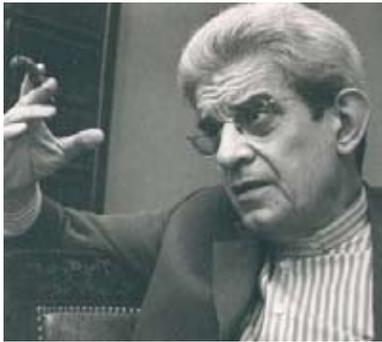


# the middle voice and topical invention

When Jacques Lacan encountered the 'prophetic' speech of the notorious madwomen of the 1930s, he realized the connection between psychosis and Biblical prophecy lay in its use of an ambiguous kind of communication that used the resources of 'mid-speak' (*mi-dire*), which was able to speak the truth at the expense of not being able to speak 'the whole truth'. What is the relation of this speech to the 'middle voice', a mode between active and passive speech that, in some languages, is devoted to existential conditions where agent and act, cause and effect, etc. cannot be successfully parsed. What, further, is the relation of *mi-dire* to the 'middle term' of the enthymeme, a syllogism describing the relationship of the speaker and his rhetoric to the audience, a form of silence that, using a metaphor of space and delay, allows the audience to complete the incomplete speech? The enthymeme's historic relationship to *agutezza*, the art of ingenuity (wit) that depends on finding a middle term to connect two unrelated or even opposite terms opens the way for seeing how *mi-dire* constitutes a 'study method' in Vico's terms. Lacan's *mi-dire* is the missing link connecting Vico's theory of reading/study to his theory of the mind's 'first moments' (related to the imaginative universal), focusing on the under-appreciated relation of thunder to the acousmatic method of psychoanalysis. Thunder links Lacan to the Upanishads, to T. S. Eliot's use of the Upanishads in *The Waste Land*, to James Joyce's use of thunder in *Finnegans Wake*, and Joyce's interest in Vico and Vico's interest in thunder.



Jacques Lacan

**Jacques Lacan's Mid-Speak ('Mi-Dire').** When Jacques Lacan read the news about the sensational murder case of the Papin sisters, he was fascinated, and continued to be fascinated, with the way the sisters spoke. In another case, a school teacher who had gone insane began to speak in fragmentary sentences that were luminous and prophetic. These instances of female paranoia led him, in explicating the mirror stage, to develop a more general theory of truth that confronted the Gödelian set-theory limitation of how theory can include itself. Because discourse must be subject to the rules it explicates as universal, the phenomenon of *mi-dire*, of 'saying half', became for Lacan both a style and a method. This style was evident in Lacan's spontaneous use of puns, aliteration, abrupt breaks (aposiopoesis), and prosopopoeia. Lacan's knowledge of classical and Biblical literature undoubtedly fueled his conviction that *mi-dire* was not simply a method or presentational mode but a means of thinking and discovery.

**Giambattista Vico's Middle Voice.** Giambattista Vico wrote his major work with an embedded theory of reading. The author purposefully cast himself as a limited, obsessed, repetitive, and sometimes paranoic figure, leaving a space for the reader to fill, either to attribute these peculiarities to historical-personal quirks or to see, in the pattern of references, a method of reading that effectively transferred the authority of 'authorship' to the reader. That the second of these options was intended by Vico is evident from one passage where Vico directly and almost psychotically refers to the process of reading as one of an internal 'resonance' of spiritual dimensions, where the reader's own self-reflection (i.e. that the New Science as a cultural-personal reality has already and always existed 'inside' him/her as a kind of *agal ma*, or hidden treasure and that reading is a recovery of this 'monstrous' interior other) completes the *New Science's* 'destiny' as a text.

**Baltasar Gracián's Art of Ingenuity.** Ernst Curtius has consolidated the lore of the late Middle Ages that gave invention a central place in the philosophy of the mind. From mystical traditions that survived through Islamic and Jewish scholarship, the early Renaissance resurrected Platonist and other texts in terms of the idea of genius, which was drawn from the consolidated traditions surrounding planetary lore of Saturn and the psychological lore of melancholy. As Vico realized, humoristic theory gave equal weight to the function of (Stoic) theory of the *animus/spark/caelum* that was coincidentally employed by Lacan in the form of the silversmith's mark of authenticity, the 'chisel'. This indicated the 'any and all' deployment of fantasy by the individual in the face of the gap left by demand/desire, but in general it is an 'operator' of consciousness constructed by the 'anticipation' of metaphor by metonymy and subsequent contamination of metaphor by synecdoche.

**Lacan's (and Others') Interest in the Future Anterior Tense.** When the literary critic and Russophile Edmund Wilson wrote about the Dead Sea Scrolls, he was in the position to link the Hebrew use of prophetic language to the Russian language's ambiguity concerning the status of a past event that will be completed at some point in the future. This 'looking forward' in order to 'look back' is, in some language situations, indistinguishable to looking backward in order to look forward, and hence prophecy and history are to some degree convertible. Lacan's designation of the (French) verb tense of the future anterior points to the innate incompleteness of the signifier. The signifier occurs in a string whose origins and ends are necessarily absent. The meaning of a sentence cannot be known until the final punctuation mark, which can recast the whole meaning of the sentence and force the listener/reader to revise the meaning, which had been based on some anticipated end. Consider:

I am happy.  
I am happy?  
I am happy!  
I am happy. I am happy.  
I am happy ...



Baltasar Gracián

The gapped circle is the result of human demand's displacement of the 'goal' of need to a silent/surplus missing element that, as a metonymical fragment, precedes metaphorical constructions ('fantasies') that conceal this absence. The return of the originating metonymical fragment takes place in a 'synecdoche' of part for whole that is an uncanny suture of an interior within the extensional dimensionality of metaphor.



In the simplest case, then, we have the options of positive statement (with possible ironic meaning), a reversal (?) that reverses the role of the agent who must report, an emphatic proc-



The 'impresa', an image preceding the text of Vico's *New Science*, demonstrates the principle of *mi-dire* through the split made by the personification of Metafisica, as 'she who lay hidden' (the inscription on the plinth is a Latin phrase, *Ignota Latebat*) between the builder's square she holds in her right hand and the mirror held by the left hand. Stereognosis could stand both for the use of Metafisica's hands to demonstrate this left-right division and the presence of the mirror, an early appearance of the Lacanian operator by which Metafisica herself undergoes the structure of externalization and sublimation of metonymy that structures the experience of the human subject.

lamation that calls for a response based on a position that is presented 'at face value', and a fragment that is indeterminate without a 'but', 'and', or other related statement, all of which reframe the phrase. Hearing the same phrase twice calls into question the way enunciation *per se* frames itself.

So, it is the case that we know nothing 'until the end', which is indeterminate. This predicament is, however, informative in the sense that the structure implied by the future anterior is a 'zag' that makes the original into a 'zig' and travels back to the origin of the enunciation while, at points along the way, revising interior elements. This is a model which could be called the 'anacoluthon', after the rhetorical figure involving the revision of syntax in a sentence. Revision involves the dynamics of incompleteness and, hence, the metonymical status of all utterances. Anacoluthon's classification as 'error' points to the relation of the anacoluthon to epistemology: either the zig or the zag is correct, but the return to the origin, and the involvement of the future and past in puzzled ways means that the situation is more complex than deciding in favor of the zig or zag version.

This is a case where an 'anamorphic' condition calls into question the issue of the point of view via the problematic nature of the 'vanishing point', the future 'event' that will have been completed in the future which is also a past, a return to origins. While this may seem to derive from a purely linguistic phenomenon, it is a case where language manages to reproduce an existential condition of the psyche. 'Mind', in its fundamental sense, is an anacoluthic structure, and the discovery of this has led thinkers in various traditions to focus on the issue of anterior futurity, the question of origins (linked with a question of ends), or the role of wit (*ingenium*). The equation of prophecy with history has, in many if not most ancient cultures, been 'cleaned up' with the advent of modern textual practices, but the common factor in all such purges of the irrationality of the anacoluthon has been the invention of authorial distance, coupled with the ideological emphasis on the single-mindedness of the author that is the basis of authorial authority. The mind that writes about the uncertain mind must nonetheless show that it has decided unequivocally what the state of affairs really is!

Following the 'anamorphosis connection', it seems that the anacoluthon and future anteriority demonstrate the intimate penetration of language by space-time elements and, in the reverse direction, the way that language invades the 'silent' domains of space and time. Here, however, we have a distinction to make. The anacoluthon has to do with aspects of language that evade the usual 'phonemic' definition of language, and even more run contrary to Saussure's intimate relationship between the signifier and signified. This is perhaps why Lacan, who was not at all interested in the signified, focused on the way that the signifier was, in its metonymic fragmentation, capable of operating with only 'meaning effects' instead of solid referential relationships. The temporality and spatiality of metonymy and metaphor establish 'referent-free' zones for thought and behavior.

**Time Travel, Contamination of Reality by the Dream, the Double, and the Story in the Story.** The involvement of the 'classic forms' of the genre of the fantastic show that the spatio-temporal dimension of *mi-dire*, in addition to engaging the dynamics of *ingenium*, construct the Lacanian 'gap' that must be filled/crossed by fantasy. Few scholars have substituted 'the fantastic' for the Lacanian function of fantasy. In fact, fantasy for Lacan was always individuated: each subject has his/her own fantasy, as indicated by the matheme,  $\$ \diamond a$ . We conjecture, however, that culture, and especially popular culture, provides the scripts by which these individual fantasies are constructed. The 'literature of the individual fantasy' follows public designs. The list of four themes is really a single structure that can be traversed in four ways. The main design is chiasmatic: the double or rival theme defines the two main chords of the chiasmus design (two intersecting lines). While the 'lower' line is sufficiently remote from the intersection, it can constitute a story contained within another, main story. Time travel is a relay along the circuit of the completed chiasmus, and this action constitutes chiasmus's status as the figure of the anacoluthon. The origin of the chiasmus figure, when the two logical lines are far apart, provides the locus for the 'return of the Real', by which the initial intention of the expression is revised by the missing element of jouissance that, through its absence, propelled the main line of action towards its future (anterior) goal. The fact that this goal was never present from the start gives the chiasmus model the status of a circuit with a gap, the gap being, itself, the occasion for the return of the Real, which is in miniature the place of the fantastic (and another 'story in a story').

**Roussel's Procédé.** Raymond Roussel's contribution to the history of Surrealism centered on his method known as 'the *procédé*', a trick he outlined in his enigmatic book *How I Wrote Certain of My Books*. In one application, Roussel took a single sentence with several key words with alternate meanings. The beginning of the story began with one possible interpretation, ended with another, and set the intervening narrative in an arc connecting the two. Another method involved an imaginary journey into the micro-detail of a small object, such as a decorative illustration on a 'desk set' or the label of a water bottle. In the first case, the themes of story in a story and double are evident; in the second we see both travel through time and the scale violation of contamination. More than mechanical application of the fantastic's forms, however, is the spirit of the *mi-dire*, which in its relation to the unconscious, allows for a silent completion of the artwork by the audience, a method of conspiracy.