would be the impossible satisfaction of desire, and *objet petit a*, as that illusory stand in for that which would afford such a completion. It will be shown how the subject at one and the same time maintains itself in relation to *objet petit a* and safeguards itself from the encounter with *jouissance* which would, insofar as it would annul desire, be destructive of the subject. The chapter will thus have shown that the subject is such that it must maintain itself in a relation of fantasy but that through traversing the fantasy, through refusing the sedimentation of any particular fantasy, the subject is capable of locating itself, rather than the illusory non-object that is *objet petit a*, as the cause of its desire. Importantly, as traversing the fantasy can be understood as a refusal to allow any particular fantasy to sediment and as fantasy itself is a necessary aspect of subjectivity, as fantasy is that which supports desire, the traversing of the fantasy should be understood as a pulsational possibility. It is not for the subject to traverse the fantasy once and for all. Rather, traversing the fantasy should be understood as an endeavour which must be repeated. This pulsational assumption of

and by the subject as the cause of its desire will be shown to entail an ethical potential insofar as it necessitates the assumption of responsibility for its position of subjectivity, the assumption of responsibility for what it takes 'itself' to be.

1.1 Lacan's Return to Descartes

Any conception of ethics requires a conception of the subject insofar as without a sense of that which would enact what might be considered to be ethical and without a conception of that towards or for which a particular action might be considered ethical, it is difficult to see what meaning would be left in the term. If events are understood such they simply occur or if events effect no one, then we would not, generally, consider them in ethical terms. Commonplace conceptions of ethics would ascribe them to something akin to a self-adequate, essential and substantial agent, an agent certain of its own self and its own thoughts, such as the Cartesian *cogito*, the subject which can be certain of its existence because of the fact of its thinking. Such a conception of the subject can be understood to be flawed for a number of reasons. Focusing on the Cartesian subject in particular, there appears here to be a gap which insists between the 'I' of 'I think' and the 'I' of the 'I am' which follows as a logical conclusion of the 'I think'. That is to say, either these two 'I's are not the same thing or the second is already assumed in the positing of the first. 'I think' already entails the subject 'I' and, thus, the conclusion 'I am' is strictly superfluous. Descartes has not really proved or substantiated anything beyond what he had already presupposed. On the basis of such criticism, it might appear necessary, or, at least, valid, to dismiss Descartes and his notion of subjectivity. Given, however, the impact Descartes'

thought has had on the manner in which we do consider subjectivity it might seem somewhat hasty to dismiss it out of hand. As Lacan puts it;

The type of people that we shall define, using a conventional notation, as *dentists* are very confident about the order of the universe because they think that Mr Descartes made manifest the laws and procedures of limpid reason in the *Discourse on Method*. His *I think, therefore, I am*, so essential to the new subjectivity, is not as simple, however, as it would appear to these dentists, and some even think they detect in it a pure and simple sleight of hand. If it is in fact true that consciousness is transparent to itself, and grasps itself as such, it does seem that the *I* is not on that account transparent to it. It is not given to it as different from an object. The apprehension of an object by consciousness does not by the same token reveal to it its properties. The same is true for the *I*.

(Lacan, 1988/1978: 6)

Utilising Descartes' errors, in such a manner that he can at one and the same time oppose his direction while maintaining the often hidden kernel of his findings, Lacan situates the subject (and 'cogito') as *of* the unconscious. For Lacan the subject is always (being) constituted in relation to the Other and in particular in relation to the desire of / for the Other.

Given the non-definitional character of Lacan's theorising of the subject, it may make some sense to begin by saying what the subject is not. By indicating a subject of the unconscious, Lacan clearly rejects the notion that the subject is in any way commensurate with the conscious individual. The traditional notion of the conscious, or even atomised, individual is generally run seamlessly into a notion of self-governing agency. In delimiting the subject of doubt as a certainty in 'I', Descartes can be understood to have glided over this crucial issue of agency. The 'I' which is certainly thinking insofar as it is doubting is posited as the master of its own perception. What is productive in Lacan's reading of Descartes is that, rather than dismiss *The Meditations* on the grounds that they simply occlude the complexities of

subjectivity in favour of positing that which they set out to discover, Lacan fathoms in Descartes text an indication of something beyond the contained subject. When Descartes asserts his desire for certainty, Lacan reads not only the ‘rational’ and empirical surface or aim of Descartes’ text, but also, and especially, the very desire attested to here.

What is Descartes looking for? He is looking for certainty. *I have*, he says, *an extreme desire to learn to distinguish the true from the false* – note the word *desire* – *in order to see clearly* - in what? – *in my actions, and to walk with assurance in this life*.

(Lacan, 1977/1973: 222)

In placing all certainty in doubt and yet maintaining unquestioningly the desire for certainty, Descartes not only introduces the modern concept of the subject but does so at the expense of noticing the subject *behind* the modern concept of the subject. Put simply, the subject of the unconscious is at work all along in *The Meditations* and is consequently overlooked. Lacan’s reading of Descartes not only indicates the unconscious subject but indicates its primacy. The subject of the unconscious is evident but unacknowledged in Descartes. What Lacan reads into Descartes’ *Meditations* is the unwitting discovery of the unconscious primacy of subjectivity and consequently – given this primacy is read through a secondary manifestation – the intractable split in the subject. In announcing the ‘I’ as both premise – *I think* or *I doubt* - and conclusion – *therefore I am*, Descartes indicates a significant doubling, one that Lacan will come to theorise under the terms *énoncé* and *énonciation*.

Lacan characterises the Cartesian cogito as *homunculus*, or ‘little man’, as a positing of something inside which retains a certain mastery. The image of the matryoshka doll is perhaps useful here in picturing Lacan’s critique. In the matryoshka, each doll

contains within itself another, smaller, but structurally identical, doll. The homunculus Lacan suggests in Descartes theory works in the same way. If the cogito is but a little man within each individual, or within Descartes himself, as that is the example we have to go on, then the cogito has *proved* nothing or adduced nothing. If the certainty of our existence is in a homunculus within, then the whole process of adducing certainty simply has to begin again – a reduction *ad infinitum*.

Against this homunculus, Lacan posits the barred subject; \exists . The bar here indicates something of the relation of the subject to language. Where the Cartesian *cogito* is brought about in ignorance of the functioning of language in its very formulation, Lacan's subject is first and foremost the subject of language. In the *cogito* when Descartes believes he has uncovered the certainty of his own existence through the pursuance of doubt to its, for him, logical extreme what he has actually done is to represent 'himself' to 'himself' or, phrased otherwise, he imagines himself but such imagining can only come about on the basis of him *symbolising* himself. Lacan illustrates this point by invoking the notch an imaginary primitive man might have made to indicate his kill in the hunt. This signifying appears to begin, then, with a pragmatic movement. The notch is made to indicate a kill in order that the hunter will be able to differentiate this kill from subsequent kills. It is counting. But, already, for Lacan, it is more than mere counting. Lacan points out that in this first mark the subject has already or must already mark himself. The notch or stroke does not only indicate the animal but indicates the animal *killed*, that is, it indicates the subject in relation to the hunt and indicates this for the subject.

The subject himself is marked off by the single stroke, and first he marks himself as a tattoo, the first of the signifiers.

(Ibid.: 141)

In so marking the stroke as a representation to and of himself, the primal subject has already encountered ‘himself’ in a division. The one marked is not simply one but “*one one*” (Ibid.), as opposed to *two* ones or *three* ones. Lacan’s point here would be that the one marked operates on two levels. In marking *one*, one always necessarily brings about a division insofar as the one marked, as it signifies something, appears to the subject as *one mark meaning one*. It is at the level of calculation, of meaning making or signification that the subject constitutes himself.

In this respect, the two ones are already distinguished. Thus is marked the first split that makes the subject as such distinguish himself from the sign in relation to which, at first, he has been able to constitute himself as subject.

(Ibid.)

The logic in operation here is that of the impossibility of the ‘private’ language. Any attempt to communicate, albeit to *oneself*, necessarily and already marks and describes a division. A similar point may be made with regard to the example of the man on the desert island who devises a complex of signs to more easily manage his life there. A series of coloured stains are used to indicate the various routes to different foods; a blue stain indicates fruit, a red stain indicates hunting ground for meat etc. Taken superficially, one might surmise that this man has indeed constructed a truly private language. There is no one else on the island who could be the recipient of the communiqués, there is not even anyone else who could immediately decipher what the complex of signs might mean or whether, in fact, they might mean anything at all. But the point is that the man on the island does in fact (endeavour to) communicate with someone; himself. The very need to devise a system of

communication for delivering messages to himself indicates a certain splitting. The man who 'sends' the message is not the same man who 'receives' the message. Were he, there would be no need to construct or sense in constructing the 'language' in the first place.

The logic apparent in this example of a 'private' language not only illustrates the, *stricto sensu*, impossibility of a private language as such but allows us to grasp the radical divisionary function of language even when described on such a restricted level. The man who has to devise a system of communication in order to communicate his own survival to and for himself, just as the man who marks himself as one within the order of ones implicated in the hunt, necessarily draws attention to the non-unitary status of what might in common parlance be termed *himself*.

Similarly, Descartes, in positing 'I think' and concluding 'I am', has invoked a splitting or division. The 'I' which is said to think is already marked off from the 'I' which says that there is thinking. The subject here posits itself but not in the sense that the subject creates itself in a pure becoming. Rather, what Lacan demonstrates is that the Cartesian subject posits itself as disunified, as duplicated, as, in a sense, impossible, insofar as in positing itself it presents, and only presents, itself as an image of itself for itself.

[The subject] sees himself as constituted by the reflected, momentary, precarious image of mastery, imagines himself to be a man merely by virtue of the fact that he imagines himself.

(Ibid.:142)

This occlusion of the unconscious mechanisms and prioritisation of conscious mastery is also evident in James Strachey's translation of Freud's *Wo Es war, soll Ich werden*; "Where id was, there ego shall be" (Freud, 1973/1933: 112). In Strachey's version the ego can easily be read as the (desired) supercession of the id. Lacan, in '*The Freudian Thing, or The Meaning of the Return to Freud to Psychoanalysis*' (1977/1956b), questions the validity of such a translation. Lacan brings our attention to the lack of article in Freud's original, a lack that, Lacan maintains, stipulates that *Es* here - insofar as it is not objectified with any article as Freud was prone to do when referring to either the id or the ego (i.e. *das Es* and *das Ich*) - does not refer to the *Id* but rather to the unconscious subject. Hence, Lacan gives us his new translation;

Wo (Where) *Es* (the subject – devoid of any *das* or other objectifying article) *war* (was – it is a locus of being that is referred to here, and that in this locus) *soll* (must – that is, a duty in the moral sense, as is confirmed by the single sentence that follows and brings the chapter to a close) *Ich* (I, there must I – just as one declared. 'this am I' before saying, 'it is I'), *werden* (must become – that is to say, not occur (*survenir*), or even happen (*advenir*), but emerge (*venir au jour*) from this very locus in so far as it is a locus of being).

(Lacan, 1977/1956b: 128)

Where the subject was, there must I come into being.

or

There where it was, it is my duty to come into being.

Lacan's re-translation not only avoids the prioritisation of the ego implicit in Strachey's translation, where one can easily read the ego as supplanting the id, it also draws out of Freud's sentence an ethicality. At the heart of Lacanian subjectivity is an ethical calling. In Strachey's translation there is an indication of development where a

temporal progress supplants the primacy of the id with the primacy of the ego. This might be understood in the fashion in which ego-psychology has often interpreted Freud as advocating the goal of analysis as the strengthening of the ego. In Lacan's re-translation, on the contrary, the ego is not mentioned and the id is not supplanted. Rather, the 'it' and the 'I' here can both be understood to stand for the subject. The 'it' indicates the unconscious mechanisms or that which arises in the unconscious without the appearance of any conscious agency or agencies author(is)ing it. The 'I' indicates the position to be assumed wherein the subject assumes responsibility for that which has arisen in the unconscious without the appearance of any conscious agency or agencies author(is)ing it. This is not, however, to suggest that in assuming responsibility one somehow attains one's proper position and the unity of subjectivity. There is none. The ethical invocation of *Wo Es war, soll Ich werden* is not something than can be responded to once and for all in an attainment of subjective security. Rather it is momentary and perpetual. It is momentary insofar as it manifests in conscious life only fleetingly. It is perpetual insofar as it is indicative of the unconscious processes which necessarily continue unobserved.

If for Descartes *I am thinking* proves that *I am*, the question remains, what happens to *I* after the thought? If *I am thinking* can be understood as a representation which posits and thus proves the (existence of the) subject, then this might suggest that when the subject is not being represented in the thought *I am thinking*, neither is the subject being. That is to say, not only that Descartes' formulation is of the *I* as temporal and temporary, but also that it conjoins the notions of thinking and being in this temporariness. If *I am* so long as and only so long as *I am thinking*, then the being adduced by Descartes is a punctual one. What Descartes does not adequately answer

here, but what is nonetheless raised in his text, is the question of what is going on when *I am not thinking*, i.e. not (re)presented in thought. Such questioning necessarily raises a question over Descartes hasty conjunction of *being* and *thought*, a question which will become central to Lacan's reformulation of the subject.

As in the example of Descartes, the subject, in order to present itself, necessarily relies upon some form of language or signifying system, whether this be the notch on the cave wall, Descartes' *cogito* or a proper name etc. In so representing itself for itself or, more accurately, as represented, the subject comes into play and experiences itself in the Other (as language) and consequently as other (to or from itself). The signifier of the subject comes to take the place of the subject and, as such, constitutes the subject as extinguishable.

Language, in the sense of a natural language, is other insofar as it precedes any given subject. We do not invent the language we speak, read, write or think and, consequently, the words we use, even the most 'personal' of words, are always already something alien to us. Language precedes us and succeeds us.

We are fundamentally and radically in a world that is beyond us. In one sense this world is the *actual* world around us, the paraphernalia of our lives, including the objects with which we surround ourselves and the people by whom we are surrounded. In another sense this is the language with which we attempt to communicate and understand both ourselves and the world around us, including the language or languages we are immersed in. To conceive of a thought or even a feeling requires us to utilise and therefore rely upon language. To assign meaning to

anything is to necessarily rely upon language. When, therefore, Descartes endeavors to ascertain the certainty of his own existence, he not only relies upon the languages he already ‘knows’ but unwittingly falls back on and falls into the trap of the grammar of those languages.

In the sense that we are represented in language both by ourselves and by other people and both for ourselves and for other people, we can understand language to be constitutive of our own self perceptions and formative of the ego.

Through reading Descartes, we can understand, then, that the subject is split. For Descartes, as exemplified in the claim *I am thinking, therefore I am*, being and thought are expressed as isolatable concepts. That they are again conjoined into one moment, while testifying to Descartes conception of them as unified or unifiable, nevertheless testifies to their ‘initial’ separation. For Descartes the *I* can be located in this conjunction, thus rendering, as we have seen, the punctual conjunction of being and thought as the point at which the *I* can, momentarily, arise; “this limits me to being there in my being only in so far as I think that I am in my thoughts” (Lacan, 1977/1957: 165). Lacan here radicalises Descartes by inverting his, implicit at least, conclusion. For Lacan, there is no conjunction of being and thought as such. The subject, *I*, must ‘choose’ between the two. Hence Lacan’s reformulations of the cogito as “I think where I am not, therefore I am where I do not think” and, subsequently, “I am not wherever I am the plaything of my thought; I think of what I am where I do not think to think” (Ibid.: 166).

Lacan here would appear to indicate that where the Cartesian formulation posits an immediacy between thought and being - and thus language, which would be explicit in the former and which would encapsulate both in expression - there is, in fact, none. For Lacan the subject, *I*, arises in the disunity of being and thought and is rendered both possible and impossible through the functioning of language. As such the place in which Descartes would locate the subject is for Lacan no place. One might understand Lacan here as criticizing humanity's tendency to place itself in a central or axial position between not only being and thought but between signifier and signified.

the S [signifier] and the s [signified] of the Saussurian algorithm are not on the same level, and man only deludes himself when he believes his true place is at their axis, which is nowhere.

(Ibid.)

Lacan's reformulation of the cogito here indicates the disunity of the subject. Either *I am not thinking* or *I am not*. Being and thought are mutually exclusive. One reason for such a reformulation is the notion of the unconscious. Thinking for Lacan would connote unconscious thought, as opposed to the (desired) conscious thought attested to in Descartes. This would then suggest that the *I am* in Lacan's "I am where I do not think" (Ibid.) indicates an illusory or fantasmic being insofar as it is a pure assumption; i.e. the ego. The split here between the unconscious which refuses being and the ego which refuses unconscious thought does not indicate a true choice of positions between which some atavistic *I* must or even can choose. Rather, for Lacan, the split is constitutive of subjectivity itself.¹

¹ The precise manner in which the subject would be divided as it is constituted in relation to language, its emergence in the field of the Other, the symbolic order, would determine the clinical structure of the subject in question. That is, whether the subject is neurotic, psychotic or perverse. In terms of the former, it is important to point out that Lacan sub-divides the neurotic structure into obsessional and hysteric. The former can be understood to be co-terminous with the position of male and the latter with

Insofar as the cogito is indicative of a representation of the subject, albeit a fantasmic representation, in as much as it (re)presents a false or desired (re)presentation, it indicates something of the subject's relation to and dependence on language. By marking *himself* with *cogito ergo sum*, Descartes can be understood to exemplify the logic at work in the relation between the subject and language. Such a relation should not be understood as one of easily identifiable separation. The subject, in a sense, is nothing but language while at the same time the subject is nothing because of language. It is only through being represented that the subject can be said to exist at all and yet, at the same time, in being so represented, the subject is strictly not there; the signifier is there.

The signifier, producing itself in the field of the Other, makes manifest the subject of its signification. But it functions as a signifier, to petrify the subject in the same movement in which it calls the subject to function, to speak, as subject. There, strictly speaking, is the temporal pulsation in which is established that which is the characteristic of the departure of the unconscious as such – the closing.

(Lacan, 1977/1973: 207)

the position of female, where the terms 'male' and 'female' are understood as structural positions rather than as biologically determined essences.

Lacan's discussion of the subject in relation to the Cartesian *cogito* and the subsequent definition of the formula of fantasy as the subject in relation to *objet petit a*, ($\exists&a$), describes the obsessional subject. While aspects of the different manners in which hysteric and obsessional subjects would figure in the relation of fantasy are discussed in Chapter 3 below, it is beyond the scope of this work to engage in a full discussion of the differences between the two structures. It remains the case, however, that both hysteric-female and obsessional-male positions are characterised by the division of the subject in relation to the symbolic order and, thus, the lack constitutive of the subject persists for both hysterics and obsessionals, albeit the relation to this lack is not the same.

1.2 The *Vel* of Alienation

Lacan's particular use of the logical concept of the *vel* is useful here. *Vel* conventionally signifies an *either / or* choice of the type *either A or B*. Lacan, however, uses it to express a somewhat different type of choice; *either A and not B or not A and not B*. His formulation has often been described as a forced choice or no real choice at all (see, for example; Zupančič, 2000: 215). However 'forced' it may be, it is clear in his own formulation that there is very much a choice to be made; "The choice then is a matter of knowing whether one wishes to preserve one of the parts, the other disappearing in any case" (Lacan, 1977/1973: 211). What disappears in this case is the subject.

If we choose being, the subject disappears, it eludes us, it falls into non-meaning. If we choose meaning, the meaning survives only deprived of that part of non-meaning that is, strictly speaking, that which constitutes in the realization of the subject, the unconscious. In other words, it is of the nature of this meaning, as it emerges in the field of the Other, to be in a large part of its field, eclipsed by the disappearance of being, induced by the very function of the signifier.

(Ibid.)

The overlapping of the two circles in fig.1 does not indicate here a conjunction, a joining together wherein the parts of one set are coupled to the parts of the other set. On the contrary, the overlap indicates that there are parts which logically belong to both sets (being and meaning). The choice which the subject faces is not, then, meaning and the exclusion of that part of being which is not also enclosed in meaning *or* being and the exclusion of that part of meaning which is not also enclosed in being. Such a choice would always leave the subject, in this instance, with a complete circle, a complete set. The choice Lacan extrapolates is rather that between the remainder of

one circle when the overlap is subtracted or the remainder of the other circle when the overlap is subtracted. Complicating this choice further, the left-hand side, *Being*, is, strictly speaking, from the perspective of subjectivity, an impossible choice. This is not to say, however, that it cannot be chosen. Lacan himself provides us with the example of the highwayman to illustrate and clarify this choice (Ibid.: 212). In the traditional cry of the highwayman, the victim is offered a choice; *your money or your life*. Clearly here there is a choice to be made but it is not as straightforward as it might first appear. The highwayman is not, presumably, suggesting that if one would rather not relinquish one's money, one is free to keep it only on condition that one lays down one's life instead. The choice is rather that one can surrender one's money and, hopefully, walk away at least still alive *or* one can die there and then and one's money will be taken anyway. It is a lose-lose situation in which there is still very much a choice to be made. The impossibility of one side does not negate the fact of choice. *Being* in the vel of alienation is akin to money in the example of the highwayman. If the subject chooses *meaning*, it loses *being*. If the subject chooses *being*, it loses both meaning and subjectivity and consequently results in an absence of subjectivity, ~~subjectivity~~ as non-being.

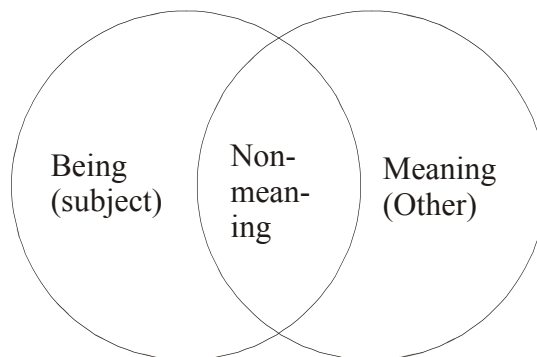


Fig.1

Contra the Cartesian proclamation that *I am thinking, therefore I am*, Lacan offers an exclusionary choice which, in effect, not only inverts the cogito but inverts it with the emphasis on the renunciation; either *I am not thinking* or *I am not*. That is to say, *I can renounce being* or *I can renounce meaning (thinking)*.

The poles of the choice here can be understood to signify the poles *unconscious / conscious*. The *thinking* alluded to would indicate the unconscious; the (false) *being*, consciousness. Such a split helps us to understand the problem Lacan discovers in Descartes' formulation. In the Lacanian reading, the Cartesian *I think, therefore I am* attests to conscious thought. In Lacan's understanding, such conscious thought is only ever illusory. It is as such that he can designate it as false being. The *I* here would be akin to the ego. The affirmation that *I am* is, for Lacan, an affirmation of a false self at the expense of the unconscious seat of subjectivity.

Recalling that knowledge only ever surfaces in language and that, consequently, 'self'-knowledge is ultimately oxymoronic insofar as *my* knowledge of *myself*, even were that somehow possible, would have to appear in the field of the Other, i.e. language, it becomes clearer why one might characterise Descartes formulation thus. Transposing Descartes' formulation onto the Lacanian diagram, illustrates the extent of the Cartesian discovery:

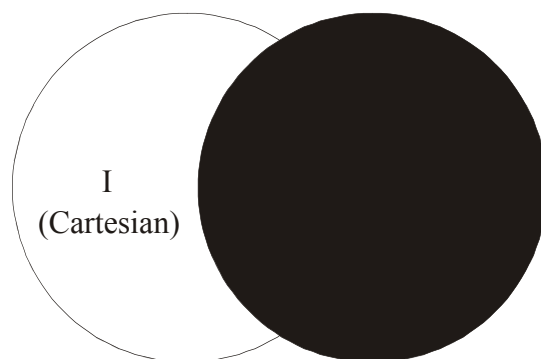


Fig. 2

The Lacanian-Freudian *I* is quite different from this Cartesian *I*. It is neither the *I* of *I think* insofar as it is formulated by Descartes with all its philosophical ramifications, nor is it the *I* of *I think* in any everyday sense with all its grammatical dependency. The former *I* is but an illusion. The latter, a shifter; a signifier which assumes a different referent depending on who is uttering it. The Lacanian *I*, the *I* of ‘*Wo Es war, soll Ich werden*’ is a becoming, an assumption.

There where it was, *I* must come into being.

As Nietzsche has pointed out, that the occurrence of thoughts imply an agency is by no means a certain assumption, never mind Descartes’ assumption that they imply a human agency which can then be ascertained as *I*.

A thought comes when ‘it’ wants, and not when ‘I’ want. It is, therefore, a *falsification* of the facts to say that the subject ‘I’ is the condition of the predicate ‘think’. It thinks: but to say the ‘it’ is just that famous old ‘I’ – well that is just an assumption or opinion, to put it mildly, and by no means an ‘immediate certainty.’ In fact, there is already too much packed into the ‘it thinks’: even the ‘it’ contains an *interpretation* of the process, and does not belong to the process itself. People are following grammatical habits here in drawing conclusions, reasoning that ‘thinking is an activity, behind every activity something is active, therefore -.’

(Nietzsche, 2001/1886: 17-18)

Lacan’s *I* then comes from another place. It is by no means central and it is not the root of thoughts. Lacan’s *I* is rather a position taken in response.

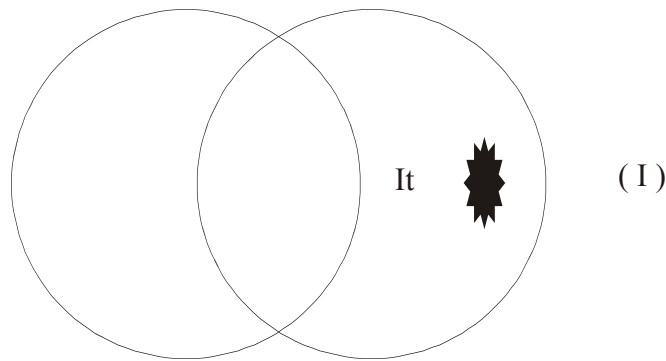


Fig. 3

For Lacan, the *I*, the subject of the unconscious, is not commensurate with a concept of agency, nor is it even a permanent fixture. The *I*, as subject of the unconscious, is not commensurate with the unconscious. One might do well to emphasise the preposition here; subject *of* the unconscious. The *I* or subject is an effect. Just as the unconscious can be understood to manifest in conscious discourse through such effects as slips of the tongue, so the subject can be understood to manifest in the assuming of responsibility for its own ex-sistence; “one is always responsible for one’s position as subject” (Lacan, 1989/1965: 7).

This impermanence is one suspected by Descartes himself in his *Third Meditation* when he questions what it is that guarantees the subsistence of the *I* from moment to moment.

Therefore I must now ask myself whether I possess some power by which I can bring it about that I myself, who now exist, will also exist a little later on. For since I am nothing but a thinking thing – or at least since I am now dealing simply and precisely with that part of me which is a thinking thing – if such a power were in me, then I would certainly be aware of it. But I observe that there is no such power; and from this very fact I know most clearly that I depend upon some being other than myself.

(Descartes, 1993/1641: 33)

If Descartes' *I* can be understood to be coterminous with the ego, or with that in which conscious thoughts arise, then his argument here would point to the necessity of something beyond conscious thought, or beyond that field in which conscious thoughts arise. Leaving aside Descartes' somewhat spurious assertion that such a beyond must be termed *God* with all the preconceived attributes that a Seventeenth Century thinker would ascribe to *Him*, we can understand Descartes to have posited that consciousness itself cannot exist or arise in isolation, that it can only exist or arise against a background which is other than itself. The 'being other than myself' to which Descartes alludes might be something akin to the unconscious of Lacan. This is not to suggest that there is any unquestionable certainty at work here. That something like conscious thought, the ego or the *cogito* requires something other than itself to sustain it appears as little more than a presumption. That some field of permanence must subsist 'beneath' it is by no means proven. However, combining Descartes' insights with those of Freud and Lacan, it can perhaps be understood that there 'is' an unknown, whether this unknown exists or not. That is to say, what both Cartesian philosophy and psychoanalysis point to is the incompleteness of conscious thought. Whether or not one accords with Descartes' conclusion that such an incompleteness then proves the existence of a completeness elsewhere, the conclusion that the *cogito* itself, conscious thought, is incomplete remains. Transposing such a conclusion onto psychoanalysis, it would then be over-hasty to suggest that the unconscious is in fact a permanent, continuous substratum of consciousness which occasionally manifests in or arises into the conscious field. All that can be concluded is that it does arise.

I should define unconscious cause, neither as an existent, nor as a $ou\}o\varpi$, a non-existent - as, I believe Henri Ey does, a non-existent of possibility. It is a $\square\square\leftarrow\varpi$ of the prohibition that brings to being an existent in spite of its non-advent, it is a function of the impossible on which a certainty is based.

(Lacan, 1977/1973: 128)

Such uncertainty of the unconscious as cause allows a better understanding of the notion of the *I* as Lacan uses it in this context. This *I*, which is neither Cartesian nor a grammatical function, can be understood as that which is purely assumed. It is the very uncertainty of thought, of what might otherwise ground thought, of any substantial, albeit unknown, kernel of subjectivity in anything approaching a traditional conception of *I*, that gives rise to the Lacanian *I*. The *I* here is posited as purely contingent and this contingency in turn necessitates a certain responsibility. Faced with the ‘forced’ and impossible choice between meaning and being, the *I* arises in response to the *vel*, in response to the uncertainty of its own (non-)existence and arises as that which assumes responsibility for the ‘decision’ (*de-caedere*; cutting away) taken. The Lacanian *I* is a response to the unknown and as such, in so far as it is assumed, entails a responsibility for its own assumption.

That one is always, then, responsible for one’s position as a subject is not to suggest that the subject is some independent self-creating thing. The subject properly understood in the Lacanian sense is not a *thing* at all.

The unconscious is the sum of the effects of speech on a subject, at the level at which the subject constitutes himself out of the effects of the signifier. This makes it clear that, in the term *subject* ... I am not designating the living substratum needed by this phenomenon of the subject, nor any sort of substance, nor any being possessing knowledge in his *pathos*, his suffering, whether primal or secondary, nor even some incarnated logos, but the Cartesian subject, who appears at the moment when doubt is recognised as certainty – except that, through my approach, the bases of the subject prove to be wider, but, at the same time much more amenable to the certainty that eludes it. This is what the unconscious is.

(Ibid.: 126)

This impermanency of the subject of the unconscious suggests a subject in motion, a subject which is neither ever secure nor securable; a subject which arises in becoming without ever assuming to be as such. This movement of subjectivity is brought further to light when one considers the other ethical injunction which Lacan gives us: “the one thing one can be guilty of is giving ground relative to one’s desire” (Lacan, 1992/1986:321).

1.3 The Subject and the Signifying Chain

The structure and functioning of subjectivity, and particularly its relationship to desire, can be further illustrated with reference to Lacan’s development of the Graph of Desire. Importantly, the various forms of the graph do not represent any chronological development as might pertain to the formation of the subject. Their development is rather pedagogical, unveiling the complexities of the subject as Lacan envisaged it through the four stages of the graph.

Graph I

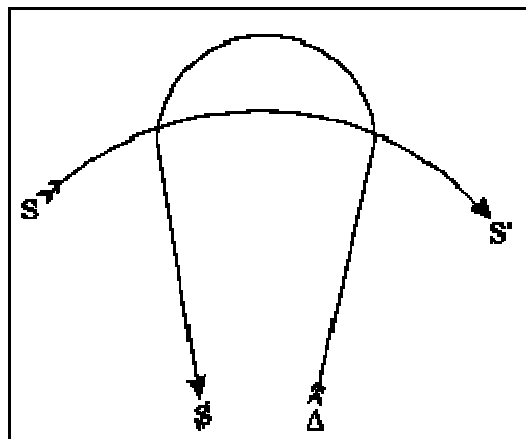


Fig. 4

Beginning at the lower right hand point on Graph I, we have \square , what Žižek has termed “some mystical, pre-symbolic intention” (Žižek, 1989: 101). The presymbolic factor here indicates the illusory nature of this \square . The triangle marks the impossible pre-subjective point from whence the subject might have intended something before or outwith the symbolic order. As such, this \square is always only retrospectively posited. \square is the conjectured position of the subject before it becomes subject or, to put it in the terms used previously, \square is a retrospectively posited position before the *I* assumes a position in response to the unknown.

Following the arc of the graph, this \square results in \exists , the subject. The score through the *S* of the subject indicates that it is barred, impossible, incomplete, divided. Through the impossible choice of the *vel* of alienation, the subject comes to be as divided from itself. In coming to be in and through the order of the symbolic, that is, the field of the Other, the subject can never be in its own place; it has no place of its own. In terms of the first Graph, the subject is nothing before crossing the wider arc between Σ and $\Sigma\exists$, all that can be said to be before this point is a retroactively posited supposition, a feeble ‘must have been’. The division in the subject is also evident in the fact that the subject is always replaced by a signifier. For the subject to ‘mean’ anything at all, or for the subject to be meant, it relies upon a system of signification which is always beyond itself. In this sense the subject necessarily is replaced or effaced by a signifier. Put simply, one can only conceive of oneself, (re)present oneself, and one is only ever conceived or represented by others through the medium of signification. To say “I am this,” or “My name is X”, “I like this” or in fact any instance of speech - even when one might believe one is absent from the content of the speech, one is still

(re)presented in it as speaker, albeit implicitly – is to mis-present oneself. Such misrepresentation however should not suggest that some true representation could somehow occur. The division and thus impossibility of the subject is the very condition of its possibility at all. Moreover, any such split of the subject is redoubled in division between consciousness and unconsciousness. It is thus that it can be said that, not only is the subject divided, but the subject is this very divide itself (Fink, 1995: 47).

The wider arc in the Graph, from Σ to $\Sigma\Delta$, indicates the signifying chain, an instance or example of the symbolic order in operation. The signifying chain and the point being made of it here can be elaborated on two levels; that of its paradigmatic function and its syntagmatic function. The syntagmatic function is exemplified in the unraveling of any sentence. Natural languages being structures of rules purporting to convey meanings always allow the possibility of a certain limited and yet unstable anticipation of meaning to come. Indeed, for Lacan, such anticipation is not only possible but intrinsic.

For the signifier, by its very nature, always anticipates meaning by unfolding its dimension before it. As is seen at the level of the sentence when it is interrupted before the significant term: ‘I shall never ...’, ‘All the same it is ...’, ‘And yet there may be ...’. Such sentences are not without meaning. A meaning all the more oppressive in that it is content to make us wait for it.

(Lacan, 1977/1957: 153)

The logic here is that in the production of any utterance, prior to the production of each signifier which would retrospectively be understood to have comprised that utterance, it is obviously uncertain what is going to be said. In the place of such uncertainty, a variety of alternative possibilities can be imagined, each possibility

inflecting upon the previous components of the utterance. The battery of signifiers, any one of which might come to occupy the place still left open, is what would be termed the paradigmatic dimension; the entire network of available signification. At the point at which the gap of anticipation is filled, meaning, and consequently the significance of the other words in the sentence, is momentarily secured (without, however, ever erasing the other possibilities which might have been previously entertained). This is the point at the left-hand intersection of the two arcs of the Graph (which appears in the second Graph as A, *Autre* or the place of Other), what Lacan terms the *point de capiton* or anchoring point.

The diachronic function of this anchoring point is to be found in the sentence, even if the sentence completes its signification only with its last term, each term being anticipated in the construction of the others, and, inversely, sealing their meaning by its retroactive effect.

(Lacan, 1977/1960: 303)

Importantly here, the *point de capiton* is no guarantee, it does not fix meaning and offer up an unambiguous reading of the sentence, it is not a ‘full stop’. Rather, it holds meaning in place for a moment, for an instant; it is a “rhythm, rather than a duration” (Ibid.: 304). With this in mind, it is clear then that the *point de capiton*, the possibility of the intersection of the syntagmatic and paradigmatic scales, occurs potentially at every point in any utterance, sentence, or even word. A series of *points de capiton* then occurs as meaning unfolds at junctures at which meaning is taken to be *more* secure, only for that security to vanish again as the utterance continues, as other meaning unfolds and on and on.

The first Graph then illustrates the retroactive constitution of the (barred) subject in relation to the symbolic order, the field of the Other. That is to say that it is only in

relation to the Other and through the mediating effects of the Other that the subject, albeit as barred, can be understood to have come about.

The Other as previous site of the pure subject of the signifier holds the master position, even before coming into existence, to use Hegel's term against him, as absolute Master. For what is omitted in the platitude of modern information theory is that fact that one can speak of code only if it is already the code of the Other, and that is something quite different from what is in question in the message, since it is from this code that the subject is constituted, which means that it is from the Other that the subject receives even the message that he emits.

(Ibid.: 305)

The intention with which one might assume to begin, for Lacan, must properly be placed on the right of the graph, where, in French and English at least, we would conventionally end. The constitution of the subject runs 'backwards' from this point, through the field of the Other, the utterance, language. It is thus that it can be understood that not only is language prior to the subject in the mundane sense that other people have spoken the language we come to speak before we come to speak it, the sense in which Bruce Fink speaks of a child being born "into a pre-established place in its parents' linguistic universe" (Fink, 1995: 5), language is also prior to the subject in the stricter sense that without language there is no subject as such. The subject is not *something* which exists independently of language only to come to be supplemented by language, to learn to negotiate a preexisting language to better express oneself or more easily attain one's needs and wants, the subject as such only ever comes to be anything at all in the field of signification. This 'anything at all', as we have seen, is the erased subject, the subject which can emerge only as split, as barred, as impossible.

1.4 The Disunity of the Subject

Graph II

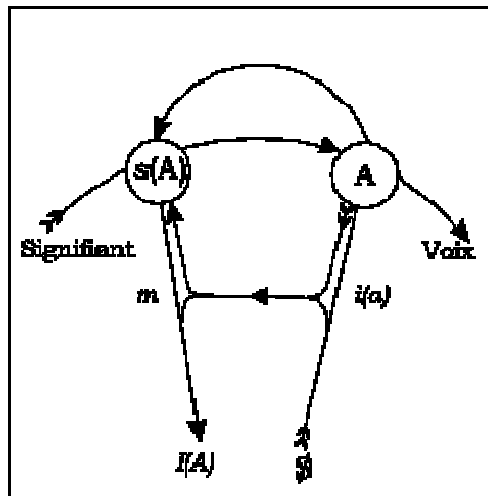


Fig.5

In the second graph, the barred subject moves over to occupy the position previously held by the \square , the retrospectively posited intention. It is important to hold in mind here that Lacan's series of graphs is not indicative of any subjective development wherein the subject, in the point in case, would come to supercede the mythical intentionality. Rather the series offers a conceptual complicating of Lacan's theorising of subjectivity which cannot properly be reduced to any temporal plane. Each graph builds on and, simultaneously unsettles the graph before it. Where in the first graph the notion of retrospection is symbolised with the anti-clockwise arc which runs counter to the wider clockwise arc of the signifying chain, in the second graph, this retrospection is indicated by this shift of \exists from the left-side to the right-side of the graph.

This is a retroversion effect by which the subject becomes at each stage what he was before and announces himself – he will have been – only in the future perfect tense.

(Lacan, 1977/1960: 306)

\exists is displaced from its former position on the left-side, (logically) posterior to the movement through the signifying chain, by $I(A)$, the ego-ideal or symbolic identification.²

The speech marked in Graph II by the trajectory ‘signifier ↓ voice’ indicates a relation with Truth, insofar as Truth might be understood to entail a “fictional structure” (Ibid.). That is to say, speech, and the Truth implied therein, is indicative of a conventional structure which seeks to provide a certain guarantee. The Truth of speech is not then concerned with an external, pre-existing reality, but rather, it is speech which endeavours to create, or author, a certain ‘reality’;

it is from somewhere other than the Reality that it concerns that Truth derives its guarantee: it is from speech ... The first words spoken (*le dit premier*) stand as a decree, a law, an aphorism, an oracle; they confer their obscure authority upon the real other.

(Ibid.)

It is only in speech, in an involvement in a pre-existent language, that the subject can come to be constituted. However, such a constitution through the mediation of the signifying field results in a certain division wherein the subject, in coming to be anything at all, is rendered other than itself. The ego ideal here is one aspect of this effect. Insofar as the subject is only constituted as subject (\exists) through the mediating effects of the symbolic order, that which comes to be within the subject, that without which the subject could not be anything at all, is necessarily alien to the subject insofar as it is a part of the Other. This ego ideal, in terms of its function within the

² I have here and throughout retained the symbolisation as used by Lacan, thus retaining, for example, $S(A)$, rather than rendering it $S(O)$.

subject, is “an agency which speaks, that is to say a symbolic agency” (Lacan, 1988/1975: 135). It is “the other as speaking, the other in so far as he has a relation to me [*moi*]” (Ibid.: 142). This would appear then to relate the ego ideal not only to the function of speech as it manifests in and is manifest of the subject and to the other as social other but also to the function of law.

The ego ideal might then be understood as that within the subject which carries out the function of the Other, the subject as function of the Other. This would be to stand it in contradistinction to both the ego proper (*moi*) and the ideal ego (*i(a)*).

The movement described in the second graph is now figured as entailing a ‘short-circuiting’ from \exists to $I(A)$ marked on either side by m (*moi* or ego) and $i(a)$. This ‘short-circuiting’ indicates what Lacan terms a ‘double articulation’, wherein the vector which could be seen in the first graph to pass from \square , through the symbolic plane, to \exists , now passes from \exists , through the symbolic plane, to $I(A)$ and short-circuits underneath at the point marked $i(a)$ to the point marked m .

This would suggest that there is something pertaining to the subject which does not fall entirely within the realm of the symbolic, which escapes to an extent, the full mediation of language. This *something* which escapes is that of the subject which is of the imaginary realm.

Lacan explains in his essay ‘The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I’ (1977/1949) how the subject’s sense of self is constituted in relation to a misrecognition of unity and mastery engendered in the encounter with an external

image (the specific example Lacan gives is of the mirror image of one's own body, but there is no real reason to suggest that this misrecognised and formative image could not be something else entirely). The fixation or "formal stagnation" (Lacan, 1977/1948: 17) of this image marks the point of separation between *ideal ego* and *ego ideal*. The *ideal ego*, as an internalised image based on a fundamental misrecognition, is a function of the imaginary order; it is imaginary (mis-)identification. The graphic representation then suggests that there is an at least partial separation between the functions of the imaginary and the functions of the symbolic, insofar as the 'short-circuit' occurs beneath the signifying chain, that is, not having entirely passed through the mediation of the symbolic order. This might also suggest that the imaginary is always subordinated to, placed under, the symbolic.

This separation indicates a separation between subject and object, a separation which is both constitutive of and forbidding of the subject, rendering it an aphanistic point of its own constitution. That the *ego ideal*, $I(A)$, comes to figure on the left-hand side of the graph where previously the barred subject had been placed, indicates that it, the *ego ideal*, is what one might call a properly subjective function. The *ideal ego* on the other hand, like the *ego* to which it is conjoined, is an object; "the ego is an object – an object which fills a certain function which we here call the imaginary function" (Lacan, 1988/1975: 44).

This distinction between the *ego ideal* and the *ideal ego* can be further clarified by turning to Lacan's *Seminar Book 1: Freud's Paper on Technique*. Here Serge Leclaire, in reference to Freud's *On Narcissism*, points out that *ideal ego* is constituted as an ideal which would come to supplant the function of the true or "real

ego” as “the target of the self-love” (Ibid.: 133). Leclaire brings our attention to the fact that Freud in his text, having for the first time introduced the term ‘ideal ego’ then goes on to introduce the other term, ‘ego ideal’. It is Lacan who proffers an explanation here,

Freud makes use there of the *Ichideal* [ego ideal], which is precisely symmetrical and opposed to the *Idealich* [ideal ego]. It’s the sign that Freud is here designating two different functions.

(Ibid.)

The opposition referred to here is clarified as that between the imaginary and symbolic planes because, according to Lacan, “the *Ichideal* [ego ideal] takes up its place within the totality of the law” (Ibid.: 134). This would then suggest, as Leclaire interprets it, that the *ego ideal* is “imposed from without” (Ibid.: 136).

it’s the symbolic relation which defines the position of the subject as seeing. It is speech, the symbolic relation, which determines the greater or lesser degree of perfection, of completeness, of approximation, of the imaginary. This representation [schema of two mirrors] allows us to draw the distinction between the *Idealich* and *Ichideal*, between the ideal ego and the ego ideal. The ego-ideal governs the interplay of relations on which all relations with others depend. And on this relation to others depends the more or less satisfying character of the imaginary structuration.

(Ibid.: 141)

The *ideal ego*, then, is figured as the idealised image which is internalised in one, that towards which one’s desire is necessarily directed. In terms of relations to the world, desire is projected onto those objects which appear to coincide with or “become[s] confused with” (Ibid.), however fleetingly, this idealised image. The *ego ideal*, on the other hand is that which allows one a passage beyond this coincidence or confusion of

images ('real' and 'imagined'). It is that of the symbolic which interferes and facilitates an exchange on the level of the symbolic plane.

The *Ichideal*, the ego-ideal, is the other as speaking, the other in so far as he has a symbolic relation to me [*moi*], which, within the terms of our dynamic manipulation, is both similar to and different from the imaginary libido. Symbolic exchange is what links human beings to each other, that is it is speech, and it makes it possible to identify the subject.

(Ibid.: 142)

This identification of the subject is then at the level or in the realm of the Other. It is symbolic identification or, in Jacques-Alain Miller's interpretation, it is "a social and ideological function" (Miller, J.A. (1987) *Aspects du malaise dans la civilisation*, quoted in Žižek, 1989: 110). The retroactive movement from \exists to $I(A)$, passing through the signifying chain from the point of the A, the place of the Other, the point at which the Other pins meaning, to $S(A)$, the signifier as it functions as part of the Other, 'results' in the subject identified as an effect of the symbolic, $I(A)$. Within this trajectory, we find the necessary short-circuit of imaginary identification which will account for the formation of the ego and helps us to understand the double identification in action; the image of the (non)self, $i(a)$, and the symbolisation of the (non)self, $I(A)$.

symbolic intention marked on the first graph. If the human being is grounded in a certain biological necessity, this necessity must still be marked and experienced through the mediation of language. As we have seen above, the human being as speaking being would know nothing of such necessity, and could thus not be said to have experienced this necessity as such, were it not for the intervention of language. Need, then, this biological necessity, is always only ever posited or conjectured retrospectively from the standpoint of having come to 'be' in language. The human being's "dependence is maintained by a world of language" (Lacan, 1977/1960: 309). This maintenance in and by language has the effect of reducing and diversifying needs "to a point where their scope appears to be of quite a different order" (Ibid.) from the basic biological necessity we retroactively suppose. Where need would be supposed to be a need for *something* in particular (food, warmth, etc.), as it is taken over into the realm of the symbolic, it becomes generalised through its attachment to the Other who provides it. As such, what perhaps began as need becomes detached from any biological necessity and comes to figure as the demand for subjugation in the willingness to satisfy those needs; love.

In this way, demand annuls (*aufhebt*) the particularity of everything that can be granted by transmuting it into a proof of love, and the very satisfactions that it obtains for need are reduced (*sich erniedrigt*) to the level of being no more than the crushing demand for love

(Lacan, 1977/1958: 286)

The particularity abolished, as need is transmuted into demand, resurfaces at the level of desire. It is thus that Lacan can say,

desire is neither the appetite for satisfaction, nor the demand for love, but the difference that results from the subtraction of the first from the second, the phenomena of their splitting.

(Ibid.: 287)

Need would arise as an appetite for this or that particular satisfaction. Demand would emanate as the demand for proof of love carried through the asking for the satisfaction of each need. In removing the necessity of satisfaction which would thus be entailed in the articulation of demand, one is left with a pure desiringness. However, where need would be the need for a concrete satisfaction and demand would be the asking for proof of (unconditional) love, desire is always desire for something else. As demand arises out of need in response to a reliance on the (M)Other, desire, as the remainder of the subtraction of need from demand, remains radically attached to the Other. It is as such that Lacan formulates desire as always being “the desire of the Other” (Lacan, 1977/1960: 312). Here, the preposition *of* marks a rich ambiguity which allows us to understand the complexity of this relation of desire between the subject and the Other.

The subject’s desire is the desire of the Other insofar as it is the desire for the Other to desire him or her. It is the subject’s desire to be the object of the Other’s desire. This would entail the desire to be recognised by the Other. It is perhaps primarily this sense of *desire of the other* that we can understand in the relationship between the infant and mother. The child wants to be the object of the mother’s desire, it wants the mother to desire it (Lacan, 1977/1973: 218). As Lacan himself puts it, the relation between child and mother is “a relation constituted ... not by his vital dependence on her, but by his dependence on her love, that is to say, by the desire for her desire” (Lacan, 1977/1959: 198).

In another sense, the subject's desire is the desire of the Other insofar as it is the desire *for* the Other. Here we would understand *of* in the sense of the womaniser's love of women, or the child's incestuous desire *for* the mother, the latter of which is, for Lacan and, in Lacan's reading, for Freud, "the fundamental desire" (Lacan, 1992/1986: 67). The subject desires the Other *qua* Other. It desires the other in its otherness. Bound to this sense of the otherness of the Other is the fact that the Other is always elsewhere. This links to a further sense in which the subject's desire is the desire *of* the Other insofar as it is a desire which is always necessarily deferred. Desire is that which cannot be satisfied. Where need could be, albeit temporarily, satisfied (the need for hunger is abated with food, the need for warmth is abated by a blanket, etc.), desire is unfulfillable. The object of desire is never quite *that* and thus desire moves on to another object which, again, once it is 'attained', will prove not be *that* which was desired. Desire is a perpetual movement in which the response to that which presents itself as that which might possibly fulfill one's desire is always, "That's not it" (Lacan, 1998/1975: 126). This is the logic of the *objet petit a*, the small *a* in the graph in which the subject finds itself in relation to in the formula of fantasy, $(\exists \& a)$.

Additionally, the subject's desire is the desire of the Other insofar as it is the desire for that which the Other desires. What is desired is not desired because of any intrinsic qualities of its own or even any intrinsic qualities erroneously or not perceived in or of it by the subject, but, rather, it is desired because it is seen to be desired or valued by the Other. Put simply, one desires *something* because it is perceived as desirable and it is only perceived as desirable because one perceives it being desired by another. The quintessential example from the psychoanalytical canon here would be that of Lacan's interpretation of the Dora Case (Freud, 1977/1905;

Lacan, 1993/1981; Lacan, 1982/1966) . Lacan interprets Dora as identifying with Herr K. and turning for her object of desire to his wife, Frau K. That is to say, Lacan interprets Dora as desiring what the other, in this instance Herr K., desires (Lacan, 1982/1966: 66). This is perhaps the logic which underpins much of the current phenomena of celebrity endorsement – a perfectly mundane object suddenly becomes extremely (hysterically) desirable because it is presented as being desirable for some famous other.

Finally, recalling the fact that the subject is only ever constituted as subject through the mediation of the symbolic plane, the realm of the Other, the subject's desire is the desire *of* the Other insofar as this desire must necessarily emanate in the place of the Other. The desire of which Lacan speaks is always unconscious desire and the unconscious is that which is Other in the subject.

Importantly here, these various interpretations of the function of the preposition *of* in the proclamation, *the subject's desire is always the desire of the Other*, are not mutually exclusive or competing. Though the infant desires that the mOther desire it, this desire is never accomplished, as the mOther never totally, exclusively desires the infant. That is to say, the infant, in desiring the mOther's desire, cannot ever have and hold that desire in its entirety. There is always going to be something else competing for the mOther's attention and affection, something else in addition to the child that she will desire. One significant instance of this something else would be the Father. The figure of the Father also bears on what Lacan has termed "the fundamental desire" (Lacan, 1992/1986: 67), the desire for the mOther herself. The child, then, wants the mOther in and of herself, a desire which is intricately bound up with

wanting the mOther to exclusively desire it. This desire of the mOther is already inflected as a reflection of the desire perceived to be focused on the mOther by the Father, a desire, or complex of desire, arising in the place of the Other.

Such allusions to the child / mother relationship should not serve to suggest that this complex of desire is something which is encountered and surpassed in one's formative years. The various instances of the *of* in *desire of the Other*, just as they are inseparable from each other, are also unalleviable. Just as desire itself is continuous, so the various inflections and emphases placed on the phrase by Lacan are continuous.

Returning to the Graph, as we have seen, the subject is only ever constituted as subject through the mediating effects of language, that is through the intervention of the Other. Such an effect is not, however, reducible to an absorption or incorporation. The very fact that the subject is constituted in relation to the Other should suggest that it is other than the Other. In passing through the symbolic chain, in encountering itself and the Other in the field of the Other, the subject is necessarily left in perplexity. This perplexity is formulised by Lacan in the question *Che Vuoi?* or *What do you want?* The question here is doubly directed in that it is the question addressed by the subject to the Other – what does it want from me? – but also in that it is the question assumed by the subject to be addressed to him – what do *you* want? what is it that you desire?

The 'answer' to this question is provided in the form of fantasy; (\exists &a). As we have seen, the subject is necessarily constituted as incomplete. The subject, in its coming to 'be' through the mediating effects of the Other can only come to 'be' as lacking in

itself. Conjoined with this notion, the Other itself is also seen to be lacking insofar as the desire which the subject does experience is, in all its complexity, the desire of the Other, thus indicating that both sides in this relation – the subject and the Other – are necessarily incomplete. Were either complete, they would not desire, lack being that which gives rise to the movement of desire. Put simply, if one truly had everything, one would necessarily not want for anything else. A certain space or lack must exist in order for the movement of desire to function.

Though this incompleteness cannot be completed, fantasy serves as a veil, a safeguard against facing this incompleteness. *Objet petit a*, as the imaginary cause of desire, allows a fantasmic sense of wholeness otherwise denied to the subject. The sense of wholeness gives rise to a certain *pleasure* which comes to operate, through the mode of fantasy, as surrogate for the being lost in the movement into meaning, the veil of alienation. The sense of wholeness which would have been experienced in being (were that not strictly impossible) or the sense of wholeness that the infant mistakes in the mirror stage is (re-)enacted on the level of fantasy. This is not to suggest, however, that the subject's desire is in any way satisfied by this *pleasure*. *Objet petit a* in the fantasy or the imagined relation of the subject (Ξ) to *objet petit a* is never achieved as such but rather functions as the imaginary cause of desire.

As we have seen, in Lacan's appropriation of Freud's *Wo Es war, soll Ich werden*, 'Where It was, there must I come into being', there is an implication of a movement from the impersonal it, the unconscious, to the purely assumed position of subjectivity. That which arises in and from the unconscious does so in a pulsating moment and does so in the mode of the Other. The 'I' of the subject is the pure

assumption of responsibility for this arising. As we have seen, the language one has at one's disposal to express 'oneself' is always the language of the Other and as such is radically other to, though also constitutive of, the subject. For Lacan the fantasy is the "stuff" of the 'I' that is originally repressed, because it can be indicated only in the 'fading' of the enunciation" (Lacan, 1977/1960: 314). That is to say, it is in and through the fantasy that the mythic 'I' supposed to have preceded the advent of the subject (\exists) as an effect of the Other is relived. This being the case, it is clear that the subject who comes to 'be' (*soll Ich werden*) in the place where 'it' was (*Wo Es war*) must be radically incommensurate with the subject sustained in relation to the *objet petit a*, that is, with the subject in fantasy.

Fantasy then is at one and the same time a veil sustaining the subject against the *Che vuoi?* – against the radical unknowingness inherent in the symbolic order – and the very structuration which allows desire to operate, which allows us to experience desire. One way of understanding this dual function would be to recall that the subject's desire is always *the desire of the Other*. This formula, not unproblematically, suggests that desire is never simply one. Desire, as experienced by the subject, is always desire in response to the desire of the Other, in response to anOther desire. Fantasy supports the subject's desire and defends the subject against the threatening approach and call of the Other's desire. A desire which can only arise in the Other insofar as the Other is itself incomplete. This allows us to more easily understand the top half of the completed graph of desire.

1.6 The Lack in the Other

Graph IV

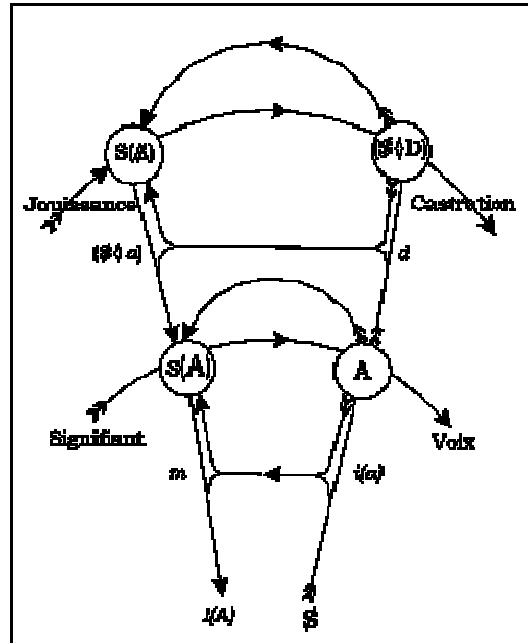


Fig.7

Where on the lower half of the graph, the graph as represented in its second formulation, we have on the left-hand side the symbol $S(A)$, the signifier as a function of the Other, in the upper half of the completed graph we have what might be understood as the (partial) negation of this symbol, $S(\%)$, here set to mark the “signifier of a lack in the Other” (Ibid.: 316). This is the notion that the Other in order to be desiring must also be lacking. For Lacan, this signifier, $S(\%)$, functions as that “signifier for which all the other signifiers represent the subject” (Ibid.). As we have seen, the subject in Lacan’s understanding is not some being which can exist outside language, utilising the armoury of words available for its own, independent, caprice.

The signifier, producing itself in the field of the Other, makes manifest the subject of its signification. But it functions as a signifier only to reduce the subject in question to being no more than a signifier, to petrify the subject in the same movement in which it calls the subject to function, to speak, as subject. There, strictly speaking, is the temporal pulsation in which is established that which is the characteristic of the departure of the unconscious as such – the closing.

(Lacan, 1977/1973: 207)

Against what one might characterise as the ‘common-sense’ notion that language (pre)exists as a tool to be utilised by a subject (or person) in the expression of their (pre-linguistic) needs, wants, beliefs etc., the notion of subjectivity in Lacan’s work posits a subject who only ever comes to be anything at all because of the signifying chain of language, because of the (pre)existence of a symbolic order in which it comes to operate. What is crucial here is that, if it is the order of signifiers which takes logical precedence, then signifiers are not arsenal to be deployed between subjects, or, to oversimplify, words are not carriers of meaning between people, but, rather, it is the subject which is constituted in the movement of *signifiance* between signifiers. It is in this sense that Lacan borrows Hegel’s dictum that “the symbol manifests itself first of all as the murder of the thing” (Lacan, 1977/1956a: 104) and adds that “this death constitutes in the subject the eternalization of his desire” (Ibid.).

An example of this notion of the signifier representing the subject for another signifier is already apparent in Freud when he writes, in *A Project for a Scientific Psychology*, of a soldier’s willingness to sacrifice himself for his country’s flag or, as Freud emphasizes it, for “a many coloured scrap of stuff” (Freud, 1966/1895: 349). Here, the soldier is clearly not concerned with the *thing* of the flag, the flag as pure object. The flag only assumes its significance in relation to another signifier, in this instance, the “fatherland” (Ibid.). The soldier, the subject, is *given* his subjectivity through the

mediating representation between one signifier, 'the flag', and another, 'the fatherland'.

For Lacan signifiers operate as representations of drives. To the formula of a signifier being "that which represents a subject for another signifier" (Lacan, 1977/1960: 316), Lacan adds that the matheme $S(\%)$ indicates that "signifier for which all the other signifiers represent the subject: that is to say, in the absence of this signifier, all the other signifiers represent nothing, since nothing is represented only *for* something else" (Ibid.). This signifier of the lack in the Other thus stands quite apart from other, 'normal' signifiers. The collection of signifiers available in any given language or indeed the collection of signifiers available to any given individual is necessarily, by definition, complete. This obviously does not mean that it cannot be added to, as new words are coined and adopted into a natural language or new words are acquired by a speaker of a language. The collection of signifiers is complete in its synchronic dimension, insofar as the collection at any one point is what it is. It is, however, by definition, both complete, in itself, and non-totalising, insofar as it can, at the very least in theory, be added to or changed (simply, new words are coined, people do acquire new words). $S(\%)$ can thus be conceived as the outer limit of the set of all available signifiers; it is neither a part of the array of available signifiers nor is the array of available signifiers conceivable without it. Were it recuperated to the array of available signifiers, another outer limit would necessarily emerge to take its place. Were there no outer limit, the existent array of signifiers would slide into non-meaning, that is, they would cease to signify, as there would no longer be *anything* for which or to which they would represent the subject.

And since the battery of signifiers, as such, is by that very fact complete, this signifier can only be a line (*trait*) that is drawn from its circle without being able to be counted part of it. It can be symbolized by the inherence of a (-I) in the whole set of signifiers.

As such it is inexpressible, but its operation is not inexpressible, for it is that which is produced whenever a proper noun is spoken. Its statement equals its signification.

(Ibid.: 316-7)

What Lacan terms the “battery of signifiers” is, by the very fact of being a battery, complete. This then necessitates that S(%) is both conditioned by and outwith the battery. This Lacan indicates with the matheme (-I). The signifier of the lack in the Other, S(%), is indicative of a negative moment of the *I*, an absence of or inconsistency of *I* (that ‘I’ is still inscribed in the inscription (-I) suggests that this is not meant to indicate an absolute non-existence of *I*). This, then, points again to a strict co-relation between the lack in the Other and a lack in the subject. The symbol (-I) is inherent in the sense that it indicates a non-part which takes part, that its existence and maintenance is supervenient on that from which it is necessarily excluded. As (-I) and its inherence clearly have a subjective feature as well, as this describes a feature not only of signifiers but also a feature of the subject, it might also be explained in terms of the concept of ‘extimacy’ – a term coined by Lacan in his Seminar VII and developed by Jacques-Alain Miller in his essay ‘Extimité’ (1994/1988). The term extimacy (*extimité*) combines the prefix *ex-* with the term ‘intimacy’ (*intimité*) to convey the notion that that which is most intimate or interior has at the same time an external quality. The term extimacy might be used to clarify the relation of subject and Other insofar as the Other can be characterized as that which is *in me more than myself*, that “something strange to me ... at the heart of me” (Lacan, 1992/1986: 71). In the current context, S(%) is extimate to and for the whole set of signifiers, indicating also that (-I) is extimate to the whole set of signifiers. The

shift from the signifier of the lack in the Other to a lack of 'I', in turn suggests a polyvalent extimation wherein the S(%) is extimate to the collection of available signifiers, the (-I) is extimate to the subject, the Other is extimate to the subject and the subject is extimate to the Other. These latter two instances of extimation should not, however, be understood to imply an equivalence or symbiosis. That the Other and the subject are both extimate to each other is not in any way to suggest that they somehow perform the same function for each other, that the subject is the Other of the Other. Strictly speaking, the Other has no Other; "there is no Other of the Other" (Lacan, 1998/1975: 81). Thus, while the subject and Other are in some senses codependent (without the subject the battery of signifiers would not be representing anything, without the Other the subject would not be represented), this mutual implication must be regarded as radically asymmetrical. In another formulation, Lacan describes the Other as non-existent but functional (see Miller, 1994/1988: 81; reference for original not given), suggesting that the Other is an inessential illusion but one which is nonetheless essential (necessary) for the maintenance of subjectivity. As Miller illustrates with the example of a bomb-scare, something does not need to exist in order for it to effectively carry out its function.

One function which is set in play by this barring or incompleteness of the Other is, as we have seen, a certain subtraction or lacking in the subject. For Lacan this results in the subject's inability to represent itself comprehensively with a notion such as the *cogito* or, phrased otherwise, it helps us to understand why it is that the *cogito* does not go far enough in explaining the subject. The (-I) implied in S(%) is that which is "unthinkable" (Lacan, 1977/1960: 317) for the subject. This suggests for Lacan that the subject is radically incapable of surmising the aetiology of his own existence and

thus short-circuits any attempt to prove its own existence in any way comparable to the attempt made by Descartes. It is perhaps thus that we are led “to oppose any philosophy directly issuing from the *Cogito*” (Lacan, 1977/1949: 1). It is not, as shown above, that Lacan opposes everything *about* Descartes deduction. Here the emphasis should be placed on the adverbial ‘directly’. The suppositions of the *Meditations* lead to (and emanate from) a conceptualization of the subject as complete in itself, though necessarily supplemented by the existence of something other to it; i.e. Descartes’ God. This dualism, in Descartes, is, as would befit the Christian tradition from within which he writes, strictly hierarchical. For Lacan, on the other hand, the failure of the *cogito* itself points towards a subjectivity which is not only essentially lacking but which is also deficient in terms of knowing this lack. One might understand Lacan here as, rather than rejecting Descartes’ findings *per se*, pointing to the underlying logic of the *Meditations*, suggesting that the hierarchical schema of complete subject supplemented by God is in fact a foreclosure of the inherent incompleteness of the subject and thus pointing to a realm of unknowability. That is to say, the essential hierarchical supplementation of impossibly complete subject with unattainable God effectively serves to cover over the disavowed lack in the subject itself.

[the subject] lacks everything needed to know the answer [to the question of its own origin], since if this subject ‘I’ was dead, he would not, as I said, earlier, know it. He does not know therefore, that I am alive. How, therefore, will ‘I’ prove to myself that I am?

For I can only just prove to the Other that he exists, not, of course, with the proofs for the existence of God, with which over the centuries he has been killed off, but by loving him, a solution introduced by the Christian *kerygma* [preaching]. Indeed, it is too precarious a solution for me even to think of using it as a means of circumventing our problem, namely: ‘What am “I”?’

(Lacan, 1977/1960: 317)

Here Lacan might be understood to be claiming that the only possibility of an engaged relation towards the Other, the only mode in which ‘I’ might be understood to have asserted the Other’s existence would be through the assumption of an act of love. Such a movement might be seen to be symptomatic of a ‘circumventing’ of the problem of ascertaining a proof of the existence of the subject itself. ‘Circumventing’ here should be understood in all its weight as the movement of enclosing as well as the idea of outwitting or avoiding. To circumvent the problem would be to encircle it, divesting it of its necessarily open status – the subject which is radically unable to conceive of its own self and thus its own origin is consequently a subject which is, at the very least on an epistemological level, non-finite – but circumventing would also entail avoiding or denying the problem as such. In these entwined senses, invoking the potential love of the Other (or other) effectively reinforces and restages the question of the subject; “What am ‘I’?” (Ibid.) The attempt to circumvent is circular. This is not to suggest however that the assumption of an act of love, of loving the Other, is something to be rejected, only that it is necessarily not an answer to the subjective question of the existence of the subject. An act of love would be that in which the subject *stricto sensu* loses itself or *is not*.

1.7 Jouissance and the Impossibility of Wholeness

It is important to acknowledge here that the term *jouissance* alters in its significance through the course of Lacan's work. Where in its commonplace French usage the term *jouissance* denotes pleasure or enjoyment, often being used to denote sexual pleasure in particular, from 1960 onwards Lacan opposes *jouissance* to pleasure, with the effect of emphasising the location of *jouissance* as 'beyond the pleasure principle'. The term continues to develop in its significance when, for example, in *Seminar XX*, Lacan distinguishes between male (phallic) *jouissance* and specifically female *jouissance*. The sense of *jouissance* as it is used here will refer primarily to the usage circa *Seminar VII* where the emphasis is on *jouissance* as posited lost wholeness, the impossible 'pleasure/pain' supposed to 'be' beyond the split which constitutes the subject. This conception of *jouissance*, as will be shown, is bound to desire and allows us to understand desire as directed towards the "inaccessibility of the object as object of *jouissance*" (Lacan, 1992/1986: 203).

In the enunciation of the question, "What am I?" (Lacan, 1977/1960: 317), the 'I', according to Lacan, speaks from the location of this *jouissance*. This is marked on the Graph on the upper-left parabola, evocative of the parabola of signification on the lower half of the graph. Here, *jouissance*, the place from which the 'I' speaks, like the significance on the lower part of this graph and in earlier graphs, can only be 'known' or 'suspected' retrospectively. At the other end of the parabola we find castration and it is, thus, only through the mediating effects of this castration that the *jouissance* that might be taken to have preceded it, the *jouissance* which might be assumed to be that which is lost in the process of castration, can be posited at all. That is to say, in a

manner similar to the mythical intentionality, \square , which could only be imagined to have been after the advent of the subject for which it is the retroactive starting point, *jouissance* can only be posited retroactively as the mythic starting point of completion or wholeness which is assumed to have been annulled as an effect of castration. That the 'I' is said to speak from this impossible position indicates again the necessity of the assumption of 'I' outlined earlier in terms of *Wo Es war, soll Ich werden*; there where it was, 'I' must come to be. *Jouissance* can be understood to be (one name for) that (impossible) location from whence the 'I' which does not exist emerges and assumes its own place.

'I' am in a place from which a voice is heard clamouring 'the universe is a defect in the purity of Non-Being.'

And not without reason, for by protecting itself this place makes Being itself languish. This place is called *Jouissance*, and it is the absence of this that makes the universe vain.

Am I responsible for it, then? Yes, probably. Is this *Jouissance*, the lack of which makes the Other insubstantial, mine, then? Experience proves that it is usually forbidden me, not only as certain fools believe, because of a bad arrangement of society, but rather because of the fault (*faute*) of the Other if he existed : and since the Other does not exist, all that remains to me is to assume the fault upon 'I', that is to say, to believe in that to which experience leads us all, Freud in the vanguard, namely, to original sin.

(Ibid.)

Jouissance is always perceived – whether as a retroactive positing of the subject's 'own' *jouissance* or detection of the *jouissance* of the Other – that is, *jouissance* is always potential and never actual, in the sense that, though mediated through the symbolic network and the mechanisms of the subject's desiring, it is never experienced directly in its entirety. This might suggest that *jouissance* is an imaginary function. Why might it be then that Lacan insists that *jouissance* ex-sists in the Real? *Jouissance* as perceived *is* an imaginary function but, as such, it necessarily

points to a facet of the Real. This complex and undividable relation is clarified by the mathematical phenomenon of the Borromean Knot wherein each circle is maintained *only* with the support of all the other circles. Were one circle to be broken or removed, the remaining circles would fall apart.

The impossible and retroactively posited *jouissance* is, then, not something which might be considered to be *at home* in the subject, but neither is it something which is at home in the Other. The *jouissance* retroactively construed in and through the process of castration, the *jouissance* implied by the imposition of the signifier of the lack in the Other, $S(\%)$, the *jouissance* implied in the effects of the subject in relation to Demand, $(\exists \& D)$, at the other end of the graph, might be taken as a summation of and indication of the lack in both the subject and the Other. It is as such and only as such that that which is necessarily denied of the subject is also that which the subject can assume a certain responsibility for and towards. That it is through castration, and through the force of law that is implied in this moment, that the notion of *jouissance* arises should not be understood to imply an erroneous social structuring, or the imposition of the 'wrong' law. Such an interpretation would deny *jouissance* the necessity of its function. *Jouissance* is not indicative of an error in cohabitation or an effect emerging from an erroneous point in human social development which could be surpassed with the institution of a more efficacious social system or the 'correct' body of laws. Rather, *jouissance* is a structural necessity arising from the manner in which 'we' as speaking beings relate to 'our' world in and through language and the multifarious effects that this wreaks on our constitution. Thus, while *jouissance* is not a social accident, neither is it a 'natural' fact. It is rather, as Lacan states, an assumed place from which and in relation to which the 'I' might emerge. While *jouissance*

might be perceived to be (in) the place of the Other, as the Other, strictly speaking, does not exist, the 'I' must (in the same imperative sense as 'there where it was, I *must* come to be'), as *jouissance* has already been posited, as its effects have (always already) been felt, assume responsibility for it. Like the Catholic notion of original sin, there is no one else to 'put it on'.

How the subject 'copes' with (its) *jouissance* returns us to the formula of fantasy which occupied the end of the questioning top arc in the previous version of the graph. The four mathemes which delineate the upper half of the graph – d , $(\exists \& \Delta)$, $S(\%)$ and $(\exists \& a)$ – respectively represent, in short, desire, the formula of the drive, the signifier of the lack in the Other, and the formula of fantasy. The short circuit from d to $(\exists \& a)$, like its mirror on the lower part of the graph, from $i(a)$ to m , indicates both a support and a *not-all*. That is to say, the subject's enjoyment (*jouissance*) is maintained by the movement of desire and its correspondence in fantasy and, because of this latter, it is never entirely subsumed by the intervention of the Other. The points de capiton on the upper part of the graph, $(\exists \& \Delta)$ and $S(\%)$, like their mirrors on the lower part, $S(A)$ and A , indicate those moments of anchoring in and by the realm of the Other. As A and $S(A)$ represent respectively the place of the Other and the signifier as a function of the Other, so to do $(\exists \& \Delta)$ and $S(\%)$ represent functions of the Other as they operate on the subject. But the very fact of the lack in the Other ($S(\%)$) opens the way for another route, a short circuit which defends against the Other and allows the subject a certain and necessary 'respite'.

The subject, it is clear, is constituted in relation to the Other but there is always some remainder which cannot be entirely subsumed within the Other without this resulting

in the disappearance of the subject which would in turn result in the disappearance of the Other as the two stand in a symbiotic relation of mutual dependence. This is not, of course, to suggest that were one person to 'disappear' the entire edifice of language and social organization would irrevocably collapse. What is crucial here is that the Other, as such, does not exist. The Other is necessarily constituted *idiotically* in relation to each subject. It is also, crucially, not to suggest that the relation between subject and Other is in any way reciprocal or equal. While subject and Other can be understood to be, in a sense, codependent, this must be understood to be a radically dissymmetrical codependence.

The remainder here, that which cannot be recuperated entirely to the Other, is what constitutes the short-circuit of the upper part of the graph; d and $(\exists \& a)$, and the passage between them. As we have seen, desire (d) is that which remains when the particularity inherent in need is expelled with the intercession of demand. This process can be further clarified with reference to $(\exists \& \Delta)$, the right-hand *point de capiton*.

When the demand of the Other intercedes on need this effectively bars need from ever being a properly subjective function insofar as it is only with the advent of the demand and its barring effect on need that the subject properly is constituted. The demand, as the intervention of language, is coterminous with the emergence of the subject in the field of the Other, the symbolic realm. Through this intervention two other 'effects' are apparent; the drives and desire. This might be pictured something as follows (fig.8);

demand

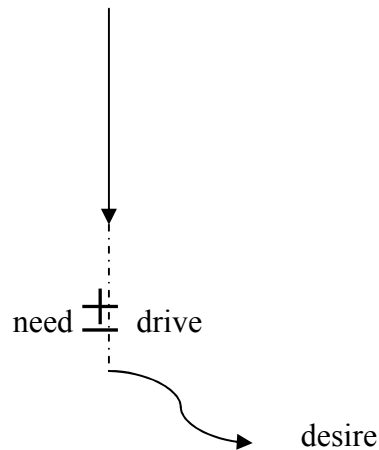


Fig.8

If demand can be understood as the moment of intervention by language, that is, as the splitting or aphanisis of the subject in its alienation between being and meaning, then the drive would have to be situated on the side of the symbolic. It is as such that the drive can be understood as “that which proceeds from demand when the subject disappears in it” (Ibid.: 314). The drive, then, as a symbolic function or product of the intervention of the symbolic, is necessarily differentiated from the organic functions of need, though it still maintains a relationship to something of the organism to which need is retrospectively perceived to have been attached. This remainder is signaled, according to Lacan, in what he terms ‘the cut’, suggesting the non-place of a border or boundary. This cut is the effect of the symbolic dimension of demand, the fact that it arises in signification from the place of the Other (A). One effect of this is that the drives come to be conjoined with certain aspects of the body, as the body can be understood as the site of needs. This is not, however, to suggest that drives are in any sense an organic function, rather they can be understood as that which “inhabits” (Ibid.) an organic function, that is, maintains a relation with a limit point of the organism which might have served as the receptacle for an organic function. It is in

this sense that Lacan describes the drives and their concomitant objects as partial. It is not that the drives attend to parts of the body which could together comprise an organic whole, for their relation with the body is at most arbitrary, but rather that they, as symbolic functionaries, “represent only partially the function which produces them” (Ibid.). That is to say, though the drive is separated from the organic functions of need, each drive remains associated with an organic function through the mediation of the very cut which separates them. The drive can then be said to have its source in certain aspects of the body (such as “lips, ‘the enclosure of the teeth’, the rim of the anus, the tip of the penis, the vagina, the slit formed by the eyelids, even the horn-shaped aperture of the ear” (Ibid.)) but its object is always dissociated from the organic function of this source. Its object, in Freud’s terms, is “a matter of total indifference” (Lacan, 1977/1973: 168), an indifference Lacan interprets as signifying that while the object may retain a certain specificity to the source and the drive (such as the breast being the object of the oral drive) it does so in a symbolic manner, thus reducing the object from its organic function and necessitating that the object’s relation to the drive, as opposed to its organic function, be reconfigured.

As far as the oral drive is concerned, for example, it is obvious that it is not a question of food, nor the echo of food, nor the mother’s care, but of something that is called the breast, and which seems to go of its own accord because it belongs to the same series. If Freud makes a remark to the effect that the object in the drive is of no importance, it is probably because the breast, in its function as object, is to be revised in its entirety.

(Ibid.)

In short, that which is to be the object of the drive, although it maintains a certain link with some aspect of the organic body, it does so with a different significance, rendering it essentially not the same at all. The real breast has been taken over into the

realm of the symbolic where it is imbued with other significations. Lacan explains this characteristic of the drive in terms of its *fixation*.

primal repression, a first phase of repression, ... consists in the psychical (ideational) representative of the drive, being denied entrance into the consciousness. With this a *fixation* is established; the representative in question persists unaltered from then onwards and the drive remains attached to it.

(Lacan, 1966-67, *La Logique du Fantasme* (Unpublished),
quoted in Fink, 1995: 74)

Primal repression is thus the consignment to the unconscious of the representatives of the drive. An example of such a representative would be the above example of the breast. The permanent status of the relation between the representative (here the signifier breast or breast as signifier) and the drive attached to it renders the drives as essentially unchanging. This then allows us to understand that the drive is not concerned precisely with the attainment of its object as such and the corresponding satisfaction that might be expected to result from this, insofar as a satisfaction, in the strict sense, would insist upon at least some modification. Instead, the drive circles around its object and thus is concerned less with the goal, in the sense of that final point which would render its course complete, than it is with the aim, in the sense of the path it takes. The drive's movement is then perpetual, circling its object and returning to its source but always, as it is insatiable, persisting to traverse the object again. In this way, the drive can be understood as repetition, or as having as its ultimate goal its own repetition. The satisfaction proper to the drive is that attained through the repetition of the route and not the attainment of the object. The function then of the object of the drive is, in Lacan's formula, "*la pulsion en fait le tour*" (Lacan, 1977/1973: 168), where *tour* signifies both a movement around and a deception; i.e. "the drive moves around the object and 'the drive tricks the object'"

(Ibid.; translator's note). It moves around it insofar as its circuit is conditioned by the object but its 'aim' is not to attain that object but rather to return to its source and, again, continue its course. In so doing, it 'tricks' the object in two senses, first, insofar as it does not treat the object as a proper object as such, one which would constitute the goal of its movement and, secondly, in the sense that it renders the object a signifier.

To recapitulate, the intercession of demand on need can be understood as coterminous with the advent of language and thus as the constitution of the subject as barred (\exists). This process gives rise to the primal repression which can be understood as formative of the unconscious. The result is both the expulsion of need to the realm of being and the creation of the subject as disunified. What is retroactively supposed to have been in the form of need is 'translated', and thus irrevocably altered, emerging in part as the drives. The drives, however, are fixated on those objects which would have been the objects of need and, as they are fixated, persist in perpetual motion around those objects, achieving their satisfaction through repetition and never aiming to attain the objects themselves. What this does not account for, however, is the particularity and wholeness inherent in need. A need is strictly a need for something, it is not concerned with anything additional, supplementary or adjacent. This particularity lost in the intercession of demand, as it does not re-emerge in the functioning of the drive, escapes as a remainder. This remainder is desire. This is seen on the graph in fact that the drives are presented in the relation between the subject and the demand of the Other, (\exists &D), while it is desire which 'slips out', returning in the short circuit to (\exists &*a*), the formula of fantasy.

1.8 *objet petit a*

What is both crucial and confusing here is the relationship between drive and desire and their individual relations to their objects.

the object of desire is the cause of desire, and this object that is the cause of desire is the object of drive – that is to say, the object around which the drive turns. ... It is not that desire clings to the object of the drive – desire moves around it, in so far as it is agitated in the drive. But all desire is not necessarily agitated in the drive. There are empty desires or mad desires that are based on nothing more than the fact that the thing in question has been forbidden you. By virtue of the very fact that it has been forbidden you, you cannot do otherwise, for a time, than think about it. That too is desire. But whenever you are dealing with a good object, we designate it – it is question of terminology, but a justified terminology – as an object of love.

(Lacan, 1977/1973: 243)

While the drives and desire are both constituted in relation to demand and, in a sense, both are constituted in relation to the same object, they are not the same function.

One differentiation between them is the crucial fact that while drives are always partial in the sense that they attain to an object which only ever partially represents the *jouissance* to which they aspire, desire, due to its defining particularity, is always necessarily unitary. That this distinction can be maintained while upholding that it is in relation to the same object, *objet petit a*, that they are both configured is explained by the different mode of relating each has towards *objet petit a*. While, as we have seen, the drives relate to the object as a partial representative of an unattainable pleasure or *jouissance* and thus constitute their satisfaction (though this is never satisfaction in the strong sense of completion or fulfillment) through repetitive circumvention of the partial object, desire pertains to the object as a cause.

As we have seen, the subject's desire is in essence the desire of the Other with all the ambiguity carried in the preposition *of*. What each of the available meanings of this phrase maintain is that the subject's desire is *caused* by something in the Other. In summary then, we could say that the subject's desire or desiringness arises in the field of the Other. *Objet petit a* would then stand in for that in or of the Other which gives rise to such desire in or of the subject. As divided, \exists , the subject aspires to a(n imaginary) lost unity which was supposed to have been before the subject's constitution as divided in the process of alienation; something akin to \square , the mythical intention supposed to have been before the advent of the subject.

Similar to the manner in which the object functions in the drive, this is not to suggest that *objet petit a* as cause of desire can be reduced to a strictly non-subjective function or a function which is exclusively proper to the Other. *Objet petit a* must be understood as being both of the Other and of the subject and neither of the subject nor of the Other. *Objet petit a* is the lack around which the subject is constituted, that "small part of the subject that detaches itself from him while remaining his, still retained" (Ibid.: 62). In this sense *objet petit a* can be characterised as *extimate* to the subject in a manner similar to the relation of extimacy inherent in $S(\%)$. It is at one and the same time that which is most central to the subject and that which is always beyond the subject. This points to the fact that *objet petit a* is not an object as such in any usual sense of the term.

To designate the *petit a* by the term object is, as you see, a metaphorical usage, since it is borrowed precisely from this subject-object relationship

from which the term object is constituted, which no doubt is suitable for designating the general function of objectivity; and this object, of which we have to speak under the term *a*, is precisely an object which is outside any possible definition of objectivity.

(Lacan, 1962-1963, *Seminar X: L'Angoisse* (Unpublished),
quoted in Boothby, 2001: 262)

Here we should understand the refusal of 'definition' in the entwined senses of escaping the conventional understanding we would have of what constitutes an object and in that it, *objet petit a*, refuses the limitations which might be imposed by such an understanding. That is to say, *objet petit a* is indefinite, both insofar as it cannot be (re)presented in itself and insofar as it cannot be ascribed with any finitude. This infinitude may be understood as adhering to the lacking status of the object or the relation the object has with the concept of lack.

The *objet a* is something from which the subject, in order to constitute itself, has separated itself off as organ. This serves as a symbol of the lack, that is to say, of the phallus, not as such, but in so far as it is lacking. It must, therefore, be an object that is, firstly separable and, secondly, that has some relation to the lack.

(Lacan, 1977/1973: 103)

Objet petit a is then that unattainable (non-)object which is simultaneously impossible and necessary in order for the subject to come to, and to continue to, be constituted as a subject. It is impossible insofar as, strictly speaking, it does not exist and necessary insofar as the locus of its non-existence, its very lack, is that around which desire circulates. The fact that *objet petit a* does not exist as such does not mean that it does not have very real effects. It may in some sense be understood as a pure effect insofar as it functions to produce or give rise to desire without it being that which would or could quell desire. Against what might be understood as the common sense notion that there must exist something which desires or is at least capable of desiring which

can then be attenuated with an object which is desirable or capable of being desired, a notion which would suggest an at least potential appeasement of (that) desire when the object in question is attained, Lacan's formulation posits a conception of the relation between desiring subject and object in which it is the object itself, or, properly, its lack, which not only gives rise to, causes, desire, but also gives rise to or causes the subject itself.

The movement of desire can then be understood to take the form of a perpetual slippage from one object, thing or aspect of a thing, to the next, a perpetual search for that which caused the desire in the first place but which, as it does not exist as such, can never be (re)found.

This lack which would constitute the movement of desire proper to the subject is also crucially a lack in the Other. As the subject's desire, as we have seen, is always the desire of the Other, the Other is also always lacking. The symbol which forms the upper left-hand *point de capiton*, $S(\%)$, the signifier of the lack in the Other can thus be understood as both constitutive of the subject's desire – insofar as without lack the Other would not desire and the subject would not come to be as subject of desire and thus would not come to be as a divorced, albeit divided, entity – and as that against which the subject must defend itself.

This conception of *objet petit a*, the object cause of desire, as, simultaneously, the stand in for the lack in the Other, $S(\%)$, and the lack in the subject can be understood as symptomatic of or corresponsive with the lack of being (*manque-à-être*) experienced by the subject. Through the machinations of desire, the subject

necessarily experiences both the Other and itself as lacking. This lack is inherent in the alienating constitution of the subject as effect of language, in the forced *vel* between meaning and being and is also coextensive with that which is experienced retroactively as that which causes desire; *objet petit a*.

Desire is produced in the beyond of the demand, in that, in articulating the life of the subject according to its conditions, demand cuts off the need from that life. But desire is also hollowed within the demand, in that, as an unconditional demand of presence and absence, demand evokes a want-to-be under the three figures of the nothing that constitutes the basis of the demand for love, of the hate that even denies the other's being, and of the unspeakable element in that which is ignored in its request. In this embodied aporia, of which one might say that it borrows, as it were, its heavy soul from the hardy shoots of the wounded drive, and its subtle body from the death actualised in the signifying sequence, desire is affirmed as the absolute condition.

Even less than the nothing that passes into the round of significations that act upon men, desire is the furrow inscribed in the course; it is, as it were, the mark of the iron of the signifier on the shoulder of the speaking subject. It is not so much a pure passion of the signified as a pure action of the signifier that stops at the moment when the living being becomes sign, rendering it insignificant.

This moment of cut is haunted by the form of a bloody scrap – the pound of flesh that life pays in order to turn it into the signifier of the signifiers, which it is impossible to restore, as such, to the imaginary body; it is the lost phallus of the embalmed Osiris.

(Lacan, 1977/1961: 265)

Desire (*d*) is manifest through the experience of a *manque-à-être* – where the ambiguity of the French conveys the experience of lacking, the lack which is experienced and the wish to rectify this lack. As we have seen, this lack is not, however, something which can be rectified as it is precisely constitutive of the subject who (which) encounters it.

Desire is a relation of being to lack. This lack is the lack of being properly speaking. It isn't the lack of this or that, but the lack of being whereby being exists.... Being comes into existence as an exact function of this lack. ...

Being attains a sense of self in relation to being as a function of this lack, in the experience of desire.

(Lacan, 1988/1978: 225)

The lack experienced by the subject (*manque-à-être*) is obviously not, however, something which can be embraced in itself. *Objet petit a* therefore must be understood at one and the same time as indicative of the lack in the subject and the Other and as that which can guard against the traumatic effects of this lackingness.

It is thus that we can understand why *objet petit a* stands at the conjunction of the three Lacanian realms - the symbolic, the imaginary and the Real – without properly speaking being situated in any one of them. *Objet petit a* is the symbolic representative of the lack experienced by the subject (the subject's lack, the Other's lack), it is the imaginary *thing* which would rectify the lack and it is the kernel of the Real which cannot be gathered into the symbolic world.

Returning to the graph, we can then understand the upper part as representing this complex movement of demand, drive and desire in conjunction with *objet petit a* and the lack that it simultaneously covers and marks. Through the intercession of demand, the *Che Vuoi?* of the previous graph, the drive begins its perpetual circuit around the transmuted object. The remainder which is experienced as emerging from this transmutation is desire, which is experienced as being caused by and points towards that mythical object which would have provided and embodied the impossible wholeness of *jouissance*. Desire here is symptomatic of a lack in the Other which is also indicative of a lack in the subject itself. However, in order for this lack not to be experienced as the impossible encounter with the Real, that is, in order to protect the

subject from the trauma of the lack of being (*manque-a-etre*), the subject maintains an impossible relation with that which marks the place of this lack; *objet petit a*. This impossible relation is represented by the formula of fantasy, $(\exists \& a)$.

1.9 Fantasy

If *objet petit a* is conceived as the remainder produced in the splitting of the subject (\exists) , the reminder of the hypothetical lost unity inherent in the notion of *jouissance*, then the formula of fantasy, the subject in the impossible relation with this object, $(\exists \& a)$, can be understood as the protective function wherein the subject guards against the terror of facing this splitting and the encounter with the Real which that would imply. Fantasy could then be understood as the subject's illusory but necessary staging of its own completeness.

As the short-circuit from *d* to $(\exists \& a)$ would indicate, there is an intimate relation between desire and the fantasy. Fantasy at one and the same time represents for the subject how they desire to be positioned in relation to the desire of the Other and, inseparable from this double articulation of desire, how they defend their imaginary self (*m*, the *moi* or ego, and *i(a)*, the ideal ego), their sense of self, against the desire of the Other in all its complexity. It is for this reason that Lacan emphasises that fantasy, not *objet petit a*, is what supports the subject's desire.

The phantasy is the support of desire; it is not the object that is the support of desire. The subject sustains himself as desiring in relation to an ever more complex signifying ensemble. This is apparent enough in the form of the scenario it assumes, in which the subject, more or less recognisable, is

somewhere, split, divided, generally double, in his relation to the object, which usually does not show its true face either.

(Lacan, 1977/1973: 185)

Embedded in the fantasy is the path to *jouissance*, that unbearable excitement or enjoyment which blurs the distinction between what might in common parlance be understood as pleasure and pain. As Bruce Fink suggests in his *The Lacanian Subject*, there are two notions of *jouissance* at work here (1995: 60). Fink dubs these *jouissance* before and after the letter. The former would denote that purely presumed *jouissance* of wholeness which could never actually have been experienced by the subject in itself as it could only have been before the subject is constituted in its own division and yet, paradoxically, it is experienced in terms of its own absence. The latter would denote the surrogate *jouissance* facilitated by fantasy, a second order *jouissance* which stands in place of and, in so doing, marks the (impossible) place of (the lack of) original *jouissance*.

Fantasy functions to obscure or defend the subject against an encounter with the Real. This Real is implied in the functions of demand, drive and desire, inherent in the impossibility and insistence of the Other's question, *Che Vuoi? Objet petit a*, that elusive object with which the subject conjoins itself in fantasy, can be understood as that which conceals the lack in the symbolic order which is indicative of the Real as that which cannot be symbolised.

The function of the *tuché*, of the real as encounter – the encounter in so far as it is essentially the missed encounter – first presented itself in the ... form ... of the trauma. ... The trauma reappears, in effect, frequently unveiled. How can the dream, the bearer of the subject's desire, produce that which makes trauma emerge repeatedly – if not its very face, at least the screen that shows us that it is still there behind? ... the reality system, however far it is

developed, leaves an essential part of what belongs to the real a prisoner in the toils of the pleasure principle.

The place of the real, which stretches from the trauma to the phantasy – in so far as the phantasy is never anything more than the screen that conceals something quite primary, something determinant in the function of repetition – this is what we must now explain. This, indeed, is what, for us, explains both the ambiguity of the function of awakening and of the function of the real in awakening. The real may be represented by the accident, the noise, the small element of reality, which is evidence that we are not dreaming. But, on the other hand, the reality is not so small, for what wakes us is the other reality hidden behind the lack of that which takes the place of representation [*Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*] – this, Freud says, is the *Trieb*.

But be careful! We have not yet said what this *Trieb* is – and if, for lack of representation, it is not there, what is this *Trieb*? We may have to consider it as being only *Trieb* to come [*Trieb avenir*]. ... The real has to be sought beyond the dream – in what the dream has enveloped, hidden from us, behind the lack of representation of which there is only one representative. This is the real that governs our activities more than any other

(Lacan, 1977/1973: 55-60)

That which sustains the fantasy or necessitates that the fantasy is sustained, is the unrepresentable real which is the lack of the drive. As any absolute encounter with the real would result in the trauma of an unbearable *jouissance*, the subject maintains itself against this in the ‘security’ of the fantasy. But as this *Trieb* is, strictly speaking not there, it can only be maintained in the fantasy itself as ‘*Trieb* to come’.

Phrased otherwise, behind or enveloped in the fantasy which the subject structures for itself in its unconscious resides the Real which the subject cannot directly encounter. *Objet petit a* functions here as the unitary representative which masks and, thus, (impossibly) represents this abyss of the real.

As remainder, that which exceeds the demand of the Other, that which is not properly contained within the symbolic, *objet petit a* can be understood as that which it is not possible to symbolise. This is not to suggest that *objet petit a* is beyond the symbolic

network in any absolute sense of being without relation to it, but it is beyond the symbolic network insofar as it cannot be brought to reign by it. By this we should understand that *objet petit a* is that which cannot be represented in itself or, more precisely, it is the mark of that which cannot be represented. Its effects are felt, its place is marked, it insists on the field of signification, but, insofar as it stands in opposition to this field, it is indicative of its limit point and, consequently, the impossibility of totalisation that the absence of such a limit point would entail.

It is in this sense, as we have seen, that *objet petit a* cannot properly be conceived as an object. It is also, clearly, here that we can see that *objet petit a* escapes the domain of the Other and thus marks the place of the impossible encounter with that which is beyond the Other, the Real. The subject's desire is that which is set in motion by the insistence of *objet petit a* and it is in relation with *objet petit a* that the subject both regains the possibility of some, incomplete, experience of the *jouissance* which would be found in this impossible encounter with the Real and sustains itself against the overwhelming effects of such an impossible encounter.

The properly subjective function of the fantasy can be elaborated with reference to Lacan's treatment of Choang-tsu's famous paradox of the dream of the butterfly. Waking from a dream in which he experienced himself as a butterfly, Choang-tsu poses himself the question of how he can be certain that he is now himself, Choang-tsu, and not the butterfly dreaming that he is Choang-tsu. Put simply, Choang-tsu's dilemma can be phrased as that of how we can know which self is the 'real' or authentic self and which self is an illusory, 'invented', dream version. This should also, perhaps, remind us of Descartes' quandary as to how he knows he is not

dreaming when he is ‘in fact’ awake (Descartes, 1993/1641: 14). Where Descartes, to an extent, circumvents this problem, leading to the conclusion that, even if he is the dream version, this in itself is indicative of a real Descartes beyond the dream insofar as the dream ‘copy’ necessitates an original from which it is abstracted (Ibid.: 15), Lacan’s treatment is a little more involved. For Lacan, Choang-tsu is correct to pose himself this question for two reasons. First, taking such a question seriously indicates that one has not fallen so under the sway of the master signifier as to have foreclosed one’s own division, that is one does not assume that one is adequate to one’s perceptions of oneself. In fact, one does not assume one is one.

When Choang-tsu wakes up, he may ask himself whether it is not the butterfly who dreams that he is Choang-tsu. Indeed he is right, and doubly so, first because it proves he is not mad, he does not regard himself as absolutely identical with Choang-tsu

(Lacan, 1977/1973: 76)

In addition to this, the question Choang-tsu poses to himself holds within it a certain truth of Choang-tsu. In a sense, he is the butterfly. The butterfly, in Lacan’s reading, cannot be reduced to some mere chimera, an arbitrary construct of Choang-tsu’s dream-state. On the contrary, it is as dream butterfly that Choang-tsu was able to grasp something of his own identity, namely;

that he was, and is, in his essence, that butterfly who paints himself with his own colours

(Ibid.)

For Lacan, it is through this penetration of the unconscious that something of Choang-tsu can emerge, as opposed to some social construct or status known as Choang-tsu. This can be reformulated in terms of the relation of the subject to signifier. What we have in the parable of Choang-tsu are two signifiers, ‘Choang-tsu’ and ‘butterfly’. The

subject, in the proper Lacanian sense, of the parable is that which is represented between these two signifiers. Phrased otherwise, the subject of the parable is placed under these two signifiers:

$$\begin{array}{ccc} \underline{\text{Choang-tsu}} & & \underline{\text{butterfly}} \\ \exists & \downarrow & \exists \end{array}$$

It is, however, actually only in the movement between them that the subject proper emerges.

The difference here, for Lacan, between the dream and ‘reality’ is attested to by the mechanism of representation. In the dream the subject is represented as a butterfly, thus confirming something of his subjective apperception. Outside the dream, the subject is represented as Choang-tsu but feels it necessary to question this representation. This logic of uncertainty is in itself what points towards the subjective truth of the situation. As a butterfly, the subject does not pose the same question as when he is awake; ‘when I am not this dream butterfly, when I am awake, am I actually this dream butterfly?’ Lacan’s explanation here and thus his conclusion is that, as dream butterfly, the subject is but his own representation whereas as Choang-tsu, he is a social representation.

when he is the butterfly, the idea does not occur to him to wonder whether, when he is Choang-tsu awake, he is not the butterfly that he is dreaming of being. This is because, when dreaming of being the butterfly, he will no doubt have to bear witness later that he represented himself as a butterfly. But this does not mean that he is captivated by the butterfly – he is a captive butterfly, but captured by nothing, for, in the dream, he is a butterfly for nobody. It is when he is awake that he is Choang-tsu for others, and is caught in their butterfly net.

(Ibid.)

The point we can extract from Lacan's reading of this parable is that the subject, \exists , cannot be reduced to either instance; neither butterfly nor Choang-tsu. Neither, however, is the subject properly some entity outwith the two instances. The subject is neither the property of, a pure effect of, the symbolic order – here that which is fixed under the signifier Choang-tsu – nor can the subject be reduced to a pure effect of itself (beyond or outwith the signifying realm).

In this sense, following Žižek (1989: 46), we could understand the dream (and its content) as the fantasy of the subject wherein the butterfly constitutes the (representative of the) object: (\exists & butterfly). For Žižek;

In the symbolic reality he was Zhuang Zi [Choang-tsu], but in the real of his desire he was a butterfly. Being a butterfly was the whole of his positive being outside the symbolic network.

(Ibid.)

What Žižek's interpretation occludes is the fact that, despite the impossibility of inverting the terms of the dream/fantasy to which Žižek correctly attests, the parable does contain two instances of fantasy. While only one instance can, as Lacan confirms, be understood as a dream, fantasy is not reducible to dream states – we fantasise when awake and the unconscious continues to pulsate when awake. While clearly, in accordance with Žižek's reading, the butterfly is a fantasised representation of the subject such that it can be represented as \exists & butterfly, the parable also contains the fantasy of being Choang-tsu; \exists & Choang-tsu. What is significant in the parable in terms of the light it casts on the notion of fantasy is that by raising and posing the question of his own identity and, in Lacan's words, in “not fully understand[ing] how right he is” (Lacan, 1977/1973: 76), Choang-tsu points us towards the impossibility of

the subject in either position. The subject is that aphanistic point of its own departure, the subject is nothing but its own division.

In this sense the fantasy embodies a relation to some *thing* or image which functions as the *objet petit a* and thus protects the subject from the (im)possibility of the traumatic encounter with the Real by masking or obfuscating the site of the lack in the symbolic order. At the same time, and in a sense it is but a different perspective on the same function, the fantasy serves to protect the subject from the *jouissance* of the Real by providing a surrogate, fantasised, sense of unity.

Through the mode of fantasy we can perceive the mechanism of desire at work. The *objet petit a*, as that which causes desire, can be understood to stand in for the unity we would wish to achieve. In both scenarios posed in the parable, as we have seen, there is something of an imagined sense of unity at work; I *am* the butterfly or I *am* Choang-tsu. In a sense, the psychoanalytic ‘reality’ is both attested to and negated in both versions – I am neither the butterfly nor Choang-tsu but I am positioned in response to my conceptualisation of myself as the butterfly and Choang-tsu. The truth of the subject is the mark of desire inscribed in both fantasies. The Lacanian point here would thus not be that the dream can be equated to fantasy and the waking state could not, but rather that both dream and waking state attest to the same fundamental fantasy albeit in necessarily different modes.

The matheme $S(\%)$, the signifier of the lack in the Other, points also to the impossibility of wholeness for the subject. In the face of this encounter, not with the void of the Real, but with the point on the signifying chain which is indicative of the

ex-sistence of this void, the subject resorts to or finds support in fantasy. The fantasy thus constitutes a veil for this lacking both in the Other, the symbolic field, and in the subject. It is as such that the object of fantasy, that in relation to which the subject places itself in fantasy, constitutes the cause of subjective desire and thus constitutes the subject proper as subject of desire. Without the function of fantasy the subject would fail to mobilise itself. That is to say, it would not properly be (a) subject;

in its fundamental use the phantasy is that by which the subject sustains himself at the level of his vanishing desire, vanishing in so far as the very satisfaction of demand hides his object from him.

(Lacan, 1977/1961: 272)

The castration of the subject, the dividing and alienating effect of the symbolic order as it functions at one and the same time to allow the possibility of the subject and to deny the subject the coherence it might (impossibly) have otherwise enjoyed, is attested to in the intercession of Demand. The desire which then arises as one effect of this intercession is caused, set in motion, by the object of fantasy. But this object, attesting as it does to the state before castration, before the intercession of demand, is never actually available to be attained. Fantasy is thus the mode whereby the subject can 'flirt' with the (semblance of the) object in a relatively secure manner. In this sense, fantasy can be understood as the provision of a surrogate *jouissance* which, as surrogate, serves to guard the subject against Real *jouissance* by masking the lacking point in the symbolic network which is indicative of the (possibility) of the emergence of the Real.

The relation of the function of fantasy to the symbolic field, that the fantasy is that which covers over the lack in the symbolic and thus functions as a support for the

symbolic insofar as the subject relates to it, indicates that fantasy not only offers a certain (illusory) coherence for the subject in terms of his own self-identity but it also confers an equally illusory coherence on ‘reality’ (as it is mediated in terms of the Other) . Properly, these should not be understood as two distinct moments. The subject’s identity is always symbolically effected and the symbolic reality to which the fantasy lends some coherence is always a subjective representation. The identity thus secured in the mode of fantasy is thus both indicative of the desire to identify oneself, to ‘find’ or construct one’s identity ((\exists & a) occupies the corresponding place on the upper graph to that of m , the *moi* or the ego, the subject’s sense of self, on the lower part of the graph), and to do so in relation to something of the ‘outside’ world, that which is mediated and structured by the symbolic network. It is in this identificatory sense that fantasy can be understood as the subjective response to the *Che Vuoi?* of demand as presented in the previous version of the graph.

Recalling the ambiguity of the *Che Vuoi?*, the fact that it signals both the question addressed to the subject from the (place of the) Other and the question addressed to the subject by itself, that it is both ‘what do you, the subject, want?’ and ‘what is it that the Other wants of me, the subject?’, we can see that fantasy, insofar as it functions as a response to this questioning, provides a double answer. The fantasy in this sense encapsulates what it is that the subject wants, albeit in a surrogate form. That is, the object standing in for *objet petit a* is never *it* and thus fantasy can and will necessarily move on to another object which will also not be *it*. It also provides some answer to what it is that the Other wants, in the sense that it offers the possibility of an explanation of what it is that the Other is lacking and why it is that the Other is lacking. Again, this is not to suggest that *the* answer is found, that we can actually

solve the lack in the Other, but that this lack is obfuscated by *an* (impossible and) illusory answer (Stavrakakis, 1999: 47 & 150-2). It is in this sense, again, that Lacan can assert that it is fantasy which is the support of the desire, not the object (Lacan, 1977/1973: 185).

Fantasy is thus that within the subject which attempts to shore up both its own constitutive lack and the lack in the Other. This operation is made possible by the *objet petit a*, that remainder of the Real which insists on the subject, both indicating and serving to mask and protect against the trauma of the Real. Crucial to the logic of fantasy and desire however is the impossibility inherent in its operation. Were the *objet petit a*, the object of fantasy, to be attained, the subject would be faced with the very trauma which the fantasy serves to protect it from. It is thus that desire must be understood as a perpetual movement, not in the sense of the drive whose aim is its ultimate goal but in the sense that the object which causes it would, if attained, negate its very own function.

Perhaps the quintessential example of the fantasy would be that of love as original unity. The myth, as presented in *The Symposium* (Plato, 1994), tells of how humanity once consisted of three genders, male, female and hermaphrodite, and how each individual of whichever gender was complete in itself though combining what we would now understand as the attributes of two people; four hands, four legs, two faces etc. Due to these creatures ambition and power, they were considered a threat to the Gods who decided to split each one into two halves. Because, however, each creature had been previously formed a whole with its other half, they clung to them and if separated search for them relentlessly (Plato, 1994:25-28). The myth as it has come to

pass into popular culture has us each in restless pursuit of our true other half, that other person who would really complete us.

This example illustrates the different functions performed in fantasy. Firstly, it proffers an identity, the answer to the question of who I *really* am; I am really the other half of my lost other half. Secondly, it does so with reference to the promise of a wholeness to come; when I find my lost other half, I will again be complete and everything will be perfect. Lastly, it offers an excuse as to why things are not (yet) perfect, why it is that both I and the world are lacking. Through each of these complementary functions, the fantasy serves to forestall any final resolution. When we do find or think we have found our lost other half, the girl or boy of our dreams, it inevitably turns out that they are not quite the magical object we had hoped for, the world is not suddenly put to rights, nothing is really perfect and thus they cannot be it and the hope can continue that the real Platonic other half is still 'out there'.

For Lacan, one of the fundamental operations of, and thus lessons to be learnt from, psychoanalysis is that of 'traversing the fantasy'. As we have seen, the formula of fantasy is represented in the symbol $(\exists \&a)$ wherein this indicates the subject in relation to *objet petit a*, the object cause of desire. Traversing, crossing over the fantasy, would thus involve the assumption of responsibility for the cause of one's own desire and thus of one's own cause as subject, as without desire the subject cannot come to be. Traversing the fantasy would thus involve assuming a position of responsibility towards (the function of) one's fantasy. That is to say, assuming the role of the cause of desire and thus accepting the perpetual sliding of the *objet petit a*. Put simply, accepting one's desire for what it is, accepting one's desire as interminably

bound to the desire of the Other, and not attaching oneself to the illusory dream of attaining impossible lost *jouissance* ‘elsewhere’.

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Graphically this could be represented as $(\exists \& a)$; i.e. the subject assuming responsibility for the (object as) cause.³ It must be kept in mind however that such an assumption is never a permanent effect. Desire is in perpetual movement and the subject in question is the barred subject of the unconscious, not some monadic subject of pure being. Thus, the pulsative nature of the unconscious must be accounted for. The subject emerges as pulsation in and through the symbolic realm and it is only thus that the operation of traversing the fantasy can be enacted, as speech.

what’s important is to teach the subject to name, to articulate, to bring this desire into existence, this desire which, quite literally, is on the side of existence, which is why it insists. If desire doesn’t dare to speak its name, it’s because the subject hasn’t yet caused this name to come forth.

That the subject should come to recognise and name his desire, that is the efficacious action of psychoanalysis. But it isn’t a question of recognising something which would be entirely given, ready to be coopted. In naming it, the subject creates, brings forth, a new presence in the world.

(Lacan, 1988/1978: 228-9)

Insofar as the *objet petit a* is, as such, *not*, that which attains to the position of *objet petit a* is always necessarily a functionary of the subject. This is not however to suggest that there is something ‘out there’ chosen by the subject which would provide the lost *jouissance* implied by *objet petit a*, rather that the subject has, in the mode of fantasy, chosen something to function as the necessary surrogate of the object cause of desire. In so naming this desire, and thus constituting it, the subject puts itself in a position to claim responsibility for it. As desire is that which motivates and constitutes

³ This should not be confused with $(a \& \exists)$, with the subject exchanging places with the object as cause, which would be the formula of the perverse fantasy wherein the subject places itself in position of object.

the subject, this naming and bringing forth allows the subject to assume responsibility for itself and thus assume a subjective position which is not in thrall to, though it is, clearly, still dependent upon, the Other.

Traversing the fantasy thus returns us to one interpretation of the Lacanian imperative *Wo Es war, Soll ich werden*, ‘there where it was, I must come to be.’ It also sheds some light on Lacan’s emphasis on desire in his seminar on Ethics when he asks, “Have you acted in conformity with the desire that is in you?” (Lacan, 1992/1986: 314) or declares that “the only thing of which one can be guilty is of having given ground relative to one’s desire” (Ibid.: 319).

Wo Es war, soll Ich werden in this context would thus indicate the movement, the traversing, from the subjugated subject of fantasy, wherein the subject is (perceived as) constituted by, caused as subject of desire by, the elusive *objet petit a*, to a position of subjectivity wherein it, the subject, is its own cause. We could thus reformulate the dictum ‘Where It was, there must I come into being’ as ‘Where the object was (perceived to be the cause my desire), there shall I come to be (the cause of my own desire).’ Such a shift is a radical realtering of the subjective position from which one speaks. It is clear also however that such a realtering is and can only be momentary as, in enunciating and thus creating its desire, the subject necessarily does so in the mode of the Other; i.e. language. The desire the subject brings into existence through its enunciation is necessarily passed over into the realm of the Other (desire is still the desire *of* the Other) but through the process of enunciating its desire the subject can succeed in repositioning itself and thus attaining something of its own.

Here we can see that traversing the fantasy does not entail a 'getting over' or moving beyond fantasy in any absolute sense. It is not that the subject who has traversed the fantasy will no longer have any need of such a function. As we have seen, fantasy is a necessity in subjective life in order to avoid the traumatic effects of the Real and to accept castration. Rather, traversing the fantasy involves the formation or configuration of a new fantasy which allows or reflects the assumption of a 'new' subjective position in relation to the Other and the Other's desire. Such a (re)formation of the subjective position is the moment of *Wo Es war, soll Ich werden*, wherein the subject (\exists) assumes a position in that place previously occupied by the Other or the discourse of the Other. Such a moment, the traversing of fantasy, can then be understood to be a moment of (taking) responsibility, a retroactive assumption of responsibility for the position one will have come to occupy. Such occupation and its concomitant responsibility is indicative of a temporalisation which resist temporalisation. It is not the 'despite what has been, I will be' of ego-psychology but rather a reconfiguration of and assumption of responsibility for the very relation of cause and effect which might be taken as having or seen to have occurred.

Returning to the *vel of alienation*, it is clear that the subject who results from the choice in a barred or impossible form(lessness) cannot, meaningfully, have been that which originated the choice or that which was faced with the choice. In this sense, Lacan's formulation is one which renounces any traditional notion of or conceptualisation in chronological terms. The retroactive positing of the subject's responsibility is one which occurs within what Lacan terms logical, rather than chronological, time. This points towards an understanding of the relationship between cause and effect which unsettles traditional or received notions of what such a

relationship would ‘naturally’ be in any given situation and emphasises the assumptive and forced qualities of this relationship. Simply put, the uninvested, received notion that A is (and always is) the cause of B in any (comparable) circumstance is put under question.

cause is a concept that, in the last resort, is unanalysable – impossible to understand by reason – if indeed the rule of reason, the *Vernunftregel*, is always some *Vergleichung*, or equivalent – and that there remains essentially in the function of cause a certain *gap*

(Lacan, 1977/1973: 21)

This logic can also be detected in Lacan’s statement concerning not ceding or giving ground relative to one’s desire. By allowing the relation with the object to pertain in such a way that the object is Other, that is, that the subject finds its cause in something radically external to itself, the subject cannot yet bring itself to be in a properly subjective position. The assignation of cause is always a retroactive and subjective affect. By assigning the role of cause to something else, the subject denies itself and places itself under the sway of the Other, albeit in a deluded form. It is only through the subjective assumption of the cause that the subject allows its own possibility.