

# DRIVE AND FANTASY

*Pierre Skriabine*

I will approach the issue of how to articulate the drive and the fantasy in terms of the status of the object within them; this articulation raises a genuine question, which has seemed to me to be worth an attempt to clarify.

Lacan, indeed, allows us to see a movement and a displacement in the way that he approaches the drive and its status. "Drive" is the term that we use to translate the Freudian term *Trieb*, a mythical concept, to use Freud's own expression, which derives, as Lacan emphasized, from "drift", and which has nothing to do with either instinct or need. In what register, then, is the drive inscribed?

I will only be concerned here with the turning-point in Lacan's teaching on the drive, one upon which J.-A. Miller has commented several times in his course. In 1958, in his text *The Direction of the Treatment*, which appears in the Écrits, Lacan emphasized that the drive "implies in itself the advent of the signifier", and he proposed, moreover, in 1960, in *The Subversion of the Subject*, to write it as  $S \leftrightarrow D$ ; this new writing accounts for the subject as fading in the cut of the demand, the unconditional demand of the Other (p. 236). The drive is written here as a fact of the signifier, rather than in terms of the object.

On the other hand, when Lacan reformulates this concept on the basis of his elaboration of the object *a*, he displaces his emphasis from the drive's signifying structure to its value as *jouissance*; this change can be seen especially in his topological elaboration of the drive in Seminar XI, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis in 1964. He had produced a similar reformulation of the fantasy in 1961, in his seminar on identification, with the aid of the topology of the subject and the object that he had developed, a reformed version of which was taken up later in *L'Étourdit*.

## I. The Drive.

Let us start with the definition that Lacan gives us of the drive in Seminar XI (p. 176):

"The drive is precisely that *montage* by which sexuality participates in psychical life, in a way that must conform to the gap-like structure that is the structure of the unconscious"; a few pages later (p. 181) he adds that "This articulation leads us to make of the manifestation of the drive the mode of a headless subject, for everything is articulated in it in terms of tension, and has no relation to the subject other than one of topological community. I have been able to articulate the unconscious for you as being situated in the gaps that the distribution of the signifying investments sets up in the subject, and which figure in the algorithm in the form of a lozenge [ $\leftrightarrow$ ], which I place at the centre of any relation of the unconscious between reality and the subject. Well! It is in so far as something in the apparatus of the body is structured in the same way, it is because of the topological unity of the gaps in play, that the drive assumes its role in the functioning of the unconscious."

In these statements, we encounter again the Freudian definition of the drive as "a concept on the frontier between the mental and the somatic", and as "a measure of the demand made upon the mind for work in consequence of its connection with the

body”: Freud describes it in this way in *Instincts and Their Vicissitudes*.<sup>1</sup> I will attempt to define the drive by means of a ten-point commentary.

1. In the first place, the drive participates in the articulation of the body as sexed being, together with the psychic, the unconscious. In Lacan’s terms, “it represents sexuality in the unconscious”.

2. In this respect, even if the drive brings the advent of the signifier into play, it cannot be stated within the signifying chain. Instead, it remains at the margins - the limits - of the signifier, it is a *montage* supported by grammar, as Lacan recalls, after Freud. It is a grammatical artifice that comes to conjoin the edge-like quality of the signifying cut with the body’s erotogenic zones; in the latter’s edges, margins, and limit-zones, the remainder of *jouissance* that cannot be evacuated by the signifying operation - the symbolization, as we call it, that inscribes the signifier on the body - this remainder of *jouissance* finds a refuge on the body. Therefore the second point is that the drive is a *montage* supported by grammar, and although it thus participates in the symbolic, it is not resolved into a signifying chain; it remains outside the chain and does not accede to the signifying concatenation.

3. Lacan emphasizes “the topological unity of the gaps in play”, i.e., the homology between the gaps constituted by the orifices of the body and the structure of the gap and the cut, a structure which is that of the subject as an effect of language, of the signifier (p. 181). Through this structure, the subject comes into existence as the lack both of a signifier - the signifier that would signify it - and also of *jouissance* - the *jouissance* that the subject’s capture in language has rendered henceforth and forever inaccessible. Because in speech, in the signifier, from the side of the subject as well as from that of sex, everything cannot be said, Lacan can formulate that “there is no access to the opposite sex as Other except via the so-called partial drives wherein the subject seeks an object to take the place of the loss of life he has sustained due to the fact that he is sexuated”. The object which the subject loses would come at this place - the breast, excrement, “and the supports”, as Lacan states, “he finds for the Other’s desire: the Other’s gaze or voice”.<sup>2</sup> The drive, and this is the third point, is thus always partial.

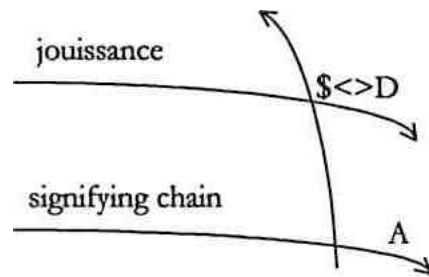
4. Fourth, the drive is silent. “It is,” Lacan says in *The Subversion of the Subject*, “that which proceeds from demand when the subject disappears in it. It is obvious enough that demand also disappears, with the single exception that the cut remains, for this cut remains present in that which distinguishes the drive from the organic function it inhabits, namely, its grammatical artifice, so manifest in the reversions of its articulation to both source and object - Freud is unfailingly illuminating on this matter.” (p. 314). If, in Lacan’s graph, the drive is inscribed in the register of the demand, this demand is situated at a place where, beyond the signifying chain, it encounters a *jouissance* that cannot be said; it is therefore a silent demand, one that can no longer be stated.

---

<sup>1</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Instincts and Their Vicissitudes*, trans. James Strachey, in *On Metapsychology. The Theory of Psychoanalysis*, The Pelican Freud, Vol. 11, ed. Angela Richards, London: Penguin Books, 1984, p.118.

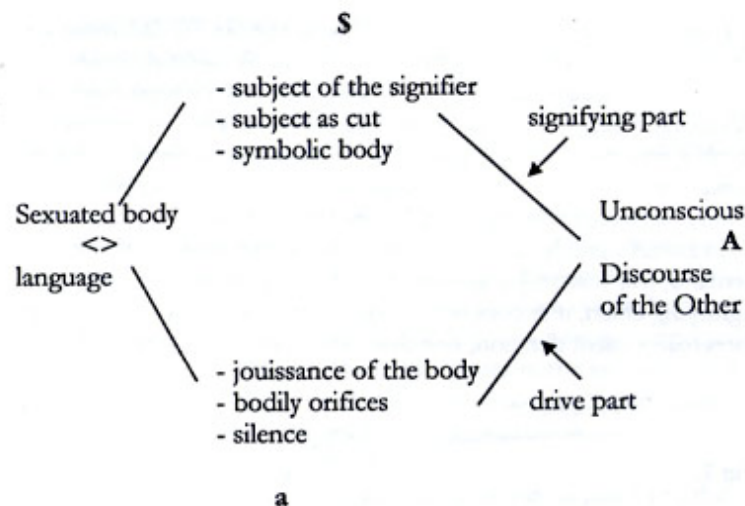
<sup>2</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Position of the Unconscious*, trans. Bruce Fink, in *Reading Seminar XI: Lacan’s Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Richard Feldstein, Bruce Fink, and Maire Jaanus, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995, p. 276.

Fig 1.



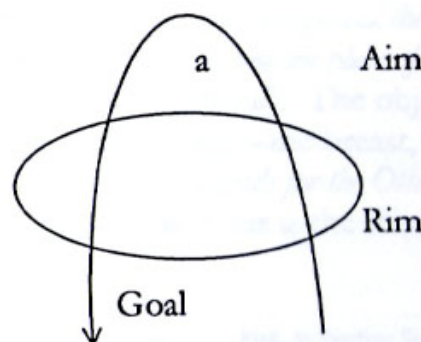
If it is, indeed, to repeat Lacan's expression concerning desire, "the fact of an animal at the mercy of language", it takes its coordinates not from the side of signification but from that of jouissance and of the object.

Fig 2.



5. We come next to the object in the drive, about which Freud has said that "it is, strictly speaking of no importance. It is a matter of total indifference" (p. 168). The drive does not aim at this object; it both turns around and tricks the object, according to the schema that Lacan proposes in Seminar XI (p. 178).

Fig 3.



This is precisely the function of the object *a* in the drive, a function that is independent of its nature, if I can say so, independent of what Lacan would, in 1974, in his *Italian Note* (Ornicar? 25) call "the four episodic substances" of the object *a*. Lacan shows us that "the object *a* is wrapped up in the drive, through which everyone

aims at his own heart, but misses the mark”; as Eric Laurent once emphasized, its ideal mode would be auto-eroticism, “a single month kissing itself” according to Freud’s own image (p. 17). Through the drive, the subject aims at his own heart - at the object of love (let us recall that to love is to give what one does not have), at the object that lies in the Other -, but its shot misses it, and thus misses the ultimate satisfaction by which one would finally *jouir* from this love-object. This *jouissance*, which would be sexual *jouissance*, or the *jouissance* of the Other, as Other sex, is, however, “forbidden to him who speaks as such” (Écrits, p. 319). For the speaking being, Lacan says (Encore, p. 14) sexual *jouissance* is specified in terms of an impasse, and *jouissance* can follow no other path than that of phallic *jouissance*, which passes through the “defiles of the signifier”, of speech. This *jouissance* can therefore only be a failure, and the drive is this movement implied by the object, in which, for want of being able to satisfy itself in the object, it finds its satisfaction in this failure itself. The object is, in any case, lost.

The goal of the partial drive is therefore this return in a circuit, the looping of the circuit itself. “The object,” Lacan reminds us, “is in fact simply the presence of a hollow or void, which can be occupied [...] by any object”; it is fundamentally a question of the object *a* as lost object: the “lost object [...] is the status of the objet *a* in so far as it is present in the drive” (Seminar XI, pp. 180,185). This is the fifth point.

**6.** This object is also lost for the Other. From this follows the particular form of the drive, the “making oneself” – making oneself seen, heard, gobbled up, shitted – in which the activity of the drive is concentrated.

Something is missing in the Other; the subject comes at this place, in order to “make himself” be what is missing in the Other, “it is in this way,” Lacan says, that the subject attains what is, strictly speaking, the dimension of the big Other” (p. 194). This is the sixth point: the drive aims at the Other, at the point where the Other is lacking. By means of the object *a*, the drive serves as a movement that calls to the Other: “Does it not seem that the drive, in this turning out represented by its pocket, invaginating through the erogenous zone, is given the task of seeking something that, each time, responds in the Other?”, as Lacan specified it in Seminar XI (p. 196).

**7.** Let us note that the lost object, as a hole, a gap encircled by the loop, makes present the hole that is necessary in any structure. As soon as the drive loops itself, however, it reaches its goal, which was not this object *a*; for example, Lacan says, “The objet petit *a* is not the origin of the oral drive. It is not introduced as the original food, it is introduced from the fact that no food will ever satisfy the oral drive, except by circumventing the eternally lacking object” (Seminar XI, p. 180). The drive is satisfied in this looping itself; the object and goal are thus dissociated. Therefore the drive aims at and attains its silent satisfaction in a displacement of the very notion of the object and its function. At the beginning of its movement, there is the object *a*, the lost object, the fundamental cause, the structural support of the drive, the hole made in the Other. It is precisely, however, because the drive also brings the other and its *jouissance* into play, that it “is the only form of transgression that is permitted to the subject in relation to the pleasure principle” (p. 183). It is a forcing toward *jouissance*; there is a production, at its end, of a *plus-de jouir*.

The purpose of the drive is, when all is said and done, a satisfaction that is *jouissance*; for this reason, it produces the object *a* as *plus-de jouir*. This is the seventh remark.

8. In its status of *jouissance* as well as in what has devolved upon it, which is to represent sexuality in the unconscious, and since the presence of sex in the living being is linked to death, let us note, with Lacan, that every drive has an essential affinity with the zone of death (Seminar XI. p. 205); “That is why every drive is virtually a death drive” (*Position of the Unconscious*, p. 275).

9. The following remark applies to the subject; in the drive, there is a subjectivation without a subject, a headless subjectivation (Seminar XI, pp. 181 and 184). Therefore the object *a* and the Other - but not the subject as effect of the signifier, \$ - are involved in the drive. The edges of the body, a register where the subject does not even know that he speaks, to repeat an expression of J-A. Miller’s, are in play, the subject itself is not present.

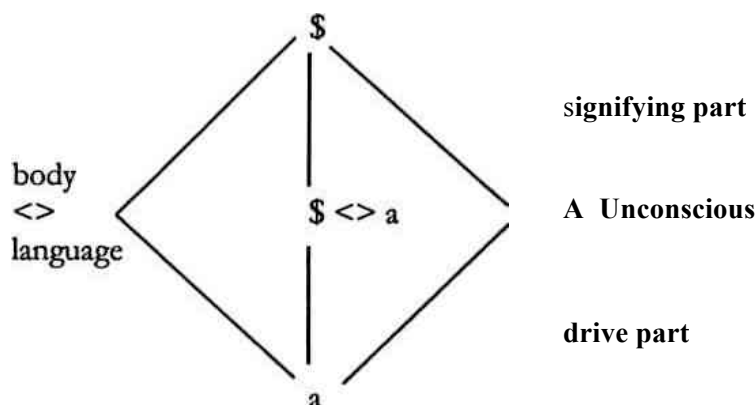
10. Finally, the tenth remark: silent, indifferent to the object, not necessitating any subjectivation, the drive is subject to no specific determination; there are different modes of “making oneself” that apply to all people, and, unlike the fantasy, there is no specific statement for each person.

To conclude this section, and to follow a remark by J-A. Miller on the schema of the loop of the drive, the object *a* surrounded by a circuit serves as the constant product of the drive as signifying chain; the drive is the effect of the signifying chain conceived of in its materiality, outside signification. We could say therefore that the drive is the signifying chain considered in its production of *jouissance* - inasmuch as it is articulated to the body and its orifices; this is the “drift” of the *jouissance* of the signifying chain.

## II. The Fantasy.

While the drive is one of the four fundamental concepts that Lacan names, one which marks a dissociation between the subject and *jouissance*, the fantasy proceeds from a logic, and aims rather at coordinating the subject and the real.

Fig 4.



In this figure, the fantasy inscribes itself between \$ and *a*, fundamentally as a short circuit of the unconscious; placed outside the register of the signifier, it fills up the subject. The subject divided by the signifier, \$, lacks the signifier that would name it, it is a lacking signifier; from this, it becomes necessary for a signifier to come to fill this void and represent the subject in the Other. This necessity manifests itself in terms of a first identification with an S1, which forms the ego ideal: it is a filling-up by the signifier. To write \$, however, is also to write the subject as voided of *jouissance*

by its capture in language and the effect of the signifier; from this point of view, the filling up is effected not by the signifier but by the object *a* in the fantasy,  $\$ \ll a$ : it is a filling-up by *jouissance*.

2. In the fantasy, the object *a* comes to suture the subject's lack with a fallacious completeness which leads the subject to misrecognise its own division. It affords the illusion of escaping from the supremacy of the signifying chain - where it can only be represented by a signifier for another signifier, and conveyed in the metonymy of the chain - by means of an object that provides a fixation, a ballast, and creates a semblance of mastering desire. To repeat M-H. Brousse's formula, the fantasy articulates "an object in the position of instrument and a desiring subject at the sharpest point of its division". The fantasy is the support of desire, Lacan says, and the object within it is the object cause of desire; this object, which is nothing other than "the object of the drive, the object around which the drive turns [...] desire turns around it, inasmuch as it is agitated in the drive". We should not forget Lacan's formula: "desire is the desire of the Other".

3. The third status of the object in the fantasy is linked to the impact of the imaginary function of castration,  $-\phi$ , which comes to regulate desire, passing from one of the terms of the fantasy to the other:  $-\phi$  included in *a* is the brilliance of the *agalma*, while if it slides under the  $\$$ , it is the imaginization of the "strong ego".

4. The subject, in the fantasy, is always there, says Lacan, and is situated as determined by the fantasy: the latter manifests itself, as we have seen, at the sharpest point of the subject's division; it is the desiring subject as caused by *a*. The fantasy is also supported by a specific statement - one, however, that constitutes the point at which associations stop - in a formula that is valid as an axiom, without an effect of signification beyond it. It is a bit of signifying chain, which is valid as such, and does not call for extension; unlike the unconscious formations, the fantasy cannot be absorbed in interpretation, but rather fixes a *jouissance*. The fantasy, therefore, coordinates the signifier and *jouissance* for the subject.

5. In the fifth place, I will approach the fantasy by means of the question of reality. Reality, to repeat an expression of Lacan's, is controlled by the fantasy. For the speaking being, reality is what results from the cutting that the signifier has already carried out on the real - already, for the Other is always already there; reality therefore immediately brings alienation - the forced choice of the Other, i.e. of the signifier - into play. As a consequence, the divided subject is caught in the metonymy of the signifying chain, and, for this desiring subject, the motor of its psychic reality will be the fantasy. The fantasy - and this is another way of bringing out the idea - therefore coordinates signifier and *jouissance*; it fixes *jouissance* and tames the real by means of the instrumentation by the object that it allows; for the desiring subject, it thus gives its frame to reality. This means that the fantasy is a *montage* by which reality is regulated and coordinated to the real; this *montage* protects the subject from this real and "covers," as Lacan says, "what is properly the real, which is always glimpsed only partially." Lacan highlights the fantasy's regulating and protective value at various points, especially in 1966 and 1967, in his Seminar XIV, *La logique du fantasme*, and in the text entitled *De la psychanalyse dans ses rapports avec la réalité*, published in Scilicet 1. The fantasy sustains and thus gives its framework to this veil - this dressing-up by the signifier and the imaginary - that constitutes reality, and which covers over the real.

6. The fantasy is articulated with anxiety. Indeed, if the fantasy has a protective function, anxiety is the alarm signal that rings when this safeguard is on the point of giving way; in spite of everything, anxiety is a new protection, for it arises and interposes itself between the subject and the threat of an immediate encounter with the real. We can see how, from this angle, it is homologous with the fantasy. This articulation of anxiety and the fantasy can be grasped particularly well in the Wolf Man's anxiety dream, which also provides a striking demonstration of the pertinence of the clinical reference that Lacan proposes in relation to the frame and the window. Here is this dream, which is repeated, as the Wolf Man tells it to Freud (these are extracts from his text): "I dreamt that it was night and that I was lying in my bed [...] Suddenly the window opened of its own accord, and I was terrified to see that some white wolves were sitting on the big walnut tree in front of the window. There were six or seven of them." He specifies that "The only piece of action in the dream was the opening of the window, for the wolves sat quite still and without making any movement [...] and looked at me. It seemed as though they had riveted their whole attention on me."<sup>3</sup> In great anxiety before this scene, the four-year-old dreamer cries and awakens.

Lacan comments on this dream in his seminar on anxiety, and invites us to recognize in it "the pure fantasy unveiled in its structure", for it shows the fantasy's relation with the real. As we have suggested, the fantasy functions as a screen, but it does so here in its most anxiety-provoking mode, for it is deployed at the closest proximity to the traumatic real, which it simultaneously causes to appear and veils.

The fantasy, Lacan says, functions as a picture placed in a window-frame, for what is in question, first of all, is of not seeing what is to be seen through the window. The fascinated subject, paralyzed by this scene of the wolves, finds himself as if frozen, as caught in a *jouissance* and a horror of *jouissance* - according to a term of Freud's - that the scene transposes; the anxiety that accompanies it denotes, behind the veil of the spectacle in which the wolves look at him, the imminent proximity of the trauma. Freud here detected the primal scene, which he then reconstructed, point by point. The dream-scene is the very image of the moment that the subject experiences as the primal scene, the moment when, as a small child, he had observed his parents' coitus *a tergo*. The fascinated and immobile gaze of the wolves is his own gaze; the subject himself, petrified in observing the primal scene, makes himself into the gazing wolves. In the fundamental fantasy, he is entirely captated in this object-gaze; he disappears in the pure object-gaze.

We see here how Lacan can say, in his *Proposition du 9 Octobre 1967*, that in the fantasy, "a window on the real is constituted for each of us" - a real that this fantasy comes precisely to veil; according to The Four Fundamental Concepts, "the real supports the fantasy, the fantasy protects the real" (p. 41). This dream is therefore a fantasized form, framed by the sudden opening of the window, of the traumatic primal scene. The structure of the dream-fantasy, however, if it veils the trauma, also provides such a clear tracing of this trauma that it makes anxiety arise as a signal and as an effect that is not mistaken about the proximity of the object. The trauma, here, makes its imprint on the fantasy.

In concluding these remarks on the fantasy, it is essential to emphasize that the

---

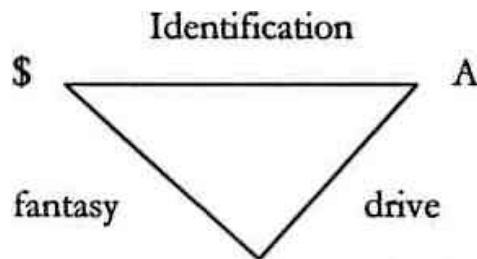
<sup>3</sup> Sigmund Freud, *From the History of an Infantile Neurosis*, trans. Alix and James Strachey, in Case Histories II, The Pelican Freud 9, ed. Angela Richards, London: Penguin Books, 1979, p. 259.

fantasy is what coordinates the signifier and *jouissance*; it is an anchoring-point where the subject is determined in its relation to the real and *jouissance*.

### III. The schema, \$, A, a.

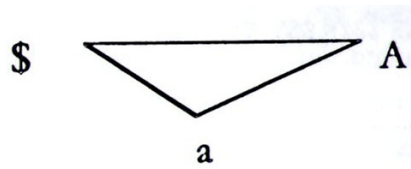
We can summarise all this with the help of the following schema which is deduced from fig. 2:

Fig 5.



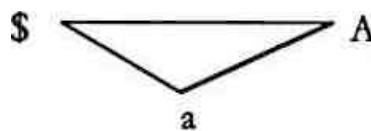
A few remarks on this ternary schema:

#### 1. The fantasy is:



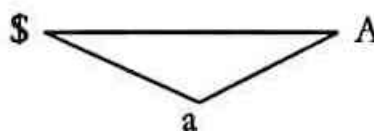
In other words, the Other is put outside of the action: the subject is complemented by the *a* as semblance of being, and attempts, through it, to escape from the metonymy of the signifying chain. The fantasy serves as the point where associations stop, and it is not reduced by interpretation.

#### 2. The drive is:



Here the subject of the signifier is no longer in question; there is only a headless subjectivity, an apparatus linked to the bodily orifices, by means of which the drive seeks something in the Other, in the place where the Other is also lacking. And the drive, in turning round this eternally missing object *a*, will attempt to catch the element of *jouissance* that is always lost. It can do so because *a* is included in A, and the drive is going to be satisfied by this movement itself.

#### 3. There is a third plane:



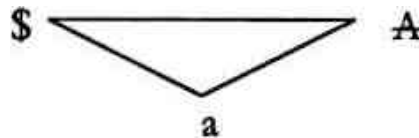
The third plane of the schema is situated in the purely signifying register of alienation, where the subject is given up to the metonymy of the signifying chain and *manque-à-être*; it cannot find its identity as a being in it, but, instead, can only disappear under



the signifier that represents it for another signifier: this is the closed field of identifications, where, among others, the slope of idealizing identification - which is the slope of the transference - is made present.

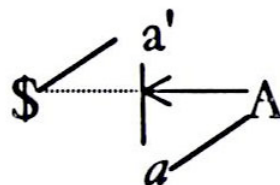
4. This schema, however, must be corrected, since the Other in play within it does not exist; at least, it exists only as barred, since it too, is lacking, for it fails to say everything. It fails to speak *jouissance*, as the extraction of *a* indicates.

We therefore write:



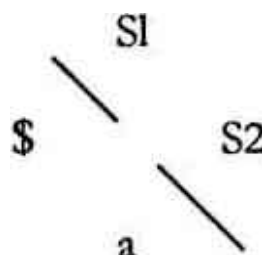
5. We find Lacan's quaternary structure again.

During the period when he accentuated the imaginary status of *a*, as well as the opposition between the imaginary axis - which, because of the imaginary weight of words, he also calls the wall of language, - and symbolic communication, Lacan split the *a* from its image *a'*; this shift adds a new element to our ternary schema:



We thus find schema L.

When, on the contrary, Lacan emphasized the status of *a* as real object – as the *plus-de-jour* correlative to the signifier – and when he accentuated the symbolic and the structure of discourse, he doubled A into S1 and S2; this writing of the discourses can also be deduced from this ternary schema:



6. I would like to suggest, finally, how this schema \$, A, *a* can help throw light on Lacan's indications concerning the end of the treatment, in the final pages of The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis, a seminar in which he had previously emphasised the two sides of transference.

First, there is the side, indexed by A, and referred to the Other - the Other of Truth and the deceptive Other -, the side not only of the supposition of knowledge but also of the deceptions of love and of the idealizing identification. The transference is ordered there between S and A, and brings into play a supposition of knowledge

related to the order of the signifier. The Other is the one of knowledge, and what is deployed is in the register of the alienation of transference. The subject has no other choice than the register of the signifier, we are in the field, the plane, as Lacan says, of identification.

The other side of transference is that of *a*, and refers to the moment when the unconscious closes; it, too, however, still refers to the subject supposed to know. It requires an Other that has been completed by *a* as logical consistency, for the subject will have given over to this Other the cause of its own desire, and it supposes that the Other has a knowledge about this cause. Transference brings the Other of desire into play, and supposes a knowledge linked to the object. Separation is possible there, and this is allowed by the desire of the analyst, inasmuch as the latter brings the demand back to the drive. The subject can then come to this place of *a*, and the relation to the Other will be played out in this moment between *a* and A, on the axis of a subjectless, headless subjectivation, as Lacan says. This is the axis, the plane of the drive, and, because the subject has been able to come in the place of *a*, to identify itself with the object, and find its complement of being there in separation, what Lacan calls the crossing of the plane of identification becomes possible. There remains the fantasy, which we evoked a moment ago:  $\$ \leftrightarrow a$ ; when the subject in analysis has undergone this crossing, has passed through the place of *a*, and has experienced itself as being in *a*, "the experience of the fundamental fantasy becomes the drive", Lacan says; in other words, this is played out beyond the pleasure principle (Seminar XI, p. 273). Inasmuch as this subject has been able to occupy the empty place, in the Other, of the *a*, inasmuch as it is caused by *a*, the subject, as *a*, aims at itself in the Other, beyond the fantasy, in the drive.

Fig 6.

