

## **Rhythm, Presence, Voice, Breath: Bearing Witness to Lacan's Handling of the Transference'**

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But when, in order to reach out and touch, to attract, to stir up, a hand has moved far enough toward an object, and if then from out of the fruit, the flower, the log, there comes a hand which stretches out to meet the hand which is yours, and if at that instant it is your hand which stills itself in the closed fullness of the fruit, in the open plenitude of the flower, in the explosion of a hand which becomes inflamed - well, what is produced then is love.

(Lacan, *J Le Séminaire Livre VIII: Le transfert*, p67)

"Put your piece of work back on the loom a hundred times." If we compare the work of the analyst to that of the weaver, this would be what Boileau advises us (1674). There are two elements in every piece of weaving: the threads that run and which are going to make the design, and the weft. When Lacan's practice has been spoken about, it has been with reference to one of these dimensions in particular: the dimension of the signifying chains, of the way in which it was desirable to mark them off, to scan them, to cut them, to speak about their themes, thus allowing the pattern of desire to be read in them. But it seems to me that there has not been much discussion about the weft, about what supports the possibility of this work.

I met Lacan in June 1972; I began working with him in January 1973; I remained doing so for eight years. I will not be speaking here about the last two years, those of his illness. I am going to consider his practice during the first six. It

was a very interesting practice and, according to what my elders say, in many respects similar to that of the previous years.

However, it is not easy for me to begin talking about the weft that supports this practice. Perhaps it is a subject which touches upon the obscene, in the etymological sense of the word: that is, staged?

How can I speak about this highly vibrant man, who would willingly place a hand on a distraught shoulder, scanning from time to time his listening with the sound of his breath, often welcoming his analysands at an unflagging rhythm, five times a week in my case and in that of many others: sometimes more often for some? Short sessions, certainly. But such a rhythm allows a very different kind of work from that which is put in place when the sessions are more spread out.

This weft of Lacan's practice, which I believe to have been hardly touched upon, made itself very much felt by me in the following terms: rhythm, presence, voice, breath - terms which we know are not Lacan's own, a consideration which has not made my thinking any the easier.

Lacan does not speak of rhythm: if he happens to use this word, it is not to do with the work during the session. Nor does he speak of breath. I am therefore in the difficult position of having to say things about his practice without, at first sight, finding anything to support them either in his *Écrits* or in his *Seminars*.

On the other hand, as soon as the Société Française de Psychanalyse was

established, he speaks about the presence of the analyst. As is shown in *Seminar I* on the papers on technique, this theme is tackled through a consideration of resistance in psychoanalysis; Lacan asks Anzieu to outline Freud's technique, as it appears in the *Studies on Hysteria*. Anzieu cites two ways of handling resistance: reassurance and the practice of applying pressure by hand. The first, where Freud encourages the patient ("But go on, you do know, just say it, just say it!") he believes is a coercive practice. The second seems to be a technique based upon trickery. He quotes Freud: "By putting my hands on the subject's forehead, I can draw his attention to the gesture itself, and by that very act, the resistance finds itself displaced, moved away from what it was resisting and onto this gesture, and in this way the memory which was underneath can come to light."

Lacan is visibly astonished by what he has just heard and asks him: "On which text are you basing this?" Anzieu replies by telling him that it concerns the chapter on psychotherapy in the *Studies on Hysteria*. Then, full of apologies, Lacan interrupts him in order to clarify matters. He is keen to recall the privileged character of the cases treated by Freud and to add that it is impossible for us to imagine what his technique actually was.

Freud was at that time on the way to discovering a truth that interested him, a truth which was of the greatest interest regarding his own self and also with respect to his attendance upon, and thus being present with, the patient. This is something which can only have given to his relationship with his patients a character of an absolutely special kind.<sup>2</sup>

We can clearly see that he does not wish Freud's way of working to be taken

as a recipe, but rather that it should remain his personal way of doing things. The same criticism could undeniably be made of me with regard to Lacan's practice: it is not about suggesting to anyone to "do as Lacan did" any more than it is of "doing as Freud did" but instead it is about understanding the *weft* upon which comes to lie the practice of the cutting and the quilting of the signifying threads, as well as the practice, just as personal to Lacan, of the short sessions.

At the time, Lacan was unsure about the presence of the analyst being a factor that could bring about resistance through the transference. Here is how, a few weeks later<sup>3</sup> he speaks of the moment when speech swings in the direction of the presence of the analyst: "The moment when the subject interrupts himself is usually the most significant in his approach towards the truth. At this point we gain a sense of resistance in its pure state, which culminates in the feeling, often tinged with anxiety, of the analyst's presence." (Lacan 1991[1975], p52) The first elements in Lacan's teaching capable of accounting for this dimension of *weft* in my analytic experience with him are only to be found six years later in *Seminar VIII* on transference. His way of theorising about the place of the analyst changes completely. Just as he reminds us that in terms of the relationship, psychoanalysis demands a high degree of libidinal sublimation<sup>4</sup> he also teaches us that we shut ourselves away with an other in order to teach him what it is that they lack. Given the very nature of the transference, this "what is lacking in him" he will learn as someone who loves. And he adds: "I am not there for his own good but so that he may love. Does that mean that I have to teach him how to love?"<sup>5</sup>

My own analytic experience has taught me that this was the case. As we know,

Lacan will make use of Plato's *The Symposium* to shed light on the relationship between love and transference: "Greek love allows us to disentangle objectively the two partners in the love relationship, this couple in which are respectively the one who loves and the loved one, *erastes* and *eromenos*."<sup>5</sup>

Lacan explains that what characterises the one who loves as subject of desire is essentially that which is lacking in him. The loved one, in this couple, is the only one to have something (Lacan, 1991, p47).<sup>7</sup>

In order to understand how this was played out in my own analysis, I must state what my position was before it began.

I had arrived from Brazil, thrown out by a dictatorship, and with a custodial remand sentence hanging over me. From one day to the next, I found myself in Paris, having left everything behind: my baby, my analyst, my first patients. As I wanted to start work again, I asked my colleagues to suggest the name of an analyst. My colleagues came to the decision that they could not recommend anyone and gave as a reason that my previous analysis had been Anglo-Saxon; only Lacan was in a position to do so. Reluctantly I made an appointment with him so that he might give me a name: "I want you to recommend an analyst to me. I am not looking for a big name, not one to be found on the cover of a thick tome." The answer he gave me was: "I also find it embarrassing to be a name on the cover of a thick tome." Did he want to win me over in this way? The exercise of charm has often been talked about with regard to Lacan. I think now that this choice of answer is to be understood within the structural framework of the relationship between *erastes* and *eromenos*.

At that time I was not in the place of Alcibiades: I did not see Lacan as a bearer of *Agalma*; I had tried to read his *Écrits* but without understanding a thing. Of course his name was beginning to become something of a phenomenon of fashion even in South America, but, not having the learning of a Valas,<sup>8</sup> could not see what Lacan himself could bring to me. I did not want anything to do with an *eromenos*, even if he were to be the author of the biggest book on psychoanalysis in the world. I wanted an analyst as *erastes*, an analyst who loved me; I already had enough problems in my life as it was.

Four times Lacan asked me to come back under the pretext of giving me the name I wanted, a name which I did not get. I was very angry and decided not to go back to see him again. Then I began working in a centre run by psychoanalysts from the SPP<sup>9</sup> who referred patients to me. I was no longer undergoing a personal analysis, and given the context of the difficulties in my life at the time, I was afraid of not being up to the task. At the beginning of January, I went back to see Lacan and said to him: "Listen, since you haven't given me the name of an analyst, I now need to find myself a psychotherapist; things are becoming difficult for me. Would you mind being my psychotherapist?" The answer he gave me was: "A psychoanalyst has no reason not to be psychotherapeutic for anyone who asks it of him."

Given Lacan's perseverance with regard to myself, I did not fail to wonder what my hidden attraction could be. Was it the dramatic political problems which I had just been living through? Now I quite simply think that he had there the opportunity to teach the young girl how to love. And, at the same time, he had the opportunity to allow her to have some access to her lack. He had there the opportunity to play that return act which he calls *love as signification*, to

put in place a metaphor, that is to say an algebraic substitution. In place of the *eromenos*, of the love object, there should come the subject as lack. Let us remember that in order to describe this transition, which he calls miraculous, where the analyst as lover is going to allow a love object to come into being as subject, Lacan proposes a myth: "I am going to compare it to the hand which reaches out to touch the fruit when it is ripe, to attract the rose when it has opened, to stir up the log which suddenly becomes re-inflamed." The miraculous part is to be found in what follows: "But when, in order to reach out and touch, to attract, to stir up, a hand has moved far enough toward an object, and if then from out of the fruit, the flower, the log, there comes a hand which stretches out to meet the hand which is yours, and if at that instant it is your hand which stills itself in the closed fullness of the fruit, in the open plenitude of the flower, in the explosion of a hand which becomes inflamed - well, what is produced then is love." (Lacan, 1991, pp66-67).

But how was Lacan going to handle things so that I might pass from my position as *eromenos*, of loved one, to that of the subject who loves, as *erastes*? Without that I would know nothing about my lack; I would not come to occupy the place of subject in the treatment.

During the first months, when I was still speaking to him face to face, I was suddenly surprised to see him astonished, amazed about something which I had just said to him without my hearing it. Later I was not only going to understand that this man, over seventy years of age, was still capable of astonishment, but also that he was playing there *the third person*, that of the *Witicism*, he who makes it possible for me, who could not hear it, to be interested in what I was saying, as a source of what had been able to catch

his surprise and his interest.

In the Seminar *The Formations of the Unconscious*, Lacan emphasises that there has to be the third-Other for there to be a witicism: "It is essential that this Other sends the ball back: if no one does it, then there is no witicism. Put in another way, for 'millionnaire' to be a *witicism*, somebody has to notice it, otherwise it is not one; it is a slip of the tongue." (Lacan, 1998, p25).

Lacan recalls that there is no emergence of a witicism without there being surprise, if there is nothing to make the subject estranged from the immediate content of the sentence. For a short moment he can say to himself: "I do not understand", "I am confused" (ibid., p107). With regard to this Other, about which we see here the first approach of its lack, of its insufficiency, Lacan adds in explanation: "Of course we need a living being, in the flesh, to reach it and to arouse its pleasure" (ibid., p117).

Lacan could be amazed and then burst out laughing, as if what I had just said pleased him. The discovery that we are the source of words which please the Other is an experience which leaves its mark. This pleasure in the witicism is called *jouissance* by Lacan. He says so clearly: "Witz restores its *jouissance* under the double aspect of surprise and of pleasure."<sup>10</sup> As we know, he will write it later as: S(A).

I owe this clarity, concerning the handling by the analyst of the place of the third person in the witicism, to an Argentinean analyst, Pablo Mario Kovalowsky.<sup>11</sup> His talk allowed me to put into words this aspect of Lacan's practice and taught me much about the efficacy of some of my interventions with young autistic

children<sup>2</sup> or babies. Since then, my clinical work with neonates has taught me that when a newborn notices that he is a source, a cause of the *jouissance* of the Other, it provokes a reversal in places: from love object he becomes the one who loves. The person for whom he is a source of *jouissance* will be loved by the baby, yet it is necessary that this Other presents itself as lacking. I did the same thing in my analysis with Lacan, when - in the transference - it appeared that I occupied for him the place of object of lack.

This was played out - in the theatrical sense of the word - in several phases. At the time I was, for contingent reasons, which circumstances were to favour, fairly inattentive with regard to listening to my own distress. A Kleinian psychoanalyst would have interpreted it as follows: "You are putting me in the place of the one who is to worry for you." Lacan used not to say very much but he was an actor; he played out the scene to which my unconscious assigned him. By the door, standing up, putting his hand on my shoulder. "My dear, dressed like that - indicating my too thin coat - you are going to catch cold!" At a time when I found myself far removed from being able to think that I was in that type of distress, Lacan's voice - moved - allowed me to feel something of it.

When Lacan wishes to articulate what the analyst's desire must be, he brings it back to the function of lack, basing himself on the words of Socrates in *The Symposium*. "To love and to desire something, is it to have it or not to have it? Can one desire what one already has?" And Lacan concludes that for Socrates the object of desire is necessarily that which the subject does not possess: that is the sort of thing which he desires just as with love (Lacan, 1991, p139).

This allows me to introduce a little story about a moment in my analysis which puzzled me for a long time. I am going to call it the telephone scene.

I was going through a period in my analysis where I was not thinking very much. Without really knowing really why, I missed three consecutive sessions. On the morning of the fourth, there was a phone call from Lacan who said to me: "So my dear, when am I going to see you again?"<sup>3</sup> I can hear myself reply: "I am on my way, Doctor." What did I hear in his voice? I only fully understood the dimension of plaintiveness when I said to my partner: "He sounds like my mother!" I had indeed recognised in it the plaintive voice of my mother, a widow, bereft, having nothing to resort to apart from her only daughter, a role which I found difficult to undertake. This mother in lack was what was making me flee.

Without being entirely fooled by what this call involved as a staging, on going out of the car park, I pressed down on the accelerator with my foot, just slightly, but enough for my car to go and gently knock into some invisible piece of metal under the lorry in front of me. This had as a consequence the splitting of the entire engine bonnet, like a tin can to be opened: split, cut.

I found it funny, feeling that I was seeing my own division which that phone call, where Lacan played my mother, poor dear, had produced. Those days spent considering Lacan's technique have allowed me to begin to unravel the telephone scene of the poor mother. It brings me to the myth of the birth of Love which Lacan tells us is to be found in Plato.

Love is the son of Poros and Penia. Poverty, misery even. What she knows full

well about herself is *aporia*, explicitly that she is without means. Poor Penia has, properly speaking, and by definition, nothing to give other than her constitutive lack (*aporia*). Penia, who had come to the birth celebrations of Aphrodite, was begging at the door when she saw Poros - Resource, Astuce - who had drunkenly fallen asleep. And it is while he is sleeping, and unawares, that love is born. Here the feminine is active, as Penia slips in through her desire for love to arise.<sup>14</sup>

Just as Lacan sounded like my mother, Socrates - in *The Symposium* - lends his voice to the priestess Diotime who recounts the myth. Lacan observes how it is the feminine in Socrates that is speaking. In his technique, Lacan also knew how to use his.

Perhaps Lacan understood nothing about the reasons which had led me to miss the last three sessions. Besides, I had no understanding of them either. Unless, that is, before his telephone call, an absence of representation in the form of a negation: "I did not bear him a grudge." For what could I have been able to bear him a grudge? For sometimes being so full of all of the things which also evoked his fascination? After the scene of his telephone call in which he had said how much he had missed me and the sudden change which followed, a fertile period reappeared in the analytic work.

If he was seeking a love transference, I was never fooled by the fact that Lacan was playing out the scenario as would a Greek actor, with a mask. From the time of the Seminar on Transference, he speaks of stage setting, but it is in the Seminar *Ou Pire (Or Worse)* that he will develop his views on the role of the mask in Greek theatre.

Let us recall the context: Lacan says that the transference relation is set in motion by the place of the subject-supposed-to-know assigned to the analyst. But this knowledge is only supposed within him by virtue of his position. "The analyst does not pretend as such; he occupies the *position* of semblance. He legitimately occupies this position because there is no other acceptable situation with regard to *jouissance*, such as he has to understand it from the words of the person whom he supports as analysand in his enunciation as subject. But the semblance is not nourished by *jouissance*, which it would hold up to ridicule. This semblance allows its mouth-piece to show itself as a mask, worn openly, as in Greek Theatre."<sup>15</sup>

Here, clearly set out, is what I feel Lacan was doing when he was playing a role, in the sense of Greek theatre.

I think that the specific points which he adds immediately after are very important with regard to the handling of his technique: semblance itself becomes manifest. When an actor wears a mask, he does not pull a wry face, he is not for real. Pathos is reserved for the Chorus who takes great delight in it.

When Lacan said: "So my dear, when am I going to see you again?" it was the tone of his voice which played the main role. It had nothing to do with what was enunciated but rather with the enunciation itself. By giving voice to the maternal character, he borrows its mask and on this mask is inscribed the dimension of a deprived mother. It was not in his face, which I could not see, but in his voice.

Lacan speaks about it himself in the above mentioned lesson in the Seminar *Ou Pire*. It is in giving voice to something that the analyst can demonstrate that this reference to Greek theatre is appropriate. Indeed, what is he doing by occupying this position of semblance? Perhaps simply showing that this great fear of desire around which the neurosis is organised, what is called defence, is only a conspiracy to evoke pity? And then he brings in Aristotle?

Already in the Ethics Seminar, Lacan had spoken to us about Aristotle and tragedy: "The term spectacle, which is usually used to discuss the effect of tragedy, strikes me as highly problematic if we don't delimit the field to which it refers. On the level of what occurs in reality, an auditor rather than a spectator is involved. And I can hardly be more pleased with myself since Aristotle agrees with me; for him the whole development of the arts of theatre takes place at the level of what is heard, the spectacle itself being no more than something arranged on the margin." (Lacan, 1992, p235).

It would happen that I would go through moments on the couch when, all of a sudden, something would prevent me from continuing to associate. I would then feel Lacan approach and I would hear the rhythm of his breathing: this had its effect: my associative flow would set off again. I was therefore carried by the rhythmical nature of this sound. The use of a sound which was not that of speech - for indeed Lacan did not have much to say - was very much his. He could also be heard turning the pages of a book at such a speed that it was obvious that he could not even see the pictures in it. The book became an instrument of sound, a wordless instrument of punctuation, even if he did not stop himself from saying, "That's right my dear". Both could be of use. But this breathing, how did it work?

If the subject finds himself situated in the signifier, in so far as he is structured by the cut, Lacan tells us that breathing knows nowhere this element of interval of cut.<sup>2</sup> Even if nothing is inscribed in a cut within breathing, he adds that it is nonetheless rhythm, pulsation, vital alternation. The use of a signifying chain - however short it might be, a "That's right" for example, served to make a scansion; the rhythm of the breath was there to allow one to carry on when it became too difficult, probably there where Freud had used the laying on of hands.

When did Lacan want this rhythmical nature of breath to be heard? What did he seek to make easier in this way? A beginning of an answer seems to me to be found in his reflections upon the ethical nature of catharsis. Here is what he said: "What is at stake in catharsis - as far as it brings together things as apparently foreign as the tragic spectacle of the Greeks and Psychoanalysis - is the purification of desire."<sup>3</sup> Purification here has the sense of decantation, the separating out of levels. For Aristotle, henceforth, the subject cannot ignore anymore where the pole of desire is. For Lacan, this allows him to know something about this regarding the hidden sense of its action. Nothing other than the Freudian hypothesis of the unconscious.

But, still according to Aristotle, this catharsis can only happen in so far as the limits called fear and pity have been crossed.

I think that Lacan intervened with the rhythm of breath when, caught up in that fear or pity, I remained voiceless. This being carried along meant that I could find a voice which did not retreat any more "before the good of the other".

A cathartic reaction could then start to operate: a separating out of planes which, for a time, allowed me to know a little bit more about the unconscious.

But Lacan emphasises that this path of catharsis is not calming for everyone. And he tells us that Plato did not hesitate to mention possession in the cathartic process.

I remember now that, during our first meeting, Lacan had asked me what my job had been in Brazil. While listening to me, he had decided that I should do a thesis on "The rites of possession in Brazil and their efficacy". No sooner said than done, he had picked up the telephone and called his friend Balandier. Without having requested anything myself, I was suddenly catapulted into the presence of this professor to do a doctoral thesis on the rites of possession. And now in a roundabout way, through this work, I have again found the rites of possession that were the starting point of my relationship with him. I never did do the thesis but, some years later, I encouraged someone else to do it.<sup>18</sup> I have only just understood the root of the interest Lacan had for these questions.

Translated from the French by Philip March.

#### notes

<sup>1</sup> This paper was originally given at a congress in Paris, organised by the Fondation Européenne de la Psychanalyse in 2004 on *La pratique de Lacan*. It appears in *Travailler avec Lacan*, Didier-Weill, A., Safouan, M. (eds.), 2007, Paris: Aubier-Flammarion.

<sup>2</sup> This exchange between Anzieu and Lacan is to be found in the Seminar of January 20, 1954, the seminar devoted to Freud's papers on technique. In the version published by Le Seuil, J.-A. Miller did not include it.

<sup>3</sup> February 10, 1954.

<sup>4</sup> Sublimation, which we will find throughout the rest of his work.

<sup>5</sup> Lesson of 8 October, 1960.

<sup>6</sup> Lesson of 23 November, 1960.

<sup>7</sup> As we know, later he will put it that it is the one who is desired who is endowed and the one who desires, who lacks.

<sup>8</sup> In the conference on Lacan's practice, Patrick Valas told us that his request for analysis was addressed to the man whose work and its importance he had evaluated. Even before the analysis began, there was a transference onto the work. I had not yet reached that point.

<sup>9</sup> Société Psychanalytique de Paris. While I was asking one of the members for the name of an analyst, he mumbled something about a training analyst being absolutely necessary in my case, something for which I had not asked. Concerned, he went through that category of analyst and told me that I would have to wait. In 1972, the number of training analysts was quite small.

<sup>10</sup> Lesson of 18 December. Miller mentions it on p121 of the Le Seuil edition.

<sup>11</sup> About fifteen years ago, during one of the first international meetings of the Inter-Associatif in Paris, I had, with Alain Didier-Weill, the pleasure of discussing his talk on "The analyst in the place of third Other". I

which he made a strong impression upon us both.

Laznik, M. C.: *Vers la parole: trois enfants autistes en analyse*. Denoël, Paris, 2004, ch. 8.

It should not be forgotten that as I had five sessions a week, I must have seen him on the Monday and missed the following days, with the telephone call on the Friday morning. Given the intense rhythm of the sessions, all this was played out over four days.

Lacan talks about this myth in the sessions dated January 18 and 25 in 1972. See Lacan (1991) pp147-148, 157-158.

Lacan (1971-72) *Ou Pire*, unpublished Seminar; Lesson of 10 May, 1972. The Seminar on Desire and Its Interpretation, Lesson May 20, 1959.

All these references to catharsis are to be found in the last lesson of the Seminar on the Ethics of Psychoanalysis.

I have nevertheless written an article on this subject; Laznik-Penot, M. C.: "Parcours mythique et rituel d'une cure selon la tradition du candomblé" in *Sessions d'hier, possessions d'aujourd'hui, Le Discours Psychanalytique*, a review of the Freud Association, no. 20 October 1988, Paris, pp253-268.

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