

Anonymity

Asked in an interview, that was published in *Le Monde* on April 6, 1980, under the heading “Le philosophe masqué”, why he had insisted on remaining anonymous, Michel Foucault answered that this request to do so came forth from his desire of being heard: “Why did I suggest that we use anonymity? Out of nostalgia for a time when, being quite unknown, what I said had some chance of being heard. With the potential reader, the surface of contact was unrippled. The effects of the book might land in unexpected places and form shapes that I had never thought of. A name makes reading too easy.” Of course, Foucault’s nostalgia for a time without such a name, that would guarantee a certain authority of speech, touches upon the question of the author. Here, in the interview with Christian Delacampagne, to give up his well-known name then means to come to speech, whereas the fact of being acknowledged as an authority would only hinder.

Foucault’s request for nameless writing, for anonymity, brings to mind the indifference towards the author, which he had addressed some ten years earlier in his famous lecture *What is an Author?*. Recapitulating the ethics inherent in this lecture, Giorgio Agamben notes: “What is in question in writing, Foucault suggested, is not so much the expression of a subject as the opening of a space, in which the writing subject does not cease to disappear.” This space that comes forth in writing, as it seems, and that, with regard to the writing subject itself remains without expression, is for the reader the very place to enter. According to Agamben in his essay *The Author as Gesture*, the reader does occupy “the empty place [...] left by

the author", repeating the "same inexpressive gesture the author used to testify to his absence in the work". At stake with reading therefore is an empty place that relates to anonymity, indifference and inexpressiveness.

Experience of language

The nymph Echo, taken from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, is yet another figure that comprises the question of anonymity. Having no possession of proper speech, Echo relies on a trick in order to communicate with Narcissus, who, blinded by his own image, rejects her affection for him — a rejection that finally causes Echo to turn into nothing but voice. According to the myth, Echo, deprived of the capacity to articulate any expression in her own words, only comes to speech in repeating and appropriating the last words of someone's phrases. Speaking about Echo therefore always already means to speak about an experience of language.

In the documentary dedicated to his daily work as a philosopher, Jacques Derrida, for instance, refers to the myth of Echo and Narcissus in order to remind us that any "speech is to some extent blind", that to "speak is to not see". Derrida's comment thereby reveals another intricate fold of Ovid's myth. Alike the question of blindness holds Echo and Narcissus together as well as apart, it almost seems to be impossible to speak about one of them without already speaking about the other. "Echo and Narcissus, they are two blind people who love each other," and, consequently, any speech about to address them is faced with the blindness of its own words. The experience of language that comes forth with Echo cannot be told apart from the fate of Narcissus, no less than it can be separated from the matter of desire, the discourse on love and death and the question of blindness, all of which are at play within this passage of Ovid's poetics.

Echo, in repeating, responds. Completely incorporated into language she designates within the word the place of its repetition. Her speech introduces a common use of language that cannot be reduced to this or that signification. The experience of deprivation and appropriation

that constitutes this speech from within language conveys an ethical question. Echo's being in language is a form of hospitality. A guest in language, with Echo Ovid's myth suggests a form of anonymity within intimacy, an appearance without name and signature, a form of blindness that according to Derrida is inherent in our acts of writing and reading.

Department of Reading

This book assembles the writings and readings of the Symposium for Readers (Berlin, December 2007). It subsumes a space of margins, a possibility of rotation and a commentary on the matter of reading. Made up of two adjacent volumes, each having its own spine, the book consists of four parallel columns. It therefore works as if the reader had two books opened next to each other, while the adjacent pages allow for different lines of text to appear side by side. The right volume has on its outer pages six essays in their initial form. In correspondence the outer pages of the left volume contain excerpts from the corresponding chats that evolved around each of these essays. The adjacency of the two volumes makes a relation appear that is both a distinction and a non-distinction between the essays and their readings. An instance that is intensified with an echo given in the double space that presents itself at the centre of this book, the former margins that are now folded in.

The Symposium for Readers itself was an attempt to recapitulate and apply the experiences that occurred within the practice of the Department of Reading in the previous year. Founded in 2006 the Department of Reading developed as a reading group — partly online-based, partly situated in different spatial settings — that displays given texts on a Wiki and invites its readers to interfere with them using an online chat. The symposium took up gestures, manners and rhythms of reading coming forth from this practice. During the course of two days and in six different sessions it assembled readers around the essays in this book, all of which were chosen and hosted by invited guests.

Like all sessions of the Department of Reading the symposium could also be attended entirely online, with read-

ings running in parallel, starting over and over again. In reference to gestures of reading, such as exposing phrases and terms, and its understanding of the margin as an adjacent space that resides within the text, technical commands were developed and applied via the Internet system DoRis. Intensifying the different rhythms of reading, repetitive or erratic, or allowing for the text to be intruded or passages to be extruded, the practice that has emerged here furthers reading as a commentary inscribing itself, while unfolding the given text, both as a method of playing and in its performative quality.

With this attempt to translate the readings and writings of the symposium into the format of the book, it was important to introduce the possibility of rotation. The chats and essays differ in proportion and not every passage of the readings corresponds to one particular passage of the respective writings. Due to the fact that each volume of this book has its own spine the pages containing the chats can now be turned independent from those of the essays. The double book therefore draws attention to the fact that reading is also always an act of interfering with the textual arrangement of the book. Phrases and single terms from these readings and writings are echoed in the inner page structure. The unbound volume formed by these inner pages proposes in itself an adjacent space that cannot simply be told apart from the chats or texts, but rather takes place within them and further relates to a zone of indistinction between reading and writing. What at first might appear to be a useless repetition turns out to be a line that both exposes a poetic moment inherent to theoretical discourse and unhinges the terminology that this book relies on.

Child's play

Thinking of the empty place any reader comes to enter and recalling Foucault's masked philosopher, another masquerade might come to mind, namely that of the child pretending to be asleep. That infantile place draws the attention to a presence that only becomes actual within its own absence. As any play it is one of tricks and illusions. For the child remaining unexpressed in being present, it relies on

the parents complying with its play. But the illusion, of course, is, that it just happens, and that might as well count for the happiness that encloses the child.

The place of the reader can offer a similar experience. If the child pretending to be asleep rests upon an inexpressive gesture, here this gesture encounters the indifference of a place that in reading turns itself to me and is withdrawn at once. This could also mean that this place comes along with an absolute substitutability. It simply could mean that my taking-place as a reader is always already common and the indifference at the same time conveys an unconditioned hospitality. If this is true, then similarly to the happiness that accompanies the child in its play this taking place in language might belong to the realm of luck. The experience that comes about in repeating the "same inexpressive gesture the author used to testify to his absence in the work" might therefore always be played out with each single one of the countless gestures that reading introduces.

Effortless

With a trick Echo offers Narcissus the illusion of a response. Finally adopting and returning his call once again, it appears as if in lending her voice to his desire of being heard Echo accomplishes the speech they both were hoping for. It seems as if she articulates his dream of a word coming forth from the alleged other and thereby allowing for her words to be embraced by the unapproachable other. Though within the same gesture Echo's response succeeds and fails. It fails, in that every spoken word belongs to the realm of illusions. Without reserve Echo takes the place of the illusionary other, giving up all her attributes, no longer possessing a place of her own in speech and in this manner making herself common. However, neither revealing the illusion as an illusion, nor acknowledging an insuperable border of language, but precisely in complying with the illusion, Echo offers companionship within language.

No mystery, no revelation — a simple trick renders this completion of the illusion possible. The trick is played out at the moment Echo assigns herself to anonymity and en-

ters the common place of language. Only with this inexpressive gesture can the illusion come to an end, and a passage like that of the metamorphosis opens up. Echo does so almost effortlessly. That blind response of language she brings about conveys an ethical place. Here, in Ovid's myth, it appears within intimacy. One attempt of *Echo's Book* was trying to comply with the inherence of such a place in our acts of reading and writing.

References

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