

MY WORDS ECHO THUS

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Reflections on the function and effect of the analyst's intervention.

*My words echo
Thus, in your mind.
But to what purpose*

Abstract

These words of T S Eliot are inscribed in the poem *Burnt Norton*, the first of his *Four Quartets* written in 1935, around the time Freud was penning his *New Introductory Lectures*. They offer a metaphor for a fundamental question that necessarily comes into formation for the neurotically-structured analysand. How the analysand responds to this question opens (upon) the possibility of the impossibility of analysis.

My Words

I'm going to parse Eliot's words in order to organize my reflections on this question. Beginning with "my words", then, is it not the case that, at the opening of the possibility of analysis the neurotic assumes that they are the author of their own words, that they are the one who determines the *meaning* of their utterance? As such, the neurotic poses as a *bone fide* modernist for whom cause and effect, voice and echo, are fixed in a straight line.

The analysand might tolerate the analyst's indulgencing in a variety of alternative/possible meanings implied by their words, but such relativism more or less strays from a meaning that is always/already designated by the analysand as *singular*.

From the perspective of this analysand, then, it is for the analyst to *confirm* that what was *meant* cancels what was *said*, to (re)cover an inconvenient slip-of-the-tongue, or perhaps to repair a deficit in 'communication skills'.

Herein lies the proof of the analysts willingness to be hoodwinked under the guise of *understanding*.

Thus, this game belies a *pretense*, that the analysand's empty words merely *masquerade* as a speech-ing full of authoritative meaning that functions to determine the 'truth of reality' as real truth. At the heart of this fantasy lies the lure of the specular, the promise reflected by the 'mirror on the wall' that captivates "his majesty the baby"ⁱ. This narcissistic crusade is adopted in the speaking of the infant neurotic of analysis; the analysand's asserted meaning (re)presents a demand upon the analyst to forge an echo of the analysand's repertoire of ego ideal(s). In *abstaining* from doing so - in refraining, that is, from propping up the analysand's conceit - the analyst appears to the analysand in the place of cause, one that emphasizes the side of desire that *objects*, that is an object cause of *anxiety*.

Why so? Because the analyst's position unmasks the ego as no more than Shakespeare's fretting, strutting idiot, the neurotic as hamming a performance rehearsed to "prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet"ⁱⁱ. This foil of the analyst, then, opens the possibility of effecting a necessary regressive hystericization, thus opening upon the im/possibility of analysis.

Echo Thus in your Mind.

We can conceive of the consulting room, then, not only as reflecting a hall of mirrors, but also as an echo chamber in which there lies the possibility of the *impossibility* to distinguish what is voice (unconscious) from what is echo (transference). Where the analyst remains silent *when they are expected to speak*, or where they repeat isolated signifiers uttered by the analysand, *the echo disturbs*, since both silence and repetition can be interpreted by the analysand as a calling into question. It is at the point at which this question-ing emerges that we might locate the opening of the *possibility of the impossible*; the possibility, that is, of *analysis*.

Is it not evident, then, that in contrast to the analysand, the analyst's articulation is on the side of a postmodernist ethic, a paradigm that insists upon a certain *uncertainty* regarding meaning? That is, the analyst forgoes authorship of their speech acts (Austin, 1962. In this analytic position we find an echo of the notion of abstinence I outlined a moment ago; in abstaining from the desire to claim *authorship*, to *fix* meaning, the analyst refrains from satisfying the demand of the neurotic analysand to mirror their ego ideal(s).

The analyst thus acts to *defer* interpretation-as-meaning in such a manner as to unmask the analysand's narcissistic quest and hollow out what masqueraded as full, opening upon the impossibility of the possible.

Let's approach this precis from another angle.

What precisely is impossible about analysis? Lacan, after Althusser, insists that, "The signifier, as such, signifies nothing."ⁱⁱⁱ Shakespeare has already poignantly presented Macbeth's sound and fury as signifying nothing^{iv}. For any analysand, it is precisely this 'nothing' that is impossible. No-thing is impossible (and yet Freud makes clear from the very start in his Project that trauma emerges, we might say, from no one event, or happen-thing).

What, then, is possible? Well, in Seminar 1 Lacan draws upon J L Austin's seminal work of 1962, "How to Do Things with Words" and illustrates some of Austin's founding coordinates with Freud's observations of the Fort-Da game. This game re-presents a *desire for mastery over absence*, an absence of some desired thing. Following the rules of this game, we might say that *speech signifies a desire to signify*, and what is signified is *no thing, an absence*. To symbolically bring into present presence and absence past.

Here we see, then, precisely how the Symbolic entangles the Real and Imaginary.

The signifier-as-*cri-de-coeur* of desire for that-which-is-absent belies the foundation of the infant's drive to speak, a cry that finds an echo in the infant neurotic analysand's anxiety in the face of silence, in the im/possibility of the absence of meaning, a silence pregnant with an excess of meaning.

I believe we can trace three evolutions, or *voicings* of the emergence of the signifier which follow from the infant's drive to speak:

- I. First, ***the signifier points***. The point, however, is an untriangulated co-ordinate, a point-ing that comprises a plurality if not a *kaleidoscope* of possible meanings. That is to say, *the signified's exigency is born as an echo of the in-sistence of the signifier*, re-presenting an impossible object-wish that remains absent and suspended beyond mastery. This much the psychotic knows and endures.
- II. Second, ***a chain of signifiers signifies significance***. The possibility of *meaning* arises *only* by the grace of the Symbolic, that is the *Symbolic-as-rule-of-grammar*, an *autonomously* organizing principle that functions akin to the Freudian super-ego in that the rules of grammar *primarily forbid*. The Non du Pere of grammar forbids certain groupings of certain signifiers, forming the basis for co-ordination. This much the pervert knows and protests.
- III. Third, in conversing with each other under the rule of the Symbolic, ***chains of chains of signifiers commune***. And since the meaning of such communication is (en)clouded, ***meaning is always commuted***. This much the neurotic knows and grieves.

But to what purpose?

These three voicings of signification author the echoes of the three defensive strategies of foreclosure, disavowal and repression, in turn mirroring the three structures of psychosis, perversion and neurosis, structures that require differing forms of analytic handling.

The psychotic cannot claim authorship of their words in the same way as does the neurotic. As Roustang famously put it, the psychotic is the stage upon which the Other speaks^v. From this platform, the *in-sistence* of the signifier returns in an amplified echo of *ex-sistence*; *the signifier is indistinguishable from its pointing, it is con-fused*. As with the mobius strip, what is within returns from without, there is no discernable separation, no means of tracing one side as distinct from the other. What this return signifies for the psychotic is an *indication*, an *illusion to meaning*. The psychotic is certain only that the signifiers to which they are subject point not to somebody, but to *this body*, such that *signification becomes invasively embodied*. As such, to refer to Laplanche's metaphor, every signifier potentially functions like a splinter under the skin^{vi}.

Lacan speaks of psychosis *metaphorically* (as do Laplanche and Roustang. How can the neurotic speak otherwise?). And yet the function of metaphor is *alien* to the psychotic. Does this not reveal that *the psychotic is spoken by the neurotic at the ontological level*, that the psychotic is signified as a neurotic construction at the level of ex-sistence? For example, the signifier 'cure' points to an alien operation imposed upon the psychotic, effecting an *abduction*. If the psychotic is to be cured, then, it is as a semblance of the neurotic, as an Imaginary conceit, an aim diametrically opposed to that in the treatment of the neurotic subject of analysis.

Freud claims that such mimicry is as good as it gets for the psychotic, that the patch is the key by which the psychotic can function *as if*, as if they were neurotic. That is, the psychotic has to *forge* a role by which a certain impostership can be anchored by nominating a singular delusion to the suturing function

of the patch, the *patch-in-lieu* of the *non-du-Pere*, one that functions *as-if-Symbolic*. It goes without saying that the analyst cannot point the psychotic to some signified in order to anchor the signifier since the signifier signifies nothing. It is the *psychotic's* nomination of the patch that brings its function as such into play, and in doing so, it is the *psychotic* who comforts their disturbance.

Disturbing the dust on a bowl of rose-leaves I do not know.

In contrast with the psychotic, the art of analysis is tasked with *disturbing* the neurotic's illusory comfort, echoing the other side of Cesar Cruz's famous dictum, "Art should comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable". That is, the words uttered within analysis must necessarily come to echo in the mind of the neurotic analysand in such a way as to "disturb the dust on a bowl of rose-leaves I do not know", to quote the following lines which conclude our stanza from Elliot's *Burnt Norton*. That is, to disturb the unconscious, or, rather, to disturb its function as guardian of the repressed (for is not the unconscious the 'royal road' to the repressed?)

For both the neurotic and the psychotic, the point of the signifier *punctures*, but to radically differing effect. For the neurotic, the reverberation of the signifier bursts the hallucinatory effects of the *Imaginary*, thus renting asunder a mesmerizing fixation, deflating the suffering otherwise endured by the *colonized* psychotic. The signifier functions in this manner for the neurotic *by virtue of its role as the representative of the Symbolic and thus its heralding of the Real*. That is, the Symbolic *solders* the Imaginary and the Real in such a way as to permanently link the three. Since the Symbolic does not exist and so does not function in this way for the psychotic, the signifier is fated to remain *unanchoring*. The signifier thus comforts and frustrates the neurotic, while remaining a daunting and indeed threatening enigma for the psychotic.

Lacan offers Schema L as map by which we might conceptualize the trajectories of the signifier within the echo chamber of the analytic encounter with the neurotic analysand, and by which we might trace the vicissitudes of the transference and so the resistance. No speech can be voiced or heard from outside this matrix; schema L represents a framework by which the neurotic analysand is *in-scribed*, and thus a co-ordinate by which they attempt to locate the speech of the analyst. The analysand's identification of and with the analyst's intervention is forged, then, in the analysand's own image; it is the analysand who is the author of the meaning of the analyst's words, it is the analysand who interprets and, in doing so, reveals an echo of the resonant co-ordinates by which they locate themselves and position the analyst.

What then is on the side of the analyst?

Well, like Neo^{vii}, having author-ized himself as such, the analyst possesses the potential to *see* the Matrix (Schema), and since resistance is on the side of the analyst (Seminar 1), a degree of *influence* by the analyst is implicated in this defensive pressganging of the transference.

To what purpose? Well, after Freud, Lacan implicates the *desire* of the analyst as a necessary if insufficient requirement for the possibility of the impossible, a desire which echoes the *drive* of

psychoanalysis. As I outlined above, the psychoanalytic ethic calls upon the analyst-as-interlocutor to abstain from colluding in the analysand's masquerade, and to focus their desire upon an alternative fate regarding the echo of their words, one that re-presents a foil to the misrecognition(s) of ego, misrecognition that elides a coming-into-being of the subject (a). It is this Heideggerian Dasein (Being & Time, 19***) that is made possible upon a disturbance of the dust on an unknown bowl of rose-leaves, and so that to which the analyst's words are purposed.

To the extent the neurotic analysand's interpretation of the analyst's intervention closes upon the impossibility of the possible, the resistance is likely to pressgang the transference in such a manner as to elide the possibility of analysis, that is to render analysis impossible. To the extent that the analysand's interpretation of the analyst's intervention opens upon the possibility of the impossible, the analysand may experience a glitch in the matrix, a blink in the mesmerizing Imaginary gaze, thus opening the veil upon possibility of a coming-into-being.

It is the neurotic analysand if not first and foremost then at least finally and at last, who must fully speak a (re)constructed historicization of subjecthood if they are to loosen the imaginary misrecognitions of an empty hystericization. It is the analysand who must author a storying of being that admits an echo of radical Otherness at the heart of their speech, at the heart of an adopted desire.

ⁱ Freud, 1914

ⁱⁱ T S Eliot: The Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock

ⁱⁱⁱ Seminar III

^{iv} *Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.* Macbeth, V: 24-28

^v Roustang: Dire Mastery

^{vi} Laplanche: Refounding Psychoanalysis

^{vii} The Matrix series