

WITZ, TRANSMISSION AND DRIVE IN THE SOCIAL BOND

Pierre Thèves

'If one comes across something comic, one can enjoy it by oneself', writes Freud in his book on the *Witz*. He carries on to say that "[a] joke, on the contrary, *must* be told to someone else".¹ How does Freud define more precisely this necessity to transmit the *Witz*? Let us read what follows: "The psychical process of constructing a joke seems not to be completed when the joke occurs to one [*Einfall*]: something remains over which seeks, by communicating the idea, to bring the unknown process of constructing the joke to a conclusion".²

In the following part of this chapter V, Freud will examine what will found this 'drive to transmit' [*Trieb zur Mitteilung*], as he writes it. This is indeed how he will call this necessity to communicate the *Witz*. He uses two expressions: *Drang zur Mitteilung* and *Trieb zur Mitteilung*, urge to communicate and drive [need in Strachey's translation] to communicate respectively. Let us note then that transmission has to do with the drive. It is a wholly drive-related exigency which urges the joke-maker to address his product to the Other, which he at first elaborates alone in his *Witzarbeit*. The urge to communicate, or again the drive to communicate, calls for a sharing [*mitteilen*] with the Other. It leads to a separation from one's product, which becomes a *Witz* in this sharing, now in the care of the Other, that which Lacan will articulate in his Seminar V as 'sanction' of the latter.

Will we go so far as to say that the drive becomes [*se fait*] transmission? Certainly, since it is truly what which the procedure of the pass puts to work, which is modelled on the unconscious formation of the *Witz*, as we know. When, in his course, '*La fuite du sens*' Jacques-Alain Miller broaches the antinomy of the One and the Other,³ their profound divorce, he does not fail to re-read at length Freud's *Witz* in front of his audience. Why? In order to show that the latter is the only formation to lift this antinomy. Indeed, it allows for the establishment of a link [*lien*] of inclusion between the One and the Other, between *jouissance* and discourse, and for the institution of a 'not One without the Other', the renewed import of which belongs to what is conventionally called the late teaching of Lacan.

We will say, in our turn, that in so far as it realises the drive to transmission, the *Witz*, *par excellence*, becomes [*se fait*] social bond. Let us resolutely envisage the *Witz* in this way. It becomes [*se fait*] an act, originating from the drive of the bond which produces it. The sanction of the Other is itself an affair of this drive.

Retroactively, this can be read between the lines of *Seminar V* against the backdrop of the graph of desire, a task which Jacques-Alain Miller set himself in [establishing the text of] this Seminar. One reads in this vein a statement which can be found on page 123 of this Seminar. There, Lacan retraces Freud's developments of the preliminary stages of the *Witz*, the preparation for the surprise-effect in the Other. He writes 'that which [the joke-maker] produces with this separation, it is the Other.' It is thus clear that the witty semblant interpolates an Other not already there, but an Other which is as new, in the manner of an 'empty Grail'.⁴

The Other posed as product is distinguished from the Other as place. Address and sanction become the very products of the semblant of the as yet unspoken (*inédit*). The *Witzarbeit*, as elaboration, provokes the emergence of the Other as symbolic function as such. This leads towards the Other of the late Lacan 'made of *jouissance*', according to the expression of Jacques-Alain Miller and, from this, leads us to consider this Other as including *a*, which then becomes the motor of a link, however tenuous it may be, between the Other and the One.

This concurs with the way Freud defined 'the drive to transmission', in the statements cited above. It is made up of a remainder. 'Something remains over',* he writes, which pushes towards enunciation, turning around its 'scandal', understood etymologically as obstacle.⁵ *Etwas bleibt übrig*, thus writes Freud. There is a remainder. A residue at the end of the *Witzarbeit*, which until then had been operating solitarily and tacitly, now insists and demands to get out, to be enunciated at last, in order to achieve the whole. Transmission becomes [*se fait*] entirely the object of the drive as well as the absolute condition (in the sense of 'detached') of the whole of this long elaboration. What is residual signs the whole. And as we have proposed, transmission produces the Other well and truly made of *jouissance*.

It is then possible to 'up-date' Lacan's question in the same sense (p.97): "What is this Other? Why this Other? What need is there for this Other?" The term 'need' here indicates that the Other is invested with surplus-enjoyment.

It will be said, in a Freudian way, that the exigency of the drive *Triebbedurfnis* accomplishes the satisfaction of the drive *Triebbefriedigung* which presides over the production of the Other and marks it. The term *Triebanspruch*, the demand of the drive, will be reserved for the notation $\$ \diamond D$ with the understanding that, "in the desire of every demand, there is but the request for object *a*".⁶

Are there other indications that this status of *jouissance* is given to the Other in Freud? What does chapter V 'The motives of jokes — jokes as a social process' end with? Freud concludes his developments as follows: the joke-maker 'seems not to find rest until through the intermediary of the interpolated third person, he achieves general relief through discharge'.⁷

Let us be attentive to this 'interpolation' of the *dritte person* in the *Witz*. The sanction is introduced at the end, which is, at the same time, the start of something new, the word which creates laughter. Interpolated, the Other is quite simply produced. The drive makes the Other emerge as *Lustgewinn*, surplus-enjoyment.

But has Freud said as much in saying that the third person is inserted? What is the German term that he employs? *Eingeschoben dritte Person*, he writes. This is nothing less than a variant of the prepositional formation of the verbal root *schieben* [to slide, to slip] which, let us note, borrows from the well known *verschieben* (*deplacer*) which Lacan turned into his metonymy of the signifier and of the drive. The Other is not so much *verschoben* as *eingeschoben* i.e. slipped in, introduced, thus included, not to say 'intruded' as object. At the very point of receiving the *Witz*, the Other is only able to enter into the process through a provoked intrusion. It is surplus-enjoyment that one then encounters. As Jacques-Alain Miller said: 'It is the drive which makes us laugh'.⁸

Let us note this difference between *verschieben* and *einschieben*, which converges with the one that must be drawn between *a* and surplus-enjoyment. The German language as it is used by Freud already accomplishes it. On the one hand, we have the metonymy of desire proper to the *Drang* of the drive, and on the other the metabolism of *jouissance* proper to the flow — *Schub* — of the drive.

'To need the Other', with which to share the *Einfall* while separating oneself from it, amounts to emphasising this inclusion in the Other of the object *a* following the intrusive mode of surplus-enjoyment: *Enschiebung*.

To need the School, to need transmission as drive of the social bond, pertains to this intrusion of *Trieb*, always to be preserved and placed in a position to govern our community. This is called 'politics of the *Witz*' (J.-A. Miller, Buenos Aires, July 1996). The One School will be a good one.

Translated by Philip Dravers

* "The psychical process of constructing a joke seems not to be completed when the joke occurs to one: something remains over which seeks, by communicating the idea, to bring the unknown process to a conclusion" (S. Freud, *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*, PFL 6. p.195).

1. S. Freud, *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*, PFL 6, p.195.
2. *Ibid.*
3. Seminar of the Lacanian Orientation 1995-6. See the comments on the equivocal status of language both as structure and as apparatus. Thus Jacques Alain Miller was able to say in Barcelona in July 1998 that the graph was Lacan's *Witz*.
4. J. Lacan, *Seminaire V, Les formations de l'inconscient*, Editions du Seuil, 1998 p.118.
5. *Ibid*, p.28.
6. J. Lacan, *Seminar XX: Encore*, Norton, p.126.
7. S. Freud, *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*, PFL 6, p.211, [transl. mod.].
8. J.-A. Miller, *La fuite du sens*, 1995-6.

This text was originally published in *Ornicar? Digital* No 33,34,35, 1998.

Copyright © by the Author. This text from the website of the London Society of the New Lacanian School, at <http://www.londonsociety-nls.org.uk>. Permission to circulate material from this site must be sought from the LSNLS. All rights reserved. Please include this portion of the text in any printed version of this paper.