

## THE MARK AND THE VOICE

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In the final sessions of the seminar on transference, Lacan develops an important and fruitful reading of Freud's discussion of identification with a single trait, which he will later call the "unary trait". Echoing Freud's own emphasis, he remarks that "identification always occurs through *ein einziger Zug*" the single trait. With this assertion, Lacan "begins" a theoretical trajectory that will lead him, in the following year, to argue that this form of identification allows us to conceive of sameness and difference. Indeed, Lacan's rethinking of Freud's theory of identification did not stop with this elevation of the unary trait to the level of a structural principle. In a more implicit fashion, the seminars of this period also examine the concept of incorporation and set forth an account of its relation to the single trait that differs strikingly from that of Freud.

In his text of 1923, "Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego", Freud examines three different forms of identification: incorporation, identification with a single trait, and hysterical identification. He states that the second of these three forms is "partial and extremely limited...[for it] only borrows a single trait from the person who is its object".<sup>1</sup> A person experiencing this identification takes the trait, whatever it may be — a particular bit of behavior, for example — on himself, or herself, and reproduces it.

Freud gives two examples of this identification with a single trait. The first is that of a little girl who "develops the same painful symptom

as her mother — for instance, the same tormenting cough”.<sup>2</sup> Such a cough could be the mark of her determination to replace her mother for her father or it may be an attempt at self-punishment for this desire; in such a case, she would be saying to herself, “You wanted to be your mother, and now you *are* — anyhow so far as your sufferings are concerned.”<sup>3</sup> However it may be read, the girl has picked up one particular aspect of what her mother does, or did. The trait in question may also be borrowed from precisely the person who, until now, has been the love-object. Thus, identification with a single trait can concern the father as well as the mother. Freud’s example is that of Dora, whose imitation of her father’s cough is, in part, an indication that she has been obliged to relinquish the hope that he will return her love. As Freud notes, “*Identification has appeared instead of object-choice, and that object-choice has regressed to identification.*”<sup>4</sup>

In *Identification*, the seminar that follows *The Transference*, Lacan takes these remarks about identification with a single trait and elevates them into a structural principle — the principle that enables us to determine sameness and difference. What, he asks, is the origin of our ability to impute a constancy and singleness not only to our own beings but to those of others ? How, each time that a particular person appears to us, do we recognize him or her ? How do we ascribe to him the quality of being the “same” person whom he was when we last saw him, whether that event occurred eight minutes, eight days, eight months, or eight years ago ?

People recognize this sameness in a way that is radically different from the fashion in which other animals do. In this context, Lacan speaks about his dog, which lacks the ability to abstract a sense of oneness, and can recognize him only by means of its sense of smell.<sup>5</sup> The human being, in contrast, possesses a capacity that is not only prior to, but conditions any subsequent responses made by means of the senses: the ability to conceive that a thing or a person is *one* — that it, he, or she is a being. This capacity to identify unitary

character enables us to impute singleness to a specific being, whatever the changes it may undergo.

Lacan argues that by examining the character of the subject's identification with the single trait, one can theorize the emergence of this sense that being is unitary. His theorization begins with an act of naming: he renames Freud's "single trait" as the "unary trait", a term taken from set theory ; the conception of unity gives rise to the possibility of counting elements and grouping them together into a set.<sup>6</sup> As an example, Lacan refers to a bone that he had seen in a museum on which a prehistoric hunter had carved notched lines, or traits, one for each animal he had killed. In thus noting his triumphs, the hunter seems to have been claiming that

"I kill one [animal], it is an adventure, I kill another of them, it is a second adventure which I can distinguish by certain traits from the first, but which resembles it essentially by being marked with the same general line."<sup>7</sup>

Similarly, the Marquis de Sade, by carving a series of notches on his bedpost, could note the number of ejaculations that he had had.<sup>8</sup>

By marking that something such as a victorious hunt or an ejaculation is itself and not something else, the unary trait "serves to connote difference in the pure state" and the result of its action is to "introduc[e] difference itself into the real".<sup>9</sup> What was real undergoes a reduction that submits it to the symbolic. What this involves is an "elimination of qualitative differences", which are reduced to a "simplified scheme". All of the sensuous qualities that were to be found in an animal killed by the prehistoric hunter are reduced to something that can be written as a very simple mark: a single line that notes the encounter with a single entity.

Lacan suggests that, in everyday life, we encounter the unary trait directly in a person's proper name. The proper name serves as a notation that the person whom we are addressing is a single, unique

being — someone who is called this as opposed to something else. In this way it is a mark, and for this reason, whenever we use it, even when we are addressing someone in speech, we are using a term that, in its structure, is written. The proper name thus differs from all the other signifiers, as Freud had also noted when he singled out the forgetting of proper names in *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*. Proper names are not translated; in moving from one language to another, we try to keep the original phonemes of the proper name, making only small alterations in order to accommodate it to the patterns of a specific language. The proper name as mark designates a specific being directly.

Lacan has thus raised Freud's remarks about the single trait into a structural principle and one may wonder how this new conception can be related to the other forms of identification in Freud's original series, in particular to incorporative identification. Freud states that identification by incorporation manifests itself most fully in "the early history of the Oedipus complex"<sup>10</sup> when a little boy "exhibit[s] a special interest in his father; he would like to grow like him and be like him, and take his place everywhere".<sup>11</sup> This wish to take the father's place is expressed by means of a cannibalistic orality : "the object that we long for and prize is assimilated by eating and is in that way annihilated as such".<sup>12</sup> Behind these statements, there is a reference to the Freudian myth of *Totem and Taboo*, in which a father who acknowledges the existence of no law beyond himself is killed and eaten by his rebellious sons.

In *The Ego and the Id*, Freud suggests that identification with a single trait is a development of incorporative identification. The giving up of a beloved object is accompanied by the introjection of a small part of it, an introjection that involves a "regression to the mechanism of the oral phase".<sup>13</sup> Any specific identification finds its primal precursor in an identification that Freud describes as the "individual's first and most important identification" : the one that he makes with the "father in his personal prehistory".<sup>14</sup> This

primal identification, which is incorporative, will form the basis of the agency which, in this text, Freud calls both the “ego ideal” and the “super-ego”. This relation, in which the identification with the single trait becomes dependent on incorporation, is not really to be found in Lacan’s elaborations of the early and mid-1960s. Instead, in a fashion that is not very explicit, he lays the groundwork for a markedly different articulation of these two forms of identification in his scattered remarks about the invocatory drive (*pulsion invocante*).<sup>15</sup>

In the “Introduction to the Seminar on the Names-of-the-Father”, in a brief reference to this drive, Lacan suggests that two terms are needed if we are to articulate something of the way in which the father, and thus identification, works. The first is the proper name; as the paradigm of the unary trait, it is the mark by which the Other can grasp us when it addresses us. The other term is the voice as object, and there is some evidence that the invocatory drive establishes a link between the voice-object and the unary trait.

In the seminar on anxiety, Lacan states that it is the voice, as object, rather than the oral object, that “gives us at least the first model” of the child’s incorporation of the primal father.<sup>16</sup> In this statement, he parts company with Freud’s views. By portraying incorporation of the father in terms of the act of eating, Freud had relegated it to the oral drive, which takes as its paradigm an object that can be demanded. In contrast, what Lacan seems to be aiming at is a different sort of object, one that has a certain materiality but that cannot be asked for in any straightforward way. Like the gaze, the other object that Lacan introduced into consideration, the voice is closely connected with a sense of the uncanny. This object manifests itself not only in the autonomous voices of psychosis but also in the voice of the superego.

How does a voice become constituted as an object ? In the graph of desire (Figure 1),

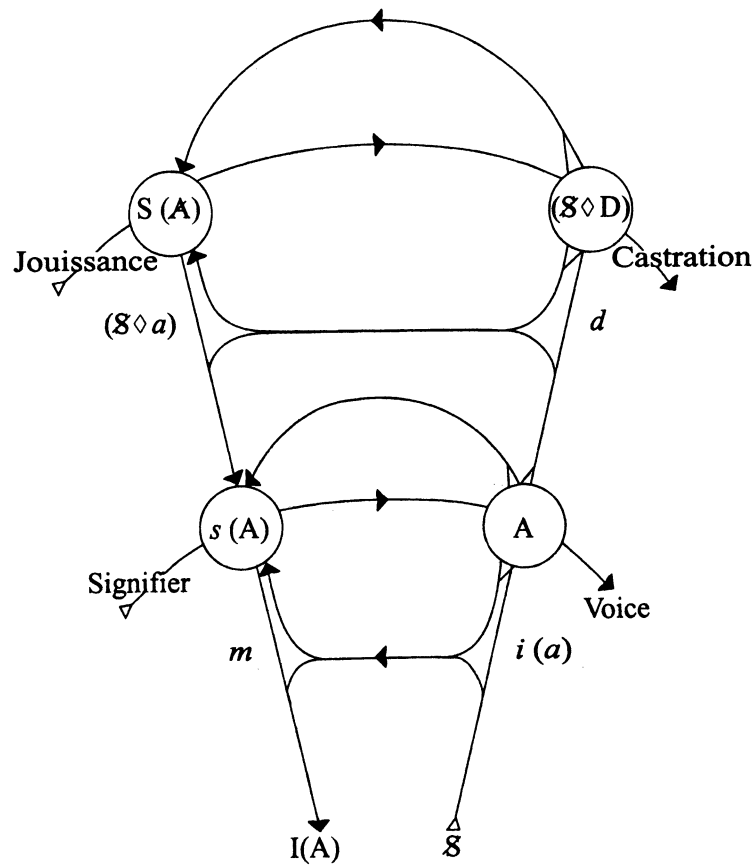


Figure 1

which can be found in its classical form in the “Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire,” we find that the voice is located on the side of the chain of speech.<sup>17</sup> It is the physical support of our statements (*énoncés*) ; it actualizes in sound waves the differences in articulation that allow one signifier to be distinguished from the others. At the same time, however, the voice also has the status of a kind of leftover that can be separated from the chain, hence its

presence at the far right of the vector. The voice is the physical support of the signifier, but is not part of the signifier as such. Once the chain of speech has been interpreted and a signified has been constituted by the looping of the two vectors, the voice becomes something irrelevant ; it falls out of the process. That is why the voice is located at the right margin of the chain of the statement, to the right of the retrograde vector, which accomplishes the interpretation. It is, in part, this experience of falling out, of being cut from the chain of our speech, of being transformed into a leftover that helps constitute the voice as an object at the level of the drive.

If Freud makes incorporation into the precursor of the single trait, how does Lacan portray the relation between the two ? The incorporated voice is an uncanny element that makes present to us the part of the jouissance of the primal father that remains alive after its death and it plays the paradoxical role of guaranteeing that the unary trait has submitted to the symbolic. In the “Introduction to the Names-of-the-Father Seminar” of 1963, Lacan illustrates this relation through the biblical story of Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac. After Abraham has shown his willingness to kill his son, he is stopped by a figure whom Lacan sometimes refers to as the “angel of the Name” the angel of a God who is defined as having been marked by the symbolic. But there is also another god in the scene: the ram, which Lacan locates as the totem-god of Abraham and his ancestors; this totem-god is described as one whose jouissance “knows no bounds”.<sup>18</sup> The sacrifice of the ram enacts the incorporation of the primal father and the emergence of the voice, for Lacan remarks that the horn of this ram becomes the shofar, which he had discussed in the seminar of the year before — the seminar on anxiety. The shofar embodies the voice; it is the element of the jouissance of the primal father that remains alive after he has been killed. It is sounded during specific ceremonies in order to serve as a reminder of the covenant that has been made with God, a covenant to which both parties are submitted. But as Lacan had asked the previous year before, who is really being called

upon to remember this covenant? It is not the worshippers, who have already engaged in ceremonies to commemorate the event. The voice acts to remind the God of the Name that he is not the primal father — and that his jouissance is not unbounded — for he has submitted to the symbolic.<sup>19</sup>

At this moment of Lacan's teaching, then, the relation between the unary trait — as represented by the name — and incorporation is not at all what it had been in Freud. The unary trait is not formed on the model of incorporation; instead the incorporated object is the term from outside the symbolic, the term that could cause our anxiety, that *could* be uncanny, but which can also comfort us by making manifest to us the symbolic character of the unary trait.



<sup>1</sup> FREUD, S., "Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego." Tr. STRACHEY, J., The Pelican Freud 12 : *Civilization, Society ad Religion*. Ed. Albert Dickson. (London: Penguin Books, 1985), p. 136, emphasis added.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 135.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 136.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> LACAN, J., *Identification*, 29 November 1961. Trans. GALLAGHER, C., pp. 4-5. All further references will be to GALLAGHER's translation.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* 6 December 1961, p. 7.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* p. 9.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 9, 10.



<sup>10</sup> FREUD, S., "Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego." *Op. cit.*, p. 134.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* p. 135.

<sup>13</sup> FREUD, S., "The Ego and the Id." Trans. RIVIERE, J.,. The Pelican Freud, 11 : *On Metapsychology: The Theory of Psychoanalysis*. Ed. Angela Richards. (London : Penguin Books, 1984), p. 368.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* p. 370. In the footnote that follows this assertion, FREUD retreats a bit from his insistence on the early primacy of the identification with the father. He states that "Perhaps it would be safer" to speak of an identification "with the parents" ; for before a child has arrived at a definite knowledge of the difference between the sexes, the lack of a penis, it does not distinguish in value between its father and its mother".

<sup>15</sup> One can find scattered references to the invocatory drive in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, the seminar on anxiety, the introduction to the undelivered seminar on *The Names-of-the-Father* as well as several later texts. There is never, however, a thorough exposition of this drive, and one can hypothesize that in the mid-1960s, LACAN decided deliberately not to present such a development. After the prohibition placed upon his teaching by the IPA, LACAN chose not to develop his most recent theses concerning the Names-of-the-Father, for he felt that there was too much resistance to them in the analytic institutions themselves. The ideas on the invocatory drive seem to have been connected closely enough to these theses that LACAN felt that the time was not right to present them. On this topic, see the work of BALMES, F., *Le nom, la loi, la voix. Freud et Moïse : écritures du père 2*, Toulouse : Erès.

<sup>16</sup> *Anxiety*, 6 June 1963, p. 8.

<sup>17</sup> See LACAN, J., *Écrits: A Selection*. Trans. SHERIDAN, A.. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1977, p. 315.

<sup>18</sup> LACAN, J., "Introduction to the Names-of-the-Father Seminar." Trans. MEHLMAN, J. Ed. Joan Copjec. *Television / Dossier on the Institutional Debate* (New York : W. W. Norton & Company), p. 88.

<sup>19</sup> *Anxiety*, 22 May 1963.