



**Strange Objects, Immaterial Objects**  
**Why does Lacan include the voice and the gaze in the**  
**series of Freudian objects?<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract:** In this paper Marie-Hélène Brousse presents the two objects Lacan has added to Freudian list of drive objects: the voice and the gaze. She considers some excerpts from *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, livre X: L'Angoisse* dedicated to the gaze and the voice to describe their characteristics as libidinal objects and give clinical examples of their localization in analysis.

**Key words:** Object a; voice; gaze.

**Sumilla:** En éste texto, Marie-Hélène Brousse presenta los dos objetos que Lacan añade a la lista freudiana de los objetos de la pulsión: la voz y la mirada. Ella toma en consideración algunos pasajes de *El Seminario de Jaques Lacan, Libro X: La Angustia*, dedicado a la mirada y a la voz, para describir sus características como objetos libidinales y dar ejemplos clínicos de su localización en análisis.

**Palabras clave:** Objeto a; voz; mirada.

I would like to say that I am greatly honored to be with you and explain how I conceived the treatment of the theme I will discuss today. They asked me to speak about the gaze and the voice, a topic that I consider very difficult. Thus, today's presentation is a task through which, addressing you, I teach myself. It is a meticulous and precise job of reading

several excerpts from *Le Seminaire de Jacques Lacan, livre X: L'Angoisse*<sup>3</sup> dedicated to the gaze and the voice.

I will begin by introducing the problem in a general way.

Ever since Freud, that which psychoanalysis calls *object* has little to do with what goes by that name in current discussions. In psychoanalysis, the object appears in expressions that immediately show us that one is dealing with something previously unheard-of. For example, the expression *choice of object* (which is one of the offshoots of the Freudian Oedipus) or the expression *object relationship* thus concern objects with which we have relationships, which implies that we are not in the field of utility.

For years, Lacan frequently criticized the object-relationship concept. Essentially, in relation to the environment present in psychoanalysis, of viewing the object as a whole, his position is that every object is partial - it is a part - and that joining all the parts would not result in a complete, ideal object. This was roughly the position of the defenders of the object relationship, since they aimed at demonstrating that the love object at play in genital relationships was summarized, so to speak, or constructed as an arrangement of all the partial objects.

Another expression that helps one to contemplate what an object is in psychoanalysis is *the lost object*, the fundamental Freudian expression. To begin with, we can say that it is the paradigm of the psychoanalytical object. In psychoanalysis, when one speaks of an object, one is speaking of a lost object. In *Seminaire X*, Lacan contrasts *objectivity* with another term that he invents: *objectality* -

"objectivity," to denote external objects (those that are in space); and "objectality," to define those curious objects that are lost initially, those to which we have access only through representations or descriptions.

Freud had established a preliminary list of these objects, a list of three plus two: breast, excrement and phallus - to which he added, as a subcategory, money and offspring -, which correspond to the five parameters of losses, the five drive objects. This list was developed and historicized by Karl Abraham, who made each one of these five object losses correspond to a stage of development. These objects were linked to the drive development, supposedly concluded by genital drive. This was a way of civilizing Freud's perverse polymorphic child.

Lacan retrieves the Freudian list and adds two objects that are even more bizarre than the Freudian objects, things that had never been called objects before Lacan: the voice and the gaze. He breaks away from what we commonly call objects. As a guiding principle, he uses the fact that, the more bizarre these objects are, the more they manifest the specificity of the Lacanian objects. In his seminar, Lacan adds other objects to these five, such as the placenta, the embryonic membranes.

First of all, I will define the Lacanian object as such. Next, I will describe the characteristics of the gaze and the voice as libidinal objects; and, finally, I will give clinical examples of the localization of these objects in analysis.

Placing them in a list implies that they have at least one common feature. Lacan went on to explain that the common

feature is their function. He constructs the idea that, for the speaking being, there is an object function, a function that designates the term he created: the object, small a. Object a is a function. Citing what he says in Lesson VII of *Seminaire X*, "We designate this object with a letter. Such algebraic notation has its function. It is like a connecting thread intended to permit us to recognize the object's identity in the diverse instances in which it appears to us."

Well, you already can see that the object appears under different circumstances. It has the same function, but appears in phenomenally diverse forms. "The purpose of the algebraic notation is precisely to give us a pure perspective of its identity, it already having been stated by us that word designation is always metaphorical ..." I will pause here to explain that he uses the algebraic notation of the small a to avoid the signifiers and the deluge of meanings that they bring into play, since a word always has a metaphorical meaning; that is, its literal meaning and its figurative meaning. Take "breast" as an example. Breast means mammary gland, but it also means bosom or core, a privileged space, as well as reminding one of breast-feeding. In other words, breast means many things. Calling it object small a seeks to eliminate the metaphor. The same goes for excrement. I'm not sure if it is the same in all languages, but one frequently uses *merde* (*shit*) in French. At any rate, in French there is a whole series of offshoots that allow one to make metaphors of such word. As to the phallus, anything can take on a phallic meaning. For example, this bottle - all I need to do is to make a metaphor of it for it to become a phallus. You can understand why Lacan decided to call this object small a,

a mechanism for combating metaphors and significations. In this seminar, it is also true that, in order for the object to be a function, it does not relinquish being a substance. This is the Lacanian seminar that is most highly supported in the field of biology. There are an enormous number of references to biology that show that, in order for the object to be a function, it is a function that implies biological functioning; it is the union of drive with the biological realm.

Another thesis of this seminar - upon which I will not overly expound, but which is fundamental - is that we only have indirect access to these objects *a*, and the most secure path of access is through anxiety. There is a clinical practice guide in this seminar! Every time you are anxious - I am not referring to when you are afraid (for when you fear, you know you are afraid), but to when you are anxious; i.e., when you cannot identify what causes your anxiety -, there is an object *a* behind it all. Here is a clinical note: when you are anxious, look for the object. You will see ... it drops.

We will now move on to a Lacanian definition of the object *a*. Perhaps the most important point is the idea that this object is a part of our flesh, a piece of our body, not a part of the body of the Other. If it is a piece (thus a part), it will never be the whole. It is an object that is hidden, separate, inert, since if we were to say sacrificed, that would entail giving it a meaning. Lacan defines it as follows: it is what remains of the division in the field of the Other through the presence of the subject. Upon birth, you are not yet a subject that speaks. You are an individual, an organism and a body, but still not a subject that speaks.

You begin to be a speaking being when you use speech - that is, when you use words, the signifiers to address the Other, although these signifiers initially reach you from the Other, of course. That is, when you interrelate with Others of the language, when you fulfill yourselves as speaking subjects, at that moment you lose a small piece, a piece of body, a little satisfaction, and that is the object.

I will give clinical examples of object a extracted from the body, two small examples: one from the psychopathology of everyday life; and the other, from movies.

When we perform our toilet routine in the bathroom, we - especially women - brush our hair. Our hair is relatively important to our image: we do or do not like it; we want to change it; we dye it; we cut it; we curl or straighten it; it does or does not please us; nonetheless, we concern ourselves with it. However, when we brush our hair, if hair falls into the sink, then, frankly, that hair does not please us. We consider that hair disgusting, hair that gets into the drain and transforms itself into a viscous thing. Well, object a is precisely that hair, when it is no longer on your head. It is disgusting when it is in the sink drain; it is the leftover hair; or when it is cut and transformed into a fall or chignon hairpiece, an artifice that can be used when, for example, you get married. When you get married, you want to have lots of hair; then, you can allow yourselves to use a fall or chignon that, when applied, is agalmatic. Yet, when it is removed, it becomes terrible; it is not a good experience. That is what object a is, the piece that gets lost.

I love war movies. One of them is incredible: *Saving Private Ryan*, especially one scene that is exceptional, the landing scene, a scene of mutilated bodies, terrible. At a certain moment, we see a soldier lying on the ground, gazing sideways. He sees an arm, his own arm, except that it is no longer connected to his body. It is his arm, and he can grasp it with his other hand. That is object a: object a is that piece of you that is no longer part of you. One can understand why it is the basis of anxiety: that piece is lost. Even when an artificial arm is attached, it will never be the same as the original, except in *Star Wars*. As you know, there is a scene in which the hero loses a hand; as if by accident, it was his father that cut it off; so they attached another one, just like the first one. In *Star Wars*, many scenes relate to the issue of object a.

In the third episode, the character Darth Vader is reduced to several pieces. You probably remember this scene, when they are in a convoy, and the only vestige is a bloody body part above the river in flames. At the end, they construct a kind of black armor that hides his body forever, which makes his body function like a hidden object a in all of the other episodes. An idea takes form: "My God! If it were removed, he must be horrible!" What remains of him?

I will pose a question that reminds me of our topic. All of you know Darth Vader. Who does not remember his *Aaahhh*? That is what remains; all that is left is an *aaahhh* (a wheeze) when he speaks ... a very characteristic wheezy hiss. Even before seeing him, we hear the *aaahhhh* ... and we know that the villain is near; we are afraid ... we approach the voice-object.

Now we will discuss the two facets of the object: the gaze and the voice. Lacan is less simple than *Star Wars*. It will be necessary for me to tell you at least two things that are a bit difficult. First: Lacan's thesis is that the function of the cause in human beings is linked to the category of the object, since Lacan considers that it is precisely the notion of cause that scientific discourse unravels. In place of the cause, science puts significant connections, relationships, laws and equations. The cause is a function that has great importance in spontaneous knowledge, the knowledge in common language, because the cause is what takes the place of the hole, of the considerable gap or absence that is the characteristic of the desire. When you desire something, you only desire it because you do not have it. When you have it, you no longer desire it; or you still desire it, but it is not the same thing. Thus, there is a basically unfulfilled status of the desire. There is a hole. At the conscious level, we call it the cause. That is what we call the hole: the cause of. The cause is what appears in the separation between the words and what is real. Alas, we tend to think that the signifiers are the cause of what is real. I will give you a very funny political example. Have you ever heard about the President of the French Republic? His name is Sarkozy. He is very edgy. Recently, he said, "The growth rate will be four percent." The people asked him, "Why?" "Because I said so," he replied. This is the idea of the cause: the signifier causes what is real. Hence, the cause is linked to the desire. There is only the desire's cause, and Mr. Sarkozy desires a growth of four

percent. Very well, he thinks his desire is a cause ... we shall see!

I will cite a phrase from Lacan: "Because man speaks, he believes he learns what is real through the signifier; he believes that the signifier commands what is real according to his own inner causation." His own inner causation is his desire.

Let us now move on to the gaze and the voice, the two objects that more clearly demonstrate the function of the cause. They demonstrate it in a different way, but Lacan always describes one supporting the other, and vice versa. Let us look at the gaze first. Pay attention to the following: the gaze is not the eye; it is not vision; it is not the image. Look closely: we are dealing with a strange object!

What does Lacan begin with when he speaks of the gaze? He begins by speaking of the eye. He says: It is bizarre. Have you ever noticed that, at an organic level, the eye is always dual? It is an organ that links two symmetrical parts of the body. There is thus a connection between the eye and symmetry. Second point: the eye is linked to mirages; this is the first function of the eye. Why does he say this? Because he means to say that the eye's first use is as a mirror. Our first mirror is our eye. It is the first time that an image is seen. The eye already is a mirror, a personal mirror because one can see oneself in the mirror. We see our inner mirror in the outer mirror. There is a peculiar feature: in its function as a mirror, the peculiarity is that I suppress myself from myself. I see you as long as I do not see myself.

Thus, the functioning of the eye produces this peculiarity: all of our visual relationships are conditioned by the fact that we make ourselves disappear from the scene. Thus, the question is as follows: What are the features of this first hidden/vanishing mirror-function?

We will now discuss the voice. It is similar: when I speak, I do not hear myself - just like when I see: I see something as long as I do not see myself. These are two levels that are based on a neutralization of the body.

Lacan relates the personal nature of the gaze to the notion of fascination. When you are fascinated by something, it is precisely you that disappears; you disappear in that which you observe, clearly hypnotized. Lacan says that the function of the gaze is that all subjective subsistence seems to become silent. He then defines the gaze as a zero point, making this its libidinal value. Because, on the one hand, the gaze annuls the disjuncture between the object *a* and the flaw of the Other. This means that when one is fascinated, when one is a pure gaze, one neutralizes one's own self-flaws, completely absorbed by what is seen, and also neutralizes the flaws of the Other. When one is fascinated, one perceives no flaws in the Other. When you begin to notice that the Other's face has a small pimple, or a somewhat crooked nose, you are less fascinated. This indicates that you are beginning to withdraw from the fascination.

The characteristic of the gaze is to neutralize the flaw in yourself and in the Other. Consequently, it is a particularly agalmatic object, which leads us to contemplation, to pacification, and frees us from the castration. This is what the gaze object is: I cannot see

what I lose or what the Other loses - which, in a rather agonizing way, demonstrates that the gaze is not a veil, which hides things, and makes the gaze, itself, appear to be an object. This time, Lacan uses the stain or blemish as an example.

The blind spot is the concretization of the gaze object. It places the object outside you. There is the interpretation of the gaze as that which protects you; you are in a kind of fusing communication with the world, in contemplation, but the gaze object does not appear to be external to you. It appears in the anxiety; and the example that Lacan gives is the blind spot that looks at you, and you are unable to interpret that which looks at you, this thing that we are unable to reduce to a sense, whether the sense be a signifier or a beautiful image. When this object persists, it is thus the gaze object. The part of you that is placed outside of you is what looks at you. It becomes real; it is not imagined or symbolized.

There is a famous example of a blind spot in Lacan's work, a very bizarre example, an anecdote that he tells of his youth: the story of the can of sardines. At age eighteen, he is in a boat with Breton fisherman; they are real workers, while he is a well-educated bourgeois youth. It is needless to say that he is not part of the group and that they make fun of him a little. At a given moment, after having observed a shiny spot in the water, he asks one of the fisherman, "What is it? What is it?" The fisherman replies, "It is a can of sardines; you see it, but it does not look at you." Lacan was astonished! This touched him so profoundly that, thirty, forty, fifty years later, he still mentions it. First, note

that it is not very common to find a can of sardines in the sea. In general, we mostly find live sardines. There was something there, a strange object that appeared where it should not appear. Deep down, all interpretations of this indicate that the blind spot is Lacan himself.

We ourselves have experiences of great affliction when we see ourselves appear as a strange in the Other. It is the gaze object that appears here: something does not look at us, and we see ourselves as a strange. Alas, when we say in French that someone is strange, it is to indicate that we are dealing with one who is effectively out of place, someone who escapes from the world's spectacle.

To conclude, we shall now move on to the voice.

Lacan introduces the voice with a Jewish rite, the ritual of the *shophar*, which is a ram's horn that is blown on certain occasions, producing an unusual sound. To give his demonstration, Lacan bases himself on the works of other analysts. He arrives at the conclusion that this sound is the voice of God, detached from phonemes. Thus, the symbol, the *shophar*, presents the voice in an exemplary manner, detached from the signifier, independent of all speech. Thus, we are dealing with the following: the voice separated from its use in speech. He considers it the moo of the dead bull and the clamor of culpability. In its separable form, the voice is the *shophar*, or the example that I gave you (which is a little less solemn) of the "Aaahhh." That is, it is the voice separated from speech, which indicates something - from the realm of the living - that was lost as of the moment one speaks; that is, the voice separated from all support.

That is what places the gaze and the voice at opposite ends of a objects. The gaze comes first because it completely annuls the separation from object a. It is the zero point of the distance between my flaw and that of the Other. In contrast, the voice is the infinity point that increases the distance between my flaw and that of the Other, and is interpreted through culpability.

Before finishing, I would like to give you two examples: one, on the use of the voice in clinical practice; and the other, on the use of the gaze.

This is about an analysand that is from the "psy" area: she's a psychologist and is already heavily engaged in the work of the analytical community. On a certain occasion (a very personal moment of her analysis), she has to present a study on the circuit of demand. On the way to this conference, she turns on the radio and hears a small portion of a voice, recognizing it as Lacan's. She arrives for her presentation and, at a certain point, in an unprecedented manner, hears her own voice. She hears herself speaking during her lecture and disappears completely. She can no longer think about anything, continues to read, makes a mistake concerning the diagram she had drawn on the blackboard, and is unable to answer questions. Two people were speaking: her and another person. At the end of the conference, the person that organized it congratulates the other person while saying nothing to her. She feels terrible! Unable to sleep, she begins to examine the associations. Two of them are central. Her paternal grandfather had been an opera singer. He had participated in the Second World War and had lost his voice in the war. He had been taken prisoner

and, upon returning, he could no longer sing opera; he had lost his voice. However, she remembers that, during family meals, he still used to try to sing. She also remembers that, before parting for the war, he had recorded LPs that had a label, the EMI label, "The voice of his master." On the label, a dog listened to a gramophone. The other association reminded her of her father, who she characterizes as someone who incessantly plays with words, in a rather maniacal manner - basically, he says nothing, an empty voice. We can perfectly see what happened to her: Lacan on the radio, the voice of her master, and her becoming the dog that listens. What does the dog hear during the conference? Her own voice - truly, the lost object *per excellence*, inscribed along the lines of paternal castration: the lost voice of her grandfather that she continues hearing on records and the absent voice of her father. Well, this had a considerable effect on her, since the major inhibitions that made her substantially uncomfortable concerned her great difficulty to speak in public, which partly disappeared with this discovery: to her, speech is the voice of her master.

Now, let us take a look at the gaze. This is about a patient who, during her entire childhood, was praised by her parents and grandparents for her beauty and her blue eyes. She was the eyes! "Magnificent" was the first thing said to her by the man with whom she married. In a dream, she is the eyes of a soup. In French, when one says *there is fat in the soup*, we say "the eyes are in the soup." In the dream, she prepares a soup; but, instead of being in the metaphorical sense, it is in the real sense. In the dream, she is in fact the eyes. She awakens. All of you understand that the issue

concerns the space between the eye and the gaze. To her, this means completely giving up her place to the gaze, which implies losing the identification with the eye that is there. A dream: on the train, she reads Lacan. In front of her, an old woman prepares to get off at the next stop. She sees that this woman, who is knitting with needles, had allowed her scissors to fall under her seat. She tells her, "You lost your scissors. Pay attention." The woman is old and does not hear her. She stands up and, in her affliction, spills the entire contents of her purse, but retrieves the scissors and returns them to the woman. The elderly woman looks her right in the eyes and says, "You have eyes. And you read Lacan," which leaves her riveted to her seat. The woman had made a wild interpretation, but she demonstrates that this interpretation had an immediate effect. From the perspective of possession, she says to herself, "Yes, I have eyes," which means that she is not the eyes! In other words, the fantasizing of herself as an eye (a lovely eye that impeded her from seeing) is recovered by her as a form of possession. However, having eyes presumes the possibility of not having eyes - i.e., that it is possible to lose them, just as the woman had lost the scissors. Naturally, this had not escaped her: they were scissors, something with which one makes holes.

I brought you these two examples to demonstrate that what is sometimes extremely abstract in Lacan's text is, in fact, a fundamental reference point in clinical practice. Roughly speaking, what Lacan calls a objects are forms of jouissance, and this is based on a loss.

Translation: *Heloisa Caldas*

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<sup>2</sup> AME of the New Lacanian School - NLS.

<sup>3</sup> Lacan, J. (2004 [1962-63]). *Le Seminaire. Livre X: L'Angoisse*. Paris : Seuil.