

Mark Stafford

Ex Nihilo

At the beginning of Seminar X ¹Lacan indicates to his audience that he wishes to link his work on angst and the concept of identification which he had elaborated in his previous seminar. I propose to work on one of the ways Lacan's articulation of object little a as voice leads to a re-consideration of an aspect of identification - *einverleibung*- or incorporation during the lesson of 5.6.63 . In this lesson Lacan further elaborates the status of the voice which he initiated with a discussion of Theodor Reik's essay "The Shofar" ²in which we find a remarkable presentation of the significance of this instrument and its sonority in Jewish custom and ritual. The question of the voice is developed on 5.6. after Lacan has first re-visited some aspects of sexuality and *jouissance* that he had also previously discussed. He returns the question of the sexual encounter to the particularity of the human relation to the visual field. I don't want to address this aspect of his presentation on 5.6 rather I hope to show the way that Lacan is articulating together the "occultation" in the visual field and the status of the voice.

Lacan begins the lesson of 5.6.63 by presenting the sexual relation between a man and a woman in the form of intersecting Euler circles. They present what "in the biblical sense" would be considered their knowledge of one another. Lacan states that "*l'angoisse est la vérité de la sexualité, c'est à - dire ce qui apparaît chaque fois que son flux se retire et montre le sable*". (anxiety is the truth of sexuality, which is to say that it appears each as each time like an incoming wave that breaks on the sand)

¹ L'Angoisse : J.Lacan(1968-69)

² Ritual: T.Reik (1971)

From the beginning of seminar x a question is raised and re-framed - what is the angst that Freud named "*kastrationsangst*" ? What relation does angst have to jouissance? The phallus as the signifier of lack reverses the received idea of the relation between the phallus and castration anxiety. If the phallus is not found "*Il n'y a pas de castration parce que, à lieu où elle a a se produire, il n'y a pas d'object à castrer. Le phallus, là où il est attendu comme sexual, n'apparaît jamais que comme manque, et c'est ça, son lien avec l'angoisse*" (where it is expected, or even required, namely on the plane of genital mediation...there is no castration because, at the place where it has to happen, there is no object to castrate.) . Lacan presents the field of intersection in the Euler set as empty, but adds that alternatively if the intersection were considered 'positive' it would take on the meaning that "*ce champ là est vide. Mais si je le positive, là ou il prend un autre sense, et ça veut dire alore que l'un à l'autre est substitutable à tout instant*" (the field is empty. But if it was positive it would take another value , which is to that that the one and the other would substitutable for the other at every moment").

Lacan notes that this sexual ambiguity is at the heart of the Zen Buddhist statue of the Avalokiteshvara,- "*plus L'Avalokiteshvara dans sa complète ambiguité sexuelle est presentifié comme male, plus il prend des aspects femelles*" (the more the avalokitecvara is presented as male, the more it takes on female aspects). The Avalokiteshvara is an image of the boddivista which he had examined in his visit to Japan and which also made reference to earlier in the seminar in a detailed reference to the veiling of the eyes of the statue and the manner in which this served to illustrate an aspect of the visual field that Lacan named "occulted".

Lacan comments that an exemplary instance of the *unheimlich* would occur if at just this moment when the statue appears not to be looking at the worshipper it suddenly revealed itself to be desiring subject. Such an *unheimlich* moment would be exemplary of the status of the object little *a*, evoking an eye that is hidden by the constitution of the visual field. This emphasis on the hidden aspect of the object cause of desire becomes the ground for the re-consideration of the voice which I will try to present in a little more detail.

Just as the object little *a* in the form of the gaze is hidden in the visual field, so the conception of the function of language as communication hides the object of the voice. The occultation of the Other in the visual field gives the Voice a particular status as a knotting between the imaginary and symbolic registers. The constitution of the subject in the field of the Other is Lacan says "*Comme je l'ai dit depuis toujours, il en résulte principalement que c'est de l'autre que le sujet reçoit son propre message en forme inversi*" (As I have always said, it has a result and consequence that it is always principally from the Other that he receives his own message, ...namely that he receives first of all his own message in an inverted form.) He adds that the form that the subject receives his own message is in an interrupted form "*La première émergence, celle qui s'inscrit dans ce tableau, n'est qu'un qui suis-je inconscient puisque informulable auquel répond, avant qu'il ne se formule, un Tu es, mais sans attribution*". (The first emergence, which I have written in the table, is not an I Am it is an Unconscious to which there is not a response in the Other, unformable, before there is any form of a You Are, that carries attribution.) If the Other is not giving the subject a message which can be assimilated Lacan proposes instead that a voice provides a support for the subject in the encounters with a void. - hence a voice is not assimilated but it is incorporated, this is what can give it a function in modelling a void.

How are we to understand this "modelling" function of the voice? There are two phenomena that Lacan asks us to consider. The first concerns the emergence of the voice. Lacan refers us to the publication of the book "*Language in the Crib*" (Hague Mouton, 1962) by the North American linguist Judith Weir, who was a student of Roman Jakobson. Jakobson had hoped that some of his students would keep tape-recorders in the nurseries of their children. The fruit of Judith Weir's very extensive recordings (her book runs to 400 pages) is that she was able to map the transformations that her little research subjects went through as they began to acquire the use of pronouns. This was an aspect of language acquisition that Jakobson was particularly interested in and his introduction to Weir's book designates this as the value of the research.

Lacan eagerly shares with his students the significance of the book, but he also teases them a little by saying that he will read to them from it later - which he doesn't actually do. I rather think he delays because he wishes to also introduce in the same lesson the relation of the voice to the ritual of sacrifice - Reik's article concerned the way in which the shofar evoked the voice of Yahweh.³ This is the kind of monolog given by a boy called Anthony that Lacan is referring to : "thats for he - mamama with dady- milk for dady - ok- daddy dance- hi dady - only anthony -daddy dance- daddy give it- milk in the bottle - i spilled it - only for daddy - take off - the - turn around"

Roman Jakobson describes this in his introduction to the book as a poetic masterpiece and the monologs do bare an uncanny resemblance to Joyce's "*Finnegan's Wake*". This phenomena of a monolog that the child conducts by itself, and which is always interrupted when someone else, a sibling or another child is present, had been noticed by other researchers and is described as "hypnopompic". It is often conducted just prior to the child falling a sleep and as the term suggests combines both a performance and also a fading or detachment. In the next lesson Lacan will take up the way that Jean Piaget described in his book "*The Language and Thought of the Child*" this form of speech as "ego centric", because it appears that the child is in some way addressing themselves. Lacan remarks that this term may not be inappropriate but he provides a different reading. Jakobson credits Vgostky with the concept of inner directed and outer directed speech in his introduction to the book, but i think it is precisely Jakobson's emphasis on the relation of the speech to the Other that Lacan is going to question, despite his esteem for Jakobson's research.

In the "Mirror Stage" ⁴Lacan writes of the phase in infancy "*où le je precepité en forme primordiale, avant qui'il ne s'objective dans l'universel sa fonction de sujet*" (in which the I is precipitated in a primordial form, prior to being objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other, and before language restores to it , in the

³ ibid

⁴ Ecrits: Lacan

universal , its function of as subject). This is aposite to the way he positions the monologs "*Bien d'autre caractères indiquant que ce qui se passe à ce niveau, et qui est si étonnamment révélateur de la précocité des tensions d'énorme comme primordiale dans l'inconscient, est en tous points analogue à la fonction du rêve*" (Many other characteristics indicate that what is happening at this level is so astonishingly revelatory of the pre-consciousness of what are described as the primordial tensions in the unconscious are analogous to the function of the dream.) He adds that they occur at the age "when the mirror phase is far from having finished its work". Initially the mirror stage was investigated and captured through the filming of the child encountering a mirror. Here too the presence of a medium is introduced into the way in which Lacan presents the transcriptions of the children's voices. He underlines that there is a literal trace (since it only remains on the tape of the recording) of a child constituting an object- the voice - that is detached from the subject who speaks. "*c'est à savoir, la constitution du a comme rest.. nous ne l'avons, nous, que'a l'état de reste, c'est-à-dire sur la bande du magnétophone*"

The second phenomena he asks us to consider, in order to underline the *ex nihilo* dimension of the voice is the physiological features of the ear. The cochlea and the timpani create a resonator in the form of a tube. While Lacan cautions against taking this analogy as exhaustive what he points to is the relation of this tube-canal to the most elementary model of the void, the pot. I think we are more or less familiar with how the pot has been used by Lacan to elaborate the imaginary capture of the body of the subject in the mirror phase. In the seminar X Lacan returns extensively to the mirror stage to emphasize the impossibility in the mirror image for the subject to find a representation of its own lack.

For the subject in the mirror the pot constitutes a surface that contains it, but it cannot find a representation of the pot as a model of a void. I am referring briefly to the very extensive re-working of the mirror stage in seminar X only to note that at in his elaboration of the void Lacan introduces the place of breathing. One limitation of the analogy of the pot is that a pot is inert, while a subject is animated. But by indicating

that a pot is also a tube, and that openings allow a tube to become a instrument of sonority, for example a flute, Lacan provide an example of how the object little a functions as a mediation of what passes through the void - which is breath. This is one way in which vocalization is distinguished from Language.

The relation of the detached object of the voice, into the modelled void of the resonator, we set aside the conception of the voice as emerging from the presence of the other. Rather the "voice" that emerges in the "hypnopompic monolog" is a voice resonating in the void of the other, not its presence. *"résonne dans un vide qui est le vide de l'autre comme tel, l'ex -nihilo à proprement parler. La voix répond à ce qui se dit, mais elle ne peut pas en réprondre"* Prior to any response to the other we "incorporate the voice as otherness of what is said" Our own speaking voice, Lacan notes, appears to us to have a strange sound, because in this "unheimlich" experience of the sound of ourselves we are reckoning with the absence of any guarantee existing in the other. *"C'est bien pour cele et non pour autre chose detachee de nous que notre voix nous apparait avec un son etranger. Il es de la structure de l'autre de consituer un certain vide, la vide de son manque de garantie. C'est avant tout controle que la vérité entre dans le monde avec le signifiant. Elle éprouve, elle se renvoie seulement par ses echos dans le reel"* For the sujet it is impossible for the Other to be guarantee of it's truth. The only access to truth for the subject is through the echoes the signifier creates in the Real.

Lacan then encourages some further research into the distinction between the voice in the experience of the singer versus that of the orator it is to underline the voice of the orator is a voice that evoke this constitution of the voice as an authority- *"C'est la voix en tant qu'imperative"* This experience of "authority" is the consequence of that dimension of identification that can be correctly named as incorporation, *"einverleibung"*. I think that this opposition between the singer and the orator is a direct reference to Reik's extraordinary mediation on the shofar. Reik's investigation was linked to his interest, which he pursued throughout his life, into the origins of music. The originality of Reik's reading is that the sound from the horn within the ritual, particularly of

antonement, evokes a guilt that exists in the listener. But at the end of the session Lacan re-works the concept of ritual sacrifice that informed Reik's thinking. "*Je vous dirai brèvement que le sacrifice n'est pas du tout destiné à l'offrande ni au don, qui se propagent dans une bien autre dimension, mais à la capture de L'Autre dans le réseau du désir*". As he had learned from his trip to Japan and the encounter with the veiled eyes of the Bodhivista the unheimlich would appear if the eyes of god were suddenly to appear as desiring, the purpose of the ritual sacrifice is then not to offer a gift, or an act of mutilation to appease the god, rather to trap the desire of the God, to occult the desire of the Other and the angst that signals its presence.

Through this emphasis on the word as foundational, over the sonority of the instrument, Lacan presents this thunderous voice of Yahveh as the container or holding of the void, a void that the child in the nursery also tries to "model" with its own voice just before darkness and sleep.

Mark Stafford

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