

An Anonymous Presence¹

“The voice is free, free to be some thing other than substance”
J. Lacan “The Third”

That most secret of secrets: “The ex-timate”

A film and recent book² containing personal accounts from various periods by thirteen of Lacan’s original students and colleagues demonstrate the extent to which his presence managed to attract a group of people who were hearing what he had to say, and to whom he listened in turn. This constitutes the horizon towards which, in my opinion anyhow, reading and hearing Lacan takes us.

In this sense, I am not proposing here to transmit a logic (*savoir*) of the encounter with him, which has become obscured behind the many extant discussions of it. Ever-elusive, it in fact constitutes a coming into contact between the Subject’s outermost interiority and the Other’s innermost exteriority. By way of giving this most secret of human secret’s a label of some sort, Lacan appealed to the genius of language itself in the form of the neologism the “ex-timate.”

My discussion shall begin with an account of the experience of ex-timacy furnished by an analyzand, Elise, because it demonstrates the extent to which the transference is able to authorize its abrupt surfacing. Based on this I will then envision what positioned Lacan as Other/Author for the unique authors-to-come the people who heard and read him were, as subjects of the unconscious, destined to be.

An Encounter Leading to Another World, Every Time.

Elise was approximately thirty years old when she came to consult with me for anorexia. Her first words involved associations between her suffering and her relationships with the other – in other words, her actual symptom, which she always spoke of in the same manner: “As soon as I am around other people something immediately appears that I cannot escape. I feel fixated by the weight of other people’s gazes, as if they were staring right through me.” Furthermore, she added, the crux of her suffering centered not on the existence of this gaze as such, but on the fact of its seemingly inevitable repetition: “I already know I’m going to blush, that certain

¹ This text is the written version of a talk entitled “Lacan as Absent, Lacan as Idol,” presented at the Convergencia Conference “Reading and Hearing Lacan, the Question of Desire,” Paris, January 26-27, 2002. This constitutes an attempt to incorporate the discussion that ensued following the presentation, in particular the contribution made by one of the paper discussants M-C Labadie, who rightly identified and emphasized the importance of issues relating to change or impulsion (*mouvement*) in the transference, insofar as said issues are akin to the theoretical and clinical elaborations of Alain Didier-Weill, with whom the author has completed a work of transference for over fifteen years. Many of Didier-Weill’s rich and fruitful intuitions in texts such as *Les trois temps de la loi* (The Three Beats of the Law), Paris, Seuil, 1995 and *Invocations*, Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 1998, as well as his current seminar in Paris “Freud Classicist, Lacan Baroque,” are taken up and examined here in various ways.

² The film was “Quartier Lacan” (Lacan’s Neighborhood) directed by Emil Weiss, and the book of the same title was edited by Alain Didier-Weill, Emil Weiss and Florence Gravas.

ideas that get into my head, always the same, will make me believe I am useless, stupid and ugly, and that no matter what nothing will ever change.”

What she did however find surprising was that this illness of “already-made meanings” would disappear the minute she would begin to play the flute, as if the impulse she heard in the sound of music invaded her and set something previously unperceived inside her in motion again. She could not get over it. How was the arrival of this “je ne sais quoi”³ able to repeatedly transport her to this new world where she was able to, in forever new and different ways, catch sight of a previously unknown part of herself?

The mystery concerns the arrival of this “outsider” who is not of course too outside as such, considering this “passerby” invokes an “inner” (*intime*) presence that consistently bids her welcome. What makes this encounter that is otherwise hidden by the weight of meanings no longer impossible? What is this gift that asks for nothing in return? What is the secret of this gratuity?

These were the questions that drove her to come back and speak. The unconscious knowledge they conveyed would be enacted in the transference at the point when her loss of words, which ground everything to a halt, was nudged back into motion by the abrupt surfacing of the impulse of the drive, enabling her to authentically speak again.

Its Appearance in the Transference...

Thus at a key moment the immobilizing Real⁴ of the gaze as object, which previously she had encountered in every interlocutor she spoke to but never in analysis, suddenly erupted in the transference itself. For several weeks in a row she was entirely reduced to her visible being for this omniscient and “ever-present”⁵ gaze – she could not “get past it” in her sessions. This Real that had been unleashed from the Symbolic and Imaginary was the underlying cause of her symptoms – a “burning silence” reigned supreme over her, and her body was stripped of the Imaginary clothing it normally used to maintain a certain *incognito*. Thus deprived of the lightness normally provided by the Symbolic, it was reduced to its dimensions as a mass in the Real, which sank heavily onto the couch, weighed down by the anxiety both she and her analyst felt in every session. Nothing, it seemed, could ever lessen the load of this persecutory world.

One day however, she heard something in her analyst’s voice as he said

³ Which is related to the wit which engendered the impulse sought after by the *Précieuses* in the salons of Paris in the early XVII century, especially the Hôtel de Rambouillet and its matron Catherine de Vivonne, who became the Marquise of Rambouillet in 1610. Wit would soon begin to languish in the ridiculous mannerism that Molière treated with such derision in his “*Les Précieuses ridicules*.” Spirit or wit, it should be noted, is something that goes beyond meaning and is best heard by women, or perhaps more precisely the dimension of the feminine in each of us. Lacan, who intuited this, sought to convey an idea of this passage in his enigmatic notion of the “not-all” of feminine *jouissance*. I shall return to this point later.

⁴This is one way of naming, as Lacan does, the unchaining of the Real, a presence that was previously veiled by its enchainment to the Imaginary and Symbolic.

⁵ One way of defining the seeing, overseeing presence of the superego, insofar as this is its way of barring access to the gift of the Symbolic that enacts a lack in its (the superego’s) knowledge.

“hello” to her which commemorated the fleeting presence that visited her when she played the flute. Immediately, her body rediscovered the lightness it once enjoyed, because the Real was enclosed again between the parentheses of the sound of the Symbolic. She suddenly felt likable in the presence of this “new gaze,” and began to speak without needing to always already know why.⁶

I believe a presence visited the analyst that day when he first caught sight of Elise, and above all that the phallic function in which man is “totally” (*tout*) inscribed, and which is of course articulated in words, favored his initial deafness to it. “He” did not hear it at first.⁷ Elise was the one who went before him, or more precisely something in her stemming from “the feminine”⁸ heard it without knowing it as such, because this “never before heard” can not be explicitly remembered. Elise the “good listener” transmitted instead that the voice is a mixture composed of both sound and meaning, because there are moments when sound and its music attain a sudden ascendancy over meaning, in a way that makes heard the existence of a presence that is heard by another presence,⁹ a secret moment of “ex-timacy.” Clearly, the “hello” conveyed by the analyst’s voice surpassed the limits laid-down by convention, and led to a new transference which brought the unlimited field of signifyingness into play, beyond the limits of signification or meaning.

...Elicits a New Transference in Time and Space.

Thus even as the superego was making heard its voice as absolute master of significations, suddenly “the voice was free, free to make heard something other than substance” (“La Troisième” (“The Third”), 1/11/1974), by resonating with the Real of the limitlessness of signifyingness itself. When she was awoken by the call of this unheard of Real, the inner receiver she became at that moment was re-oriented towards the exterior and thereby discovered, as a new Subject, a newly visible space that had *never been seen before*, and from which a “new gaze” looked upon her. What did the impulse heard in the music of the analyst’s voice reveal to Elise?

A new transference within time and space which enabled her to pass from the “already heard” and “already known” world of appearances, that transfixed her into being “this” and “that” for the Other, to the world of the “never before” seen and “never before” heard, in which the Other shone to her through its own absence. She was the one who “**made herself**” heard and “**made herself**” seen in this world’s universe. This is what is known as a third moment in the drive, involving the

⁶ This represented a new knotting of the Real, Symbolic and Imaginary created by the body of the speaking being. This creation may rightly be called “authentic” because it occurs without the presence of symptoms.

⁷ As observed by the *Precieuses*, it is heard by being unheard in the sense that it is something that goes beyond words.

⁸ According to my argument the feminine is a knowledge that goes beyond the phallic function. It corresponds to a feminine part of both men and women that is able to take on the burden of the Real that may only be heard beyond what is heard in the words of the phallic function as such. Lacan dubbed this field of the unlimited the “not-all” (*pas-tout*), in the sense that it does not stem from the “all” of the phallic function and its well-known limits. The feminine thus points in the direction of the unlimitedness of signifyingness itself.

⁹ An idea I shall return to in relation to what Lacan called the “you of devotion.”

“appearance of a new subject” according to Freud,¹⁰ and which Lacan reinterpreted as the saying “it is novel to see a subject appear.”¹¹

What overturned the superego was the impulse inherent to music, and the way it was able to slip past the analyst’s surveillance and inhabit his body in a way that transmuted his voice into a placeholder for the Other, an object constituted by its being lost for the Other.

In my view this impulse to assume speech is elicited in the analyst by the call of the invocatory drive, in response to a certain angst. Its aim is to bring what is most exterior in the Other into contact with what is most intimate to the Subject. First discussed by Lacan on March 4, 1964 as the “the experience closest to the unconscious,”¹² the invocatory drive actually undertakes what the superego attempts to forbid – the subject’s passage from receiver to emitter,¹³ which enables him to pass beyond the fixity of his own division between the immobilization of the object gaze and the desupposition of the voice as sole signified, to the knotting of the scopic and invocatory drives as such.

How can this new passage from the Real of the object to the a-historic impulse of the drive be accounted for in structural terms?

Wit (*l’esprit*), the Smuggler (*le passeur*) of Signifyingness

In his initial approach to this topic on December 9, 1959 in the “Ethics of Psychoanalysis,” Lacan refers to this moment of the “primordial Other,” the Other as *das Ding*, the Human Thing, as a moment when a sudden presence “risks abruptly surprising us and casting us down from the height of its appearance.” Lacan calls the receiver of this call of the Other a “You of devotion,” (*Toi de dévotion*), and further notes that it “is tempted to seek to tame [this] Other.”

As has already been pointed out, once it has been named by the Other which absents itself as soon as it has been invoked, this second person says “yes” to the Other who conveyed it into existence and devotes itself, as a creature symbolically separated from its creator by the latter’s absence, to its own passage from the “You” that it is to the “I” it is supposed to become, as per the inversion of the message¹³ described by the motion (of reversal) of the drive itself. The problem in this respect is that this passage involves an ever-elusive Real that is only occasioned by *wit* (*esprit*), the smuggler (*passeur*) of the Real whose importance Freud demonstrated through his work on the witticism (*mot d’esprit*). As a third person not bound to a specific “paternal denomination,”¹⁴ wit resides in the limitless field of signifyingness as such, and is therefore made audible by the music of sound, as heard by Elise.

The first traces of the Other for the subject to come would therefore apparently always stem from the effects of its primordial exposure to the world of sound as such. Before the arrival of meaning, through musical measure and the rhythmic articulation

¹⁰ Freud, “*Pulsion et destin des pulsion*,” (“Drives and Their Vicissitudes”), *Métapsychologie*, p. 29.

¹¹ Lacan, *Les Quatres concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse*, Seuil, p. 162.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 96.

¹³ This is the inversion of the unconscious message as per Lacan’s famous formula: “the emitter receives from the sender his own message in inverse form.”

¹⁴ Tr: “Patronym.” The French “nom” (nym) is both “name” and “noun,” hence wit as “third person” is a noun unbound from its “meaning” and thus free to equivocate between them. This must be kept in mind in reference to the author’s point regarding the way the sound (or music) of words *precedes* their (paternally determined) meanings.

of the consonance and dissonance that adheres in the human voice, the mother's voice, the Other transmits the existence of a Symbolic law, of an originary paternal metaphor. The Signifier of the Name-of-the-Father which serves as its functionary is forever prepared to reemerge wherever and whenever some unheard receiver hears the call of the invocatory drive, in this moment when the Real unchained from Symbolic and Imaginary reassumes its full weight.

But then, by Jove, does this mean that reading and hearing Lacan involves accepting the charge of this originary Real which he himself denominated, or does it instead somehow imply discharging ourselves of it?

Reading and Hearing Lacan – The Question of Desire.

This primordial time of the Other does not “go without saying,” but is instead in itself an achievement, in part because it escapes the activity of conscious thinking, but also because it is only to be found in the aftermath of the disappearance of already-constituted knowledge based in the Imaginary, a knowledge Lacan dubbed “anti-knowledge” in the sense that it is “anti-unconscious” (15/2/1977). What is the difference between how Lacan and Freud conceptualize this?

Freud's adage “where it (id) was, Subject shall be” is based on secondary repression, and expresses the idea of the Subject entering into existence via a continuity between itself and the unconscious, here styled as a warehouse of unconscious memory.

Lacan on the other hand orients us more toward an originary moment before words which originary repression has forgotten, and yet which remains unforgettable. For Lacan in other words, discontinuity is key – a passage that occurs via an originary hole through which the Real insists and which leads to the Subject as a creation. As the structure of the witticism itself suggests (*mot d'esprit*), the disappearance of thought that occurs in the moment of stunning is what leads to enlightenment.

Is this the reason why Lacan was forever returning to the structure of the witticism as a primary model for the transference, insofar as the impulse which drives wit is what authorizes the emergence of an intermediate moment of unconscious elaboration, a moment when the Other as self-absenting author and the Subject as author to come are bound to one another in a way entirely new? Was Lacan trying thereby to make us hear that the soul of wit is the only presence truly capable of taking on the charge levied by the insistence of the Real, the charge created and revealed in the moment of stunning that occurs as part of structure of the witticism itself?

Indeed, the Real of the *Human Thing* can be either the best or worst of Things for each individual being, according to whether it leads to esthetic *jouissance* along the lines of an ascendance of signifyingness over signification, or illness, when the latter instead takes precedence over the former.

In his closing remarks to the EFP Conference of 1978 Lacan insisted, Again,¹⁵ once more, on the ascendance of signifyingness over signification, this time via the idea of the Signifier of the lack in the Other, S(A). This was the way he, Lacan, purported to have found to write the unique manner in which “each analyst reinvents the way in which psychoanalysis shall endure.”

In my view what he was thereby making each analyst hear, in his typically

¹⁵ J. Lacan, Seminar XX (*Encore*), Seuil, 1975.

enigmatic way, was that wit (*esprit*), the aforementioned smuggler, requires each analyst to authorize himself only from himself, because wit, or “spirit” (*esprit*), does not arise from either the Father or the Son, as the Christian dogma of the Holy Trinity contends.

Three Final Questions...

When he invented the procedure of the pass based on the structure of the witticism did Lacan intend to spark an impulse leading to the emergence of psychoanalysts? Was the importance of psychoanalysis as a secular discipline based, in his view, on the free spirit of the secular mind, unfettered by the Christian tradition where it may only arise from the father and son? Do the rules of the analytic community, transfixed as they are by the names of fathers and of sons, not in fact by default make clear the importance of this wit’s *anonymous*¹⁶ presence?

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¹⁶ Tr: see footnote 14 above, insofar as here as well the author is emphasizing the way in which wit’s presence must remain antecedent to “paternal names/nouns,” and is thus in this sense a-nonymous.