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a cry

a whisper

a voice

In early modern England the word 'gossip' referred to companions in childbirth not limited to the midwife. It also became a term for women friends, with no necessary derogatory connotations. In either case, it had strong emotional connotations.¹

It's been a few hours of labour and she feels completely exalted and exhausted. Her friend whispers soothing words in her ear while holding her hand and gently wiping the sweat from her face. A big wave of pain washes over her and finally, clutching her friend's hand as tightly as possible and with a deep and roaring scream, the baby leaves the mother's womb. For a split second, there is stillness. Every-body in silent quiet. The air molecules not producing sound ripples, hovering in nothingness. The walls and corners of the room ready to reverberate: to absorb the cry. To cry back. The baby's lungs fill up and her vocal cords vibrate for the very first time. Her first interaction with the world, mediated through the reverberation of her crying voice. Her first audience: her mother, the midwife, the friend--the gossips--all witnesses of *the birth of the cry*². She hears herself and perhaps she knows that the sound belongs to her. Her first embodied knowledge. She cries with all her strength, beginning to learn how her muscles tense and contract in her throat, all over her face. All over her body.

She cries like she's never cried before/will ever cry again.

She has become a voice.

The beginning of sense, its possibility and its send-off, its address, perhaps takes place nowhere but in a sonorous attack: a friction, the pinch or grate of something produced in the throat, a borborygmus, a crackle, a stridency opened into the division of its resonance.³

¹ Federicci, Silvia. *Witches, Witch-Hunting, and Women*. Canada: Between the Lines, 2018.

² Nancy, Jean-Luc. *Listening*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2007.

³ *Ibid.*

The more she cries, the more the walls and corners cry back, the more she cries. She has become a voice but that voice is still alien to her, and so, it scares her. She will have to grow into that voice, tune her ears, mold her tongue to that voice and make it hers. Her mother's voice is not alien to her, she recognises it straight away. Her ears slowly formed on each side of her head in constant awareness of it. Inside of the womb, the sound of her mother's voice was always in counterpoint with stomach growls, heart beats, blood hums. It will be the only thing that soothes her for quite some time because it will remind her of the place before here.

*Where does the voice come from? It comes from the innermost realm of our being, but at the same time it is something that transcends us, it is in ourselves more than ourselves, yet again, a beyond at our most intimate.*⁴

It's the first time the mother hears the baby's voice but it's a sound she's known for millennia. Her body is tuned to it and it will respond to her cries with empathic vibrations coming from the deepest part of her brain, the part some people call reptilian. It will be an automatic reaction—machinic, some might say—bypassing any possibility for logicity or prevention. The mother's breasts will start dripping at the sound of the baby's cry.

*The breast [becomes] a machine that produces milk,
and the mouth [becomes] a machine coupled to it.*⁵

The cry, its sonorous attack, is the medium through which mouth and breast become a symbiotic unity.

After becoming a voice, she will rest.

Exhausted, she will sleep for hours.

When the baby is not a baby anymore, her ears will begin stretching. They will grow beyond the anxious fear of the sonic unknown and start searching for meaning. Her voice will first take the form of an echo while she figures out how to masticate the noises that will become

⁴ Dolar, Mladen. *A Voice and Nothing More*. United States: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2006.

⁵ Guattari, Felix, and Gilles Deleuze. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983.

words, that will become signs. The sculpting of her own voice will be a work done by her as much as the others. A collaboration where the reverberating gap between her and the others will give her voice a specific flow and shape. In the process of learning these sounding rituals, she will lose intricate noises that will find no resonance with the older voices that she is exposed to. When she grows up, she will reminisce about this, standing in front of a mirror, she will try to reinterpret those untrained utterances: her pre-linguistic sound sensibilities.

*The ear is stretched by or according to meaning—perhaps one should say that its tension is meaning already, or made of meaning, from the sounds and cries that signal danger or sex to the animal, onward to analytical listening, which is, after all, nothing but listening taking shape or function as being inclined toward affect not just toward concept.*⁶

One day she will discover the edge of her voice, located between her lungs and her mouth, where the whisper resides. The hissing whispering noise will fascinate her, and she will practice it with care. Letting just enough air out of her lungs, tightening her throat, letting the air slip through the smallest slit in her vocal cords without allowing them to vibrate. The air will become a frequency, all the frequencies: a noise that she will sculpt with the use of her cheeks, tongue, teeth, lips.

She will learn that a part of her life will be spent disentangling knots, unknotting her voice. These knots will stealthily start forming at the edge of her voice, clogging her throat with speech unspoken, with sounds unsounded, making it hard to breathe in [inhale] breathe out [exhale]. A couple of times in her life, before she masters the art of untangling knots, she will become a hoarder of utterances, keeping them stored on the roof of her mouth, unable to project them out to the ears of the world. Soon enough she will find the resonating voices that will teach her how to ease the knots: to patiently blow on them, like a magician, rather, like a witch, to make them loose and set her voice free.

As she grows older, she will understand that the most important thing to do with her life is to search for resonance. She will learn how to *walk so silently that the bottoms of [her] feet become ears*.⁷ And by doing this, she will find the most important voices in her life. Some of them will resonate because of their tone, their delivery, some others will resonate because of

⁶ Nancy, Jean-Luc. *Listening*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2007.

⁷ Oliveros, Pauline. *Sonic Meditations*. United States: Smith Publications, 1971.

their structure, their content. Some of them will resonate for no other reason than their mere noisiness. She will find it strange at first, this resonance, the voices of others that move her from the inside out, as if some part of these voices had resided dormant in her until her ears got hold of them. The other's voices will resonate as they speak to her, sing to her, whisper to her. These voices will belong to the people that she loves, either directly or at a distance. With some of them she will be in harmony, with others in counterpoint. Sometimes they will be in dissonance or in unison, and just as I do now, she will appropriate the rumour of those voices, and make them hers. Her voice will be a collage of voices, one voice, made up of many. But it will be hers. She will understand, through her listening intuition, that the song of the world is formed breath to breath, mouth to mouth, made up of whispers, rumours, noises and cries that linger on every wall and every corner, ready to reverberate, to absorb another cry. To cry back.

*Sólo la voz, la piel, la superficie
Pulida de las cosas.*

*Basta. No quiere más la oreja, que su cuenco
Rebalsaría y la mano ya no alcanza
A tocar más allá.⁸*

⁸ Castellanos, Rosario. *Colección Antológica de Poesía Social*. Vol. 95. Spain: Biblioteca Virtual Omegalfa, 2015.