Like a black hole—which cannot be perceived directly, but is known only by the way it warps space-time—the object of psychoanalysis is an object we know solely by its effects. In his seminar “The Analytic Act,” Jacques Lacan suggests that the analysand’s act is not something the analyst can know, interpret, or anticipate, but something by which he is “struck” both psychically and in his body, where it leaves its traces or impressions. The act leaves effects in the real; it acts upon the body, and not upon the understanding alone. What “strikes” the analyst in the act—as distinct from the “acting out” that often characterizes the analysand’s way of relating to the analyst, for example as an object of love or aggression—is what Lacan calls the object (a), the “object-cause of desire” that acts in and through the subject. As a purely mental object that does not properly speaking “exist,” it cannot be perceived, sensed, or known empirically. Instead, it must “create a path” or “make room” for itself in the world, through the subject’s act.

My paper will explore the status of this act in relation to the procedure of the pass, which Lacan introduced in 1967 as a means of investigating the results of an analysis. In addition to clinical examples, it will explore the act and its legacy through a reading of Freud’s Moses and Monotheism. “How,” Freud asks of Moses, “did one single man come to stamp his people with its definite character and determine its fate for millennia to come?” “Stamp,” like “strike,” implies a corporeal impression, a body that receives an imprint, mark, or blow. The materiality of what Moses transmits must be distinguished both from the idealized hero of legend and from the ethical doctrine of monotheism. It can be identified by the traces it leaves in the bodies of those it “stamps,” traces Freud ultimately locates in the body of the apostle Paul.