The kingâ??s speech impediment

Description

Tom Hooperâ??s film *The Kingâ??s Speech* demonstrates the vital importance of the human voice in establishing and maintaining power. If you canâ??t get the words out then you will never assert authority. This moving film about King George VI and his attempts to deal with a stammer is also about a father and a son, a relationship that exercises proponents of Freudian ıral theory. Problems about â??the voice of the fatherâ?• are the mainstay of Lacan, explained, explored and worried over by philosopher Slavoj Å½iÅ¾ek.



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From a different angle, film Theorist Michel Chion has conducted a careful analysis of the different aspects of the voice in cinema. He emphasises how the curiosity of an audience is aroused by hearing the voice but not yet being able to see its source, as in the voice-over in a documentary, or the voice that originates from outside the frame of view. There are also those pregnant silences filled in by our imaginations, and by what precedes and what follows the silence.

For Chion, silent film was not without voice, but contained many voices, the voices conferred on the actors by the audience. As a good bit of cinema *The Kingâ??s Speech* presents artfully the human voice, and even the absence of voice. There is potency in the kingâ??s silences in the lecture hall, racecourse and over the radio as he forces out the words in spite of an unobliging vocal apparatus.

One of the key capabilities of the human voice is to repeat itself, to repeat others, to mimic, and simply to repeat sounds over and over in rhythmic patterns. The insistent practice of vocal exercises demonstrates our faith in repetition. Repetition is also built into the stammer in the first place: the

faltering attempts at delivering the â??pâ?• sound in the word â??peopleâ?• results in staccato breaths and involuntary contractions, before the required sound is released.

Of equal but less obvious interest is what the film says about the role of the human voice in constructing and modulating space. How do we translate the influence of the voice outside of the cinema and into everyday spaces? â?? the architecture of the voice.

Repetition is central to understanding the voice in space. The design, organisation, control and experience of space is permeated by repetition. The arrangement of columns in a building, organisational grids and the deployment of measuring systems all point to repetition, without which it seems space cannot be managed.

In so far as the voice repeats, it is caught up in these instruments of spatial organisation. Evident from the vocalisations of protesters, football crowds, market sellers and street vendors itâ??s apparent that people claim space by chanting, ie repeating, over and over, the same phrases, words, syllables. In many cases it matters less what is actually being said or that it can be understood than that something is being said, and repetitively, a basic way of staking out territory shared throughout the animal kingdom.

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The way that vocal repetition works in spaces is clearly a subtle process. The voice is time-bound and transient. As in a busy marketplace, there may be many voices, each competing, and with their own rhythms. Space as defined by the voice is not as easily controlled and managed as the disposition of repeating columns, steps and windows. The voice is part of a spatial â??sub-architecture,â?• that must be taken into account, and that interacts with the hard materials that define conventional architectural space.

The Kingâ??s Speech demonstrates something of this subtle interplay between architectural space and the space of the voice. The use of public address systems and radio clearly expand architectural space, particularly public spaces, otherwise constrained by the reach of the voice. Thanks to broadcast technologies the King can deliver his famous war speech while in a sound studio separated from his immediate audience by solid walls, and from peopleâ??s living rooms by many miles.

Then thereâ??s the rhythm and flow of his voice that brings people closer and into a space over which he has command. This contrasts with the gap that opens between speaker and audience when the flow is impeded. Generally construed as acute embarrassment, this aural space of anticipation and frustration, the inability to speak, to repeat, presents as a chasm. If only we could disappear into this space. Such is the sovereignty of speech, and its lack.

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