



**"the chair is nasty!"**

**the status of the object  
and the nominative function**

1 - The object : an extra-linguistic connective element

2 - The feeding act

3 - The object: combination of a real element/and a real action

4 - Patient / agent antagonism

5 - The reversal of the positions

6 - Story of a Baby walker

7 - A conversion of finality

8 - Nominative action from Baby walker to car

9 - Some consequences:

1 - The nanny speech

2 - The chair is nasty!

3 - Blanks in infantile memory

## **General problems**

Much mystic but not modest, Middle Age, a long time before scientific psychology, filled up frescos and sculptures with libidinous, oral, sexual, or excremental representations. The Verb denounced by this way, the true origin of sin. At the same time death was denied and radicalized as this ultimate separation which is the eternal damnation. Centuries ran before orality, genitality and anality are understood according to a new concept: the object-relationship.

Nowadays only, they acquire a scientific consistency and, by the way, stopped contaminating the moral. Meanwhile, psychology was looking further into linguistic

being. Such an evolution was inescapable because most of therapeutic principles suppose an action of the word on the body. Yet thought didn't make any progress on the question of object and extra-linguistic universe.

## **The object: an extra-linguistic connective element**

If we had to draw conclusions from the current vision, we must have to summarize them in this idea that the object constitutes the connective psychological element between:

- on the one hand, drive,
- on the other hand, its satisfaction.

More precisely, let us say that a distinct element (in the physical world), required by the drive, becomes object thanks to a specific quality which allows it **to modify inner reality of the being**. Either animated or unanimated, the object draws its qualities from its power to establish this connection: under this condition, the combination of a real action with a real element generates and defines existence of the object. Whether the mother, or an attribute of her, sexual object or food, the object involves the psycho physiological being, his desires, his drives, by a precise effect without which it does not exist : it modifies internal reality of the subject. Either our point of view Pavlovian or Freudian, in any case, the object affects being by contiguity.

## **The report with the object in the feeding act**

To give more clearness to our remarks, we will illustrate them by the feeding act, which is undoubtedly the simplest and the most constraining act, for all alive being. The need to eat finds its starting point in a "inner requiring necessity" which affects both mind and behaviour:

- mind by a message, called "hunger",
- behaviour, by setting food search as a priority.

If hunger indicates a nutritional need, and induces adequate researches, a cookie can be an answer: it draws its qualities from nutritional power which its composition confers to it. The cookie, as a food object is thus presented like:

- a response to a need which pre-exists to it,
- and especially like an object required by this need.

If the child turns his intentional gestures towards it, we notice that external world, only, can bring an answer to him. In this context, it is not difficult to conclude that objects which children take off the world are only those which he is interest in. Here appears a fundamental data: the child brings out from external world, anything which pre-exists in his own inner universe and has already a functional representation. In other words which is waited in advance. Inside this connection, object (cookie) is, according to the well-known sentence "*is the thing by what the drive can achieve its aim*". The logical postulates which govern surge of the object are those of the causal relation: a logical of

contiguity. **This object does not need to be named to exist.** It is thus indifferent to the linguistic action.

## The object: combination of a real element and a real action

By the way, the object appears as a consequence of the hunger (which is a fundamental biological need). Here is a hidden obviousness, lightened by the concept of combination given in honour by **R. Jakobson**. It would be absurd to say that the cookie, combined with eating, induce hunger.

cookie + act to eat =====> hunger

There would be madness. On the other hand, if one considers the need to eat as a concrete reality, and thus hunger as an element of this reality, the facts are given in the right order. One perceives that it is the experience of the hunger, combined with the experience of manducation, which confer on the cookie the qualities of object. One can say: the object surges from reality by the combination of the hunger (the drive) with the act to eat.

So, we note that, in the exercise of creation of the world, contiguity relationship generates surge of object by the combination of a real element to a real action:

combination				modifying agent
hunger	*	act to eat	=>	food object (cookie)
real element	*	real action	=>	object

Consequently, we can give a definition:

*the object is a cut off element from the distinct reality (the external world) which, combined with a real action, modifies inner reality of the being.*

Mother or Nature, the universe of material objects and maternal space surges to conscience by the **power of contiguity**. We notice, at the same time, that good or bad qualities and the fact of being animated or unanimated are contingent. Often put ahead, they are however erased in front of the logical postulates of the contiguity. This manner of seeing draws its interest from the later introduction of a radically different report which occurs with the universe of signs. The opposition of the two systems authenticates an ontological splitting, settled in the bipartition patient/agent. These concepts take on a practical operativity which is advisable to look further into now.

## Patient / agent antagonism

- the "patient" position defines the psychological being (which is calling for inner transformation) appealing to the circumstance to which it is subjugated (i.e. where the subject of the action is set up); for instance, when baby cries at feeding time, his wellbeing depends on circumstance;

- the position "agent" defines the psychological being as an active transformer of this circumstance and so, at the same time, psychological subject of the action; that is how behave an elder baby who makes din by claiming his meal. The word "circumstance" is given in its first meaning: which is held around, referring to the context of transaction.

## The reversal of the positions

What has just been known must be specified: a baby who is hungry screams and tightens his hands towards the feeding-bottle. Mother perceives the index that baby is hungry, thanks to this **phonic gesture**. It is known, an **index** is not a sign; that rings a bell for the person which observes it but not for the being which emits it. In this configuration the baby is in position of patient fixed with the circumstance which will provide (or not) for its needs. Later, the child cans scream for another reason: for example, to make the mother coming toward him. We are in front of an **analogon of behaviour**, in fact, this is the diverted use of a natural body act: the cry.

This one, consequently, gets the value of a sign and is not any more an index.

The child, even if he imitates indeed himself only, enters an active behaviour, with intention to modify the surrounding world. At same time, he becomes circumstance. **Crying is no more a phonic gesture but a signifier**. By the way occurs a complete inversion of the patient / agent positions. This question is narrowly connected to the development of the linguistic communication. One can have presentiment that this antagonism will mark out construction of a language, introducing vast and constant breaches inside relationship universe. We will endeavour to light them step by step.

## Story of a Baby walker

Until he acquires language, the child leads a permanent struggle against the universe. This fight is necessary to mind and body development. It is instinctually continued with all motor activities. A baby walker is a toy given to the child in this purpose. It does not matter that baby walker is not a natural element but a toy, made by men: a functional connection pre-exists, between need and object. Generally, this baby walker, thank to which the child develops his muscles, appears a miniature vehicle, Train or Truck, in such a way that baby can imitate the adult. This use of a baby walker, as a vehicle, **creates a sense**. So it brings up another kind of relation: the child wants to be driver, imitating his father or mother; by the way he **become himself circumstance**. Obviously, one can see that agent-patient positions are inverted.

Thanks to example of the baby walker we are able to distinguish two types of concurrent

relations upon the same object (they are antagonistic and co-eternal and one cannot suspend their coexistence):

a) the first to be described, is a contiguity relation induced by the spontaneous motor activity of the child; his acting is entirely controlled by the configuration of the baby walker to which he is fixed as a patient;

b) the second belongs to the similarity order; the movements of the child are in agreement of a parental imitation by which the child, across his instinctual motor activity, gives a sense to his acts. One can speak here of "signifier".

This duality explain a splitting where we can observe that:

a) in the first function, the psychological subject is the circumstance (the baby walker); the patient/agent relation is constituted as follows:

*baby walker = agent \ \ child = patient*

b) in the second function, the psychological subject is the child (who becomes circumstance) what underlies a inverted relation:

*child = agent \ \ baby walker = patient*

The ontological ambiguity attached to this bipartition generates the following question : **can one be simultaneously agent and patient in the same situation**, in the same context? According to our hypothesis this is impossible with human being, and an irreducible antagonism is generated by this inversion.

The conjunction of these two relationships upon the same object is factor of crisis. It opposes incompatible and mutually exclusive psychic attitudes, like having or being. On same relevant space, one cannot depend on the circumstance and being the circumstance, at the same time. In consequence of this incompatibility one observes the **repression of the primitive relation of contiguity**. This "setting under sequestration" can take various forms such as denial, diabolization or obliteration of the memory. This, in the youth, takes the name of **infantile amnesia**.

Indeed, child can't choose. On the one hand he needs to acquire the language, and on the other hand he must draw aside the subjection of the object, unless to be locked up in the autism.

## **A conversion of finality**

Through this intermediate object, which is the baby walker, one will have understood, that identification with the parental images is concerned. These images are static and dynamic, structural and acting. But like any object, the baby walker has to be named. Giving a name (**the act of nomination**) indicates a sense which cannot be a slight sense: here, as we wrote higher, this sense, signifying to drive a car, goes for a segment of a signifier chain, representing adult power and, beyond, access to the sociality. In the last

analysis, the body act remains the same one. But a conversion of finality occurs, as from moment where the baby walker, designed to satisfy muscular impulses of the child, becomes a "car" and the baby its driver.

By the **power of the word**, the subject of this act, promoted as a driver, will exist as such: he is present in the signifier chain, but in certain manner he is expropriated from his definitively lost first being. This was precisely expressed by a schizophrenic patient: "*when I speak, I feel that I lose something*".

Here is the major contradiction with respect to maternal contiguity. For mother being "*omni causal*", she has an initiatory role being the privileged imitative model for acquisition of language, precisely known as mother tongue. But language has a separating power; mother, who teaches this language, will be the only person with whom the pure contiguity becomes definitively prohibited: this is called taboo of incest. Separated by the word from "native continuity", can child give up so close relationship otherwise to bring into question his own existence? But, on the other hand, there is not other way than imitation to acquire the word, so that to give up imitative act is to give up the language. That means to be hold out of the linguistic institution, out of the communicated and communicable sense and out of the social universe. It is another manner of dying.

One perceives here the base of a splitting, which challenged *Lacan* much (for which "*the word is the murder of the thing*"). It is materialized by this **Saussurian line** which is the bond and the spitting between signified and signifier. The importance of this line never stopped to be accentuated since its introduction by the Genevan linguist as a simple graphic convenience.

## **From Baby walker to car...**

It will be noticed that the "sense taking" is carried out when the baby walker becomes a miniature vehicle, i.e. before the baby use a developed language. "Sense taking" and "nominative action" are two processes which are not simultaneous. They are however congruent **under the primacy of the similarity**, and thus, not at all antagonistic one with respect to the other. On the other hand, they are opposed one against the other and, in the same way, to the ontological category of "baby walker object", considered in its first emergence by the way of empiric contiguity.

Psychopathology currently puts ahead these aspects of the introduction of the language. "*To speak one day, said *Lacan*, means that before child did not speak*"; when baby starts speaking, **he gives up obligatorily his pre-existent nonverbal life**. This, according to the author, is the function of symbol, which names the thing while being completely different from it: "any mediate relation imposes a rupture with inaugural continuity". Our hypothesis does not suffer from difficulty compared to *Lacan's* thesis except that, putting pyramid on its basis, it is not the introduction of the symbol which creates the splitting as one could understand it when reading *Lacan*. Quite to the contrary, it is the ontological splitting, in other words, the irreducible cut contiguous / similar, **which substitutes for the object the function of the symbol**.

## Some consequences

The consequences of this phenomenon are considerable on certain essential aspects of the development of child in respect with language. We will illustrate three directions:

- The "nanny speech";
- The subject-object inversion in the childish language;
- Infantile amnesia.

### 1 - The nanny speech

One will not be surprised that child enters the language very carefully. Word is needed, but it is not used without risk. So the child, assigned with the language, use to try many stratagems, which doesn't show a lack of verbal clumsiness. Initially, child will take care **not to apply to human his imitative ability**. First, in the purpose to produce words he will not imitate the men but the object: thus the dog will be "Baouw Baouw" (before "doggy") and the baby walker, of which we spoke upper, will be "vroum-vroum" (Raphael month 15). The child specifies the objects with an imitative statement but that is **onomatopoeias**. "Baouw Baouw" and "vroum-vroum" forms part of what they represent" (the dog, the car). For this reason they are metonymies, congruent with the contiguity. So onomatopoeia **does not contradict the primitive relation with the object**. By this way children install a vocal communication but avoid imitating adults.

Metonymy is a process of transition. The full nomination comes into effect when the word "car" is substituted for onomatopoeia "vroum-vroum" (Raphael, month 23). "Car" is really an arbitrary linguistic sign. "vroum-vroum" is not. Between these two periods, using "*nanny speech*", children speak but take care **to corrupt the resemblance** of words. Yet a young child has a real ability to reproduce the sounds with a quite fine precision and a real register of competence. One thus explains adaptation to the diverse phonetic formulas in various languages.

Before they are height months old, children can reproduce vocalizations of animals, and in the same way the words of human being like vocalizations. But this phenomenon disappears as soon as the adult pay attention to it; it is very furtive and generally unknown because the child hide it - having undoubtedly good reasons to do it. Nathalie 8 months old repeated her first name perfectly at least three times. Raphael (month 10) is once heard stating the word perfectly "elephant", as soon as he heard adult pronouncing this word; up to month 23 one will never have heard it more.

The important point is that child completely ceases using these early stating when he is around twelve months old. So when we he begins to communicate, the child doesn't use his clever ability to imitate every sound: **at the beginning his maternal tongue is always corrupted**. Child is immersed in the contiguity and this verbal retention seems to obey the mechanisms of modest inhibition. Sometime children repeat the words in secrecy before openly stating.



In connection with the beginning of language, **R. Jakobson** notices that each imitation requires a choice and gives place to a creative variation compared to the model. It also notices that the young speaker introduced modifications into the linguistic model and often deviates with obstinacy, being opposed to any correction. **Piaget** brings back the same observation without drawing some from conclusions. The act of speech is not a phonic gesture. It is an imitative act and, for this reason, it contradicts bonds of contiguity. This contradiction is accentuated while the child improves stating.

## 2 - The chair is nasty!

Intuitively, every adult draws conclusions from the linguistic statute of the child, as he would unconsciously understand the particular position of the object. This adjustment is very precise. When he has just run up against a chair, each mum, in the world, in order to calm tears of her baby tell him: "the chair is nasty", and sometime she slaps the chair. During some years she uses to speak with **this reversed language**. But, one day, in substitution with this speech, the mum will say to his child "pay attention to the chair". Thus, she installs him in the agent position which was not his own initially. The reversal starts precociously and his completed with constituted language. A question arises which we could not answer: does this reversed stating come from mother's or child's unconscious?

## 3 - Blanks in infantile memory

The mother is called to play the leading role in language acquisition. So she has a central place of the contradictory game that we try to describe. Good or bad object, mother is limed in the empirical contiguity, while the linguistic equipment, entirely imitative, is originated with her (and for this reason creates splitting and crises that we commented on). These problems have their corollaries: **mourning, abandonment, and lapses of memory**, which appear to be summarized in **infantile amnesia**. This amnesia is precisely related with original contiguity: i.e. it is in correspondence with this time of the linguistic development of the child illustrated by the inverted speech such as "the chair is nasty".

We advance the hypothesis that this large blank in infantile memories, as a spontaneous therapy, is a direct consequence of the "reversal" patient/agent, **otherwise generating of a depressogenic or dissociative process**. Yet, let us not forget that the first object, experienced by children, cannot disappear. The baby walker gives pleasure to children thanks to its psychomotor effectiveness. As they can't, by themselves, cancel this enjoyment when becoming linguistic, children are faced with two possibilities:

- Either, being confronted with the pure contiguity, they will exclude themselves from language (as everybody is compelled about sexuality by modesty phenomenon);
- Or they will cancel their own existence or rather "sequester" the no-linguistic part of it (repression).

The most effective process is amnesia, which fulfils several functions.



**This forgotten period allows people to represent the most inconceivable, i.e. death. This setting in prospect for death with the forgotten period of childhood, in assimilation with original pleasure, can explain the fascination of this "primitive Lethe" and frequent paradoxical research into death. It works in all transformer crises, especially for teenagers. For a long time, psychopathology recognized that, in psychic depression, pleasure is hidden at the deepest place of unconscious. So, during a lot of decades, regressive therapeutic conduits, miniaturizing death, such as electric shocks or insulin therapies which provoked amnesia, were quite common medical practices.**

See: the web page: [Pueblo's cultural history](#)

**Bibliography: R. Jakobson. Langage enfantin et aphasies. Flammarion ed. Paris. 1980.**

### *[Index](#)*

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