

## "ON THIS HAUNTED GROUND I WAS LOST AND FOUND" – ECHO'S LITOGRAPHY

Mirjana Stošić

Singidunum University, Belgrade, Serbia

**Abstract:** Ovid's work represents Echo in turning from bodily to bodiless shape, from the talkative voice to the surplus of voicelessness. Being punished to repeat the end of the sentences of the speaking-other, Echo is the ultimate figure of metamorphosis and of wandering – always lost in repetitions, always lost to be found in *écriture* in stone, in engraved narratives of the other, as a ghostly identity of the other. Therefore, Echo is a decentred, meandering voice – a voice only until there is any voice at all. Being the undercurrent of speech, Echo is a figure of fragmented, dismembered, detached speech, a travelling postcard on an errant, wandering course. The mythical Echo creates a sonorous ground to be written upon, only to be multiplied. Belonging to no-body, she is always on her way to die away and close, a voice-thing destabilizing the voice-subject. This research paper deals with the mythic figure of Echo in terms of Gayatri's notion of „deconstructive embrace“ and the concept of the subaltern. Can Echo's „fragile auricle“ be aligned to „non-mimetical“ identity, to multiplicities of repetitions in conflict to the voice-subject, the same and the different at once? Or, if Echo „has no identity proper to itself“, as Spivak puts it, what can be lost and found in echoland of identity, in the political space of „the catachresis of response as such“?

**Keywords:** voice, metamorphoses, Ovid, voicelessness, *écriture*, image, catachresis, voice-thing, voice-subject, subaltern.

### I. ECHOES IN ALTERITY

*“L'Autre ne saurait accepter de s'affirmer comme Tout Autre, puisque l'altérité ne le laisse pas en repos, le travaillant d'une manière improductive, le déplaçant d'un rien, d'un tout, hors de toute mesure.”*

Maurice Blanchot, *L'Écriture du désastre*

In a study on “listening” and “hearing”, Jean-Luc Nancy (*À l'écoute*, 2002) attempts to, as he puts it, “prick up the philosophical ear”, to tune it to “accent, timbre, resonance, and sound” (Nancy, 2007 : 3), in order not to just understand and not to simply hear and not to only see. If thinking through listening is somewhat a limit of philosophy, Echo (the mythic figure) and echo (sound effect) are the permanence of limit of thinking. Echo cannot be seen, the end-fragments of speech of the other cannot provide overall comprehension of coherent utterance, and we hear but don't listen. Or, to put it differently, if we are to think the limit of thinking in terms

of “being all ear”, Echo is on the both sides, or on all of the sides, of listening: she is listening to the voice of the other, and she is the voice to be listened (to). To listen to the Echo is to listen to the resounding of the sound; it is to sound again and again and again until the echo of silence resounds *ad infinitum*. Or, maybe this is a dream – to listen the asymmetrical listening of echo.

“To sound is to vibrate in itself or by itself: it is not only, for the sonorous body, to emit a sound, but it is also to stretch out, to carry itself and be resolved into vibrations that both return it to itself and place it outside itself”. (Nancy, 2007 : 8)

Given that the subject of this paper is the mythic figure Echo, I will start with some introduction to Ovid’s poem, the most cited source when one is talking about Echo, but there surely are other sources. Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* is a Latin narrative poem, an etiological poem, an inventive new reading of Hesiodic and tragedian mythopoeia, and Virgilian apotheosis of Roman Caesarism. Ovid is leaning to the notion of double-bind writing – his references are already known narratives, sacralised in Hellenic and Latin cults. Ovid’s verses are a certain writing of echoes: he listens to the reverberations of classical Greek myths and transforms them into echoes in alterity, inventing the notion and the word “metamorphoses”.

I am to reread the myth of Echo and to try to resist widespread miss-readings of the Echo-figure, always related to the figure of Narcissus, and blindness of insight in reducing Echo (a mythic figure) and echo (a sound effect) to mimetic apparatuses of pure response without a subjectivity and agency.

Echo, Ovid’s *vocalis nympha* (talkative nymph), is a runaway voice, a non-belonging speaking apatriote. She belongs to mythic circling, to the changes of the seasons.

It is the pathway illuminated by moonlight, by a dark glow – Echo is a lunar figure. So, the story goes like this: Echo is a nymph, a relentless and talented narrator, seducing Juno to listen and to be oblivious of Jupiter’s mischievous fun games with the rest of the nymphs. After discovering the trickery of Echo’s entertaining stories, Juno punishes her. Echo is thus reduced to speaking only if there is a speaking subject, and only repeating the tail of other’s speech. So, from a talkative, careless girl, Echo would become “a voice-activated device, unable to originate a discourse, unable to forbear from reply”, a surplus of voicelessness. (Hollander, 1984 : 8).

By the iconic lake, undisturbed by any breeze ever, a mirror-like device for Narcissus, Echo falls in love with him, and after futile attempt to engage Narcissus into discourse on love, she withers away, her body shrinking to bare bones and repetitive voice, and Echo withdraws to rocky, hollow caves, forever residing there as an unseen and always heard voice, no more Echo, but a reverberating sound whose anteriority is localised outside, and always comes after the originary sound.

## II. “BOUND TO CITE NARCISSUS”

*“Resonance is the locus of voice— voice is not a primary given which would then be squeezed into the mold of the signifier, it is the product of the signifier itself, its own other, its own echo, the resonance of its intervention. If voice implies reflexivity, insofar as its resonance returns from the Other, then it is a reflexivity without a self—not a bad name for the subject. For it is not the same subject which sends his or her message and gets the voice bounced back—rather, the subject is what emerges in this loop, the result of this course.”*

Mladen Dolar, *Voice and Nothing More*

The story of Echo is placed between Tiresias's oracle and Narcissus's death, brought to him for his unresponsiveness, and "Echo stands in for all the lovers that Narcissus left 'unanswered'" (Nouvet, 1991: 105). Echo is the ultimate figure of metamorphosis and of wandering – always lost in repetitions, delivering speech that is not-quite-speech, since she has to repeat, and is deprived of intention and subject position in speech act, always lost to be found in *écriture* in stone, in engraved narratives of the other, as a ghostly identity of the other. Therefore, Echo is a decentred, meandering voice – a voice only until there is any voice at all. *Vox manet*, as Ovid states. Voice remains. As was shown in various approaches to reading Ovid's poem, the narrative of Narcissus and Echo „is bound to cite Narcissus“ (Nouvet, 1991), and so the narrative is also an echo. The „I“ is in the place of the „other“. And that is the paradox of anterior and originary signification. Ovid has represented Echo as a body, not a voice (*Corpus adhuc Echo, non vox*), at first, only to re-locate the representative power of echoing into the living voice (*Vox manet*), at the end of the narrative. The living voice, or the voice living-on, is a voice-thing becoming a voice-subject that lives in Echo (*qui vivit in illa*).

The Echo myth corrodes the philosophical discourse of presence and the logic of identity. It is the story of many metamorphoses: Echo is transforming into various narratives (before the punishment), into the narrators and subjects of all the stories she narrates. From this point on, Echo, after being punished, is transformed into de-subjectified voice always repeating, no longer a story, no longer a narrative, but precisely the eros of somebody else's story, into the "tail" of somebody else's utterance. And, the crucial point of forever transforming body of

Echo is the metamorphosis of this "tail" into the discourse of love, or the appropriation of the speech of the other within the voice-subject speaking on love. Echo is repeating Narcissus's words only to send a message of love and longing, and she is turning "sounds" in "answers".

""[E]cquis adest?" et 'adest' responderat Echo. / hic stupet, utque aciem partes dimittit in omnis, / voce 'veni!' magna clamat: vocat illa vocantem." (Ovidii, III 380-82)

""Is anyone here?" and 'Here!' cried Echo back. Amazed, he looks around in all directions and with loud voice cries 'Come!'; and 'Come!' she calls him calling" (Ovid, 1984 : 1:151).

But this "answering" is not so simple. Echo answers to Narcissus's question (*Ecquis adest?*/ Is anyone near?; *Veni!*/Come!; *Quid me fugis?*/Why do you run from me?), repeating his word(s), not responding to the question, but sending the question back as "other", as Claire Nouvet notes in "An Impossible Response". This otherness of question is not some kind of other than itself, but the otherness that "diffracts the question into a potentiality of alternative meanings". Mythic Echo stands for the figure of undoing the temporality of presence, of metaphysics. The echoes of Echo, or the echoes themselves, are infinite displacements of origin, resistances to the subject source of speech, and thus they represent the violence of otherness. But this otherness of Echo is not just "the feminine other", but "an endless process of alteration", "it is not secondary, but originary" (Nouvet, 1991 : 110), and in that sense, Nouvet concludes, Echo "answers by noting the originary lack of correspondence, the constitutive otherness, which inhabits the question." (ibid : 108). The echoing stone, as an obstacle, is an acoustic body mimetic, repeating the originary sound and always perversely distancing itself

from it, desolating the power of the voice. Echo is always anarchic, secular and heterogeneous. On the one side, we witness the desired homogeneity of voice, and, on the other – the subversive heteroglossia of echo.

The final, but never finalised, metamorphosis that Echo has to endure, is the transformation into double imagery of echo as such: the rock, the stone (the barrier) and the voice (the nomad). Echo is the mountain rock and the repetitive phantom voice. She is the revenant body-stone-voice. Ovid states that Echo's bones are turned into stones, her reverberating voice can be seen as a writing on the stone – a lithography. Echo is not going to face the fate of framed image of the voice of the other, or to be entrapped into the unison repetition of speech of the other, but would endlessly loiter without a rest, without residence and assigned place, through the echoland inhabited by absences and phantoms. Being the undercurrent of speech, Echo is a figure of fragmented, dismembered, detached speech, a travelling postcard on an errant, wandering course.

### III. AND YET SHE SINGS!

*"First she dies. Then she loves.*

*I am dead. There is an abyss. The leap. That Someone takes. Then, a gestation of self – in itself, atrocious. When the flesh tears, writhes, rips apart, decompose, revives, recognizes itself as a newly born woman, there is a suffering that no text is gentle or powerful enough to accompany with a song. Which is why, while she's dying – then being born – silence."*

Hélène Cixous, *Coming to Writing*

There is another story on Echo, and it is the narrative space where Echo continues her transformations. In Hellenic pastoral love novel of 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, *Daphnis and Chloe*, by Longus, Echo is a

musician, virgin-singer, "brought up by the Nymphs and taught by the Muses to play the pipe and the flute, to perform upon the lute and the lyre, and to sing songs of every kind", associated with Pan, "sings with the Muses" and "[flees] all males." Envious and enchanted Pan, unable to silence her or to have her (body, voice, musical skill, and disseminating mastery), brings about her death by the hands of herdsmen. These bloodthirsty bacchant shepherds tear Echo's body to pieces, and scatter her limbs all over the earth. But, scattered and dismembered Echo still sings. "The Earth concealed these singing limbs and preserved their music; and they, by order of the Muses, are still able to sing and imitate sounds of every kind, just as the girl did once - sounds made by gods, by men, by musical instruments, and by wild beasts. They even imitate Pan when he plays his pipe." So, the earth has embraced pieces of Echo's body, and thus the earth becomes a specific funeral place of echoing disembodiment – the talkative grave, the speaking dirt – the echoland. Or, to be close to Ovid's text (to seek an asymmetrical embrace between two texts), in *Metamorphoses*, Echo, after being transformed to stone and voice, is to be the echoland herself, inhabited by sound: "there is a sound, which lives in her" (*Sonus est, qui vivit in illa*).

In close proximity of Cixous's "coming to writing", a horrendously beautiful adventure of acquiring the right to write as a woman, the figure of Echo can be said to be of the similar echoing predicament.

"To prove that I'm rightfully in the wrong, I've invoked all the reasons for the fact that I have no right to write within your Logic: nowhere to write from. No fatherland, no legitimate history. No certainties, no property. [...] No permanent residence." (Cixous, 1991: 36)

One can presume that Echo, as a Cixousian feminine, can speak, can sing, and can produce the authentic speech phenomenon (if there is such a thing), but only by being assigned to a proper place within the masculine Logic. But she can write, not in the sense of drawing lines on the paper, but in producing disturbances within the notion of writing, by becoming *écriture*, by decisively becoming a weak, minor writing of the other – the feminine, the newly born, again, always again, into the borders of the Language – the always newly born.

Ovid's book starts with beautiful line on somewhat queer creation of the world: "Of bodies chang'd to various forms, I sing" (*In nova fert animus mutatas dicere formas corpora*).

These mythic metamorphoses are seen as practices of transformations on textual, narrative, epistemic and ontological level. They show the inevitability of change, the world of transformation. Rosi Braidotti has outlined the problem of metamorphoses as "the only constant at this dawn of the third millennium", and calls for urgent need to think processes not only concepts, regarding the notion of "becoming" (the other) (Braidotti, 2002 : 1).

Thinking the change, the transformation is at the front line of contemporary re-evaluations of the notions of the human, the community, politics and identity. Echo might encompass concepts of response and responsibility within the re-mythologizing narrative of a disappearing body of voice, and in terms of becoming a (ir)responsive and (un)responsible body of/for the future to come. Undoing the "self-identical subject" is to be found in Ovid's story of Echo, "in the plusreal, the elsewhere to come is announced" (Cixous, *Prénoms de personne*, 1974; as cited in Buchanan and Colebrook, 2000 : 23).

There are numerous examples of female mythic figures transformed, dismembered, and put to ground, aligned to earth, and giving birth to new forms of life. We already know that Echo is the body of sound, inhabited by sound, a living sound. Another example would be Medusa, formerly turned to monstrous figure with petrifying gaze and snake-like hair, later decapitated and used as apotropeic sign. From the contact of her blood and earth, Pegasus and corals are born. Third example is the pre-Greek, babilonian goddess, from the epic *Enuma eliš*, Tiamat, whose dismembered body parts are a substance of the world, the earts, the water, the celestial space and universe. All these mythic female vast bodies of transformation are a result of a fragile auricle, the ear of the other, of an anarchic listening of the order and the law of creation of the world, the listening that always hears every utterance but menages to over-hear it, and send it back as other. In this sense, these figures serve as a destabilisation of logics of identity.

Jacques Derrida traces the Echo-Narcissus "dialogue" within the notion of the "to come" (*à venir*):

"A dissymmetrical, unequal correspondence, unequal, as always, to the equality of the one to the other: the origin of politics, the question of democracy. If I seem to be insisting a bit too much on these *Metamorphoses*, it is because everything in this famous scene turns around a call *to come* [*à venir*]. - And because, at the intersection of repetition and the unforeseeable, in this place where, each time anew, by turns [*tour à tour*] and each time once and for all, one does not see *coming* what remains *to come*, the *to come* [...] "Veni!" says Narcissus; "Come!" "Come!" answers Echo. Of herself and on her own." (Derrida, 2005 : xii)

Belonging to no-body, Echo is always on her way to die away and close, a voice-thing destabilizing the voice-subject.

#### IV. ECHOID ONTOLOGY

*"Il faut avouer que le Moi – n'est qu'un – Echo."*

Paul Valéry, *Cahiers*

I would like to turn your attention to Bulgarian philosopher Boyan Manchev, whose work in recent years focuses on developing the metamorphic line in philosophy, or *modal ontology*, with the central focus on the categories like metamorphosis and alteration, as Manchev states. Regarding Manchev's transformationist approach, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* are to be read not as a form changing its shape, as an explanatory narrative of "forming" and "shaping" of the "world" and "life", but as an "activity of form", of bodies changing forms, or *animus mutatas dicere formas corpora*:

"Ovid's *Metamorphoseon* appears as a turning point not only in relation to the question of metamorphosis but to the very reflection on form, to the *poetics* or *poetology* of form, precisely because it exemplifies the impossibility of approaching form without a concept of transformation that is, of the *activity* of form." (Manchev, 2015 : 18)

Maybe, after all interpretations which deal with the echo as a transformation of body to voice, and of voice to a lithography, we can, perhaps, imagine one reading of this myth that enables the thinking of transformation of silences, absences and disappearances. Is it unfathomable to listen to poetics of silence, to tune one's ear to the always changing forms of absences, and to slide on the routes of disappearing bodies and utterances? Echo can be interpreted as a form of acousmatic voice, as

a possibility of listening without seeing. Therefore, it is imaginable to approach Echo from the perspective of master's voice, the one in hiding, the voice of divinity, of sovereign, of a professor. But this possibility is, we might say, the impossible possibility, given that Echo is the anti-divine voice, the voice in collision with the great feminine divinity of Juno. Echo is the subaltern voice and a divine silence, at the same time. And this duality is, perhaps, the site of impossible future to come – the monstrous temporality of the future apocalypse of sovereign voice (present, divine, masculine, in possession of truth, and professing the truth etc.)

In terms of Spivak's notion of „deconstructive embrace“ and the concept of the subaltern, „the lithography of Echo's bony remains merely points to the risk of response. It has no identity proper to itself. It is obliged to be imperfectly and interceptively responsive to another's desire, if only for the self-separation of speech. It is the catachresis of response as such“ (Spivak, 1996 : 185).

Can Echo's „fragile auricle“ be aligned to „non-mimetical“ identity, to multiplicities of repetitions in conflict to the voice-subject, the same and the different at once? Or, if Echo „has no identity proper to itself“, as Spivak puts it, what can be lost and found in echoland of identity, in the political space of „the catachresis of response as such“?

Spivak attempted to „give woman“ to Echo, to deconstruct her from traditional (Freudian, Oedipal and Narcissus complexes). To deconstruct Echo Gayatri Spivak had to place this figure into a comparative, fragile and perilous embrace with Indic tradition and subaltern post-colonial, namely, with the writings of Algerian author Assis Djebar and with the notion of *a-phonie*. „A-phonie, midway between

women's oral culture and patriarchal scripture, is a willed imitation of Echo's warning-in-longing that must continue to fail, since one cannot Echo willingly."

As Blanchot notes in *L'Espace littéraire* (1955), "language speaks as absence", it is "the speech of silence, it cannot be heard" (Blanchot, 1982 : 51). A-phonie, a phenomenon in close proximity with silence (but not identical to it), is a temporal spatiality of Echo's bony remains, a voiceless and scriptural echoscape out of which Echo professes that language speaks as silence, murmur, a-phonie.

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