

Listening by Echo: Voice, Eidetic Image, and the Retrospective Self

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The quotidian experience of cognitive sense, of ‘hearing’ a voice within the mind or ‘seeing’ a scene of childhood through the lens of memory, seems to be so everyday as to hardly warrant closer examination. And yet, it is largely these faculties of interiority and their cycles of recurrence in the mind that constitute our understanding of the past, of the world around us, and consequently of ourselves. The phenomena of the inner voice and the intimate cinema of the mind are the internal echoes of our experience of the outside world. They are the reverberations and reflections of the outside within. Inner vocality, vision, and their conglomeration in the experience of memory are perhaps the richest example of what Gaston Bachelard called “the dialectic of outside and inside,” of exteriority and interiority. Among many other questions that we will approach here, we must ask: to what degree is the self constituted by voices from within and without? How is the inner voice bound up with self-identification? And what is the role of memory and interiority in identification processes? Our conceptions of self and our perceptions of the world is bound to and thoroughly effected by the phenomena of the inner voice and eidetic vision. This analysis seeks to examine the manner in which these complex phenomenal processes perform the dialectic of inside and outside and the extent to which voice, image, and affect comprise the ambiguous elements at the threshold between interiority and exteriority.

Our inner speech seemingly constitutes the most private and immediate aspect of self-consciousness. We intuit that our inner speech is our own, that it is spoken and controlled by ourselves. Though the din of inner voices can be unwieldy, our common presumption

is that, as an aspect of our inner life, this speech is of our own possession and is uniquely bound to us specifically. Adriana Cavarero has developed what she calls a “vocal ontology of uniqueness;” structured much like Levinas’s ethical model of intersubjectivity, Cavarero’s system places the voice in an ontologically primary position. Here, the voice is always already social in that it immediately posits an interlocutory relation. Most central to her system is the ontological uniqueness that is revealed in the voice of each individual. She invests the voice with an inherent and unassailable authenticity and truth value. She writes that “the truth of the vocal...proclaims simply that every human being is a unique being, and is capable of manifesting this uniqueness with the voice, calling and infecting the other, and enjoying this reciprocal manifestation” (7). The relation and interlocution of voices is a reciprocal “relation among uniquenesses;” perhaps most importantly for our particular concerns: for Cavarero, the voice, though not exactly a “sort of secret nucleus of the self,” is however “what the unique person has that is most hidden and most genuine” (16, 4). According to this formulation the voice is (1) ontologically primary in humans, (2) essentially veridical and authentic, (3) embodied, (4) reciprocally relational, and (5) the bearer of a singular uniqueness. In this system, the voice is the avatar of the particular uniqueness of the self, it is in my complete possession, and when interiorized, remains a hidden domain of privacy that can withdraw from a relation with an exterior other, though it continues in a relation of the self to itself.

While Cavarero argues for an essential, authentic hiddenness to the voice that precedes articulate speech, she largely fails to theorize in her “vocal phenomenology of uniqueness” the embodied voice that “resonates, [though] no air is agitated. No larynx swells, no eardrum vibrates,” that is interior vocality (Cavarero 7, “Voice” 58). Some basic questions arise here: is the interior voice an articulate voice? Can it properly be called speech? And when we hear the voice of the other in our own minds, whose uniqueness is borne on that voice, that of the self or the other, for can we properly say that we possess within ourselves that which is supposedly most unique and hidden in the other? It is clear that the voice of the other reverberates in the mind; at any moment we can mentally conjure a chorus of unique voices that we’re familiar with. As light effortlessly passes through a sheer veil, in like fashion the voices outside ourselves easily pass into interiority and remain. The supposed privacy of interiority is continually trespassed, most often against our will, calling into question the strict inside/outside distinction, as well as the privacy and uniqueness of the inner voice, and the control or possession we have over the voice (within or without).

Denise Riley, like Cavarero, argues for the inherent sociality of the voice, but to such a seemingly radical degree as to eclipse its uniqueness. Cavarero’s contention that “the voice belongs to the living; it communicates the presence of an existent in flesh and bone,” is starkly opposed by Riley’s proposition that “the dead chatter away as the inner speech of the living” (Cavarero 177, “Voice” 71). The latter’s notion of interior speech is one of ambiguous agency. While we are subjects of “linguistic occupation” by the chorus of remembered voices that inhabit our inner life, our inner voice is neither produced by “the exertion of pure will nor [is it] straightforwardly spoken” by these various voices of memory. Given this “principled ambiguity” of interior vocalic control, a theory of the voice

cannot rest on any claim to individual uniqueness. That someone is speaking also means that it is being spoken, and 'I vanish into my long home as a faint rustle within a broad murmur among anonymous voices. For 'there is always another breath in my breath, another thought in my thought, another possession in what I possess, a thousand things and a thousand beings implicated in my complications!.' (*Words* 184)

The phenomenon of inner speech is not just one where I consult myself, speaking directly to and with myself. Rather often "there's simply talking inside me. *There is a voice*" ("Voice" 72). So, when Riley claims that my voice is but a "faint rustle within a broad murmur among anonymous voices," she is following Vološinov's lead in the contention that "interiority is always already social" ("Voice" 80). Our inner voice is immersed in the "insistent reverb" of remembered speech, and though our voice is distinctive it is not unique (*Impersonal* 12). To borrow Riley's analogy, we plagiarize rather than author our voice ("Voice" 70). We unconsciously take up the second-hand phrases, tones, "reiterated quotations," "the rubble of the overheard," and "the mutterings of remembered" ideas from the indwelling language of the inner voice ("Voice" 73). The "imported sociality" of inner speech carries with it the traces of remembered voices, causing our own voice to be caught up in unconscious echolalia (*Impersonal* 19). Rather than being a vehicle of ontological uniqueness, the voice reveals the self to be a "residue of echoes" (*Impersonal* 17).

The remembered voices that come to inhabit and resound in the mind are not a tool of some heinous force of hegemony or political coercion, rather this process of echolalia is simply a function of how the mind perceives, remembers, and constructs an imagined self. The polyphony within does not speak us but rather speaks across or with us. Just as in Ovid's story of Echo and Narcissus, where the repetition of the latter's voice in the mouth of the former is semantically altered through its distortion, fragmentation, and change of stress and accent, so to with the relation of the voices of memory to the self in the present. Riley terms this a process of ventriloquy. She writes, "We might say that inner speech itself lives as a state of ventriloquy, in that there is talking within us as if we are spoken from elsewhere; but this just is our main mode of speaking... [Ventriloquy is] the state of sensing that words are running through me, across me. There's a kind of 'it's speaking in me' which is not exactly 'it is speaking me,' but is an unwilling busiedness [within]" ("Voice" 72). The voice of the inner self is thus spoken vicariously by these indwelling echoes. According to Riley "the performer here is the arch-ventriloquist, language. Its apparently spoken puppet is that aspect of the inner voice marked by echo, repetition and dictation" ("Voice" 73). And yet, the plight of the subject is not one of simple passivity and a state of being wholly spoken from elsewhere, though it is nearly impossible to distinguish between "such driven inner speech and something more spontaneous" ("Voice" 73). To account for the self's capacity to speak with or through remembered voices, Riley describes a process of autoventriloquy. She writes that autoventriloquy "disposes or arranges me to speak as if I myself were [the] source" of the "densely chaotic onrush of the speech from the outside" or the resounding cacophony of the remembered within ("Voice" 74).

The mechanism of autoventriloquy is one where I speak on my own behalf. It is a state of being spoken from elsewhere in one's own voice, imagining this utterance to be spontaneous and personally articulated. What Riley terms "the autoventriloquy of the inner voice could be read as a description of the working of identification" ("Voice" 77-78). The self remains a stand-in, "acting on [its] own behalf at one remove" ("Voice" 74). With this mode of identification, one is an active agent though remains a conduit of voices from without that resound in the pitch of one's own 'unique' voice. As with Echo, voices from the outside are taken up by the self and repeated as one's own utterance. In this way, processes of identification are structured and performed as anomalous resonance, repetition, and reflection. By definition, this process is always retrospective. Riley contends that "autoventriloquy enjoys its real triumph when I've so naturalized some [self-]description as my own that I'll repeat it to myself with the contented conviction, and without meditating on where it originated" ("Voice" 76-77). But this scenario is not so bleak as it may seem. Working retrospectively, the self acts as an editor would with miles of celluloid or text, with a long succession of framed voice and image that can be cut and refashioned to make it one's own. This retrospective, echoic process of identification is not a passive, loyal repetition; rather the subject enacts a continual process of cutting and recutting. Though the plight of the subject may be its lack of a unique voice—insofar as the utterable is always already second-hand—and though the self is constructed residually, caught in concentric circuits of resonance, the work of autoventriloquy—"my repetition to myself of whatever authoritative positioning I've caught from the world"—still enables one to refashion or recut these voices and images on one's own behalf ("Voice" 77). We're apt to conceive of this process as one of inculcation, coercion, or an entrapment that reduces freedom, but, for better or for worse, "autoventriloquy is a practical aspect of societal identification" and a function of the way that the mind constructs the self through the work of memory, and at the threshold between interior experience and exterior events ("Voice" 79).

Identification and constructions of the self are always already retrospective. The material for such re-constructions are the repeated echoes and reflections of remembered voice and image. Joan Scott characterizes the process of retrospective identification as one of fantasy echo. Scott's term names the cognitive process in which the remembered voices, images, events, and affects that continue to reverberate in the mind, becoming increasingly distorted in their anomalous, altering returns constitute the protean material of our plagiarized selves. It is not so much that memory becomes corrupted or that its accuracy diminishes, causing our backwards glance to fall upon an inauthentic scene, rather the basic condition of all rememberers is one of paramnesia, that is the condition involving distorted memory or confusions of fact and fantasy. Scott describes the retrospective identificatory process characterized by fantasy echo as one that enacts "the repetition of something imagined or an imagined repetition. In either case the repetition is not exact since an echo is an imperfect return of sound... Retrospective identifications, after all, are imagined repetitions *and* repetitions of imagined resemblances. The echo is a fantasy, the fantasy an echo; the two are inextricably intertwined" (Scott 287). Similarly, along those

same lines, it would be fair to say that memory is a fantasy, and fantasy a memory. Scott describes identification as a process “of writing oneself” according to the fantasized repetitions of memory and the imagined resemblances that we find between the self of the past and that of the present. But perhaps, in light of Riley’s formulations, it would be more accurate to understand this as self-plagiarizing, as the construction of the self on the basis of remembered, reconstrued quotations from the voices of memory, from both our own imagined past voice and from the echoic chorus in which it is immersed.

The figure of the echo is particularly helpful in developing our understanding of how memory, fantasy, repetition, and resonance work on perceived voices and images to construct the self. Moreover, it is productive in describing how these processes transgress the supposedly distinct threshold between exteriority and interiority. Scott writes: “Echoes are delayed returns of sound; they are incomplete reproductions” that create “gaps of meaning and intelligibility,” and constitute an “incomplete, belated, and often contradictory kind of repetition” (291). When Ovid’s Echo responds to the voice of Narcissus, her repetition of the latter’s words are fragmented and stress is placed differently, wholly altering their original meaning.

Like the interaction of remembered and perceived voices and images, “the melodic toll of bells can become cacophonous when echoes mingle with the original sound; when the sounds are words, the return of partial phrases alters the original sense and comments on it as well” (Scott 291). The mental repetition of voice and image mingles memory of the past with the perceptions of the present, and in this way the self is constructed dialectically as the altered echoes of past voices effect our construal of the present, and present scenarios cause the past to be re-imagined. Scott claims, “In either case, repetition constitutes alteration. It is thus that echo undermines the notion of enduring sameness,” or uniqueness, “that often attaches to identity” (291). Identity, like an echo, is protean in the sense that the meanings of the voices of memory become altered by fragmentary self-reference and fantasy echo. We self-identify on the basis of these meanings and their apparent relation to the self in the present. Echo is the “process by which subjects come into being as ‘a play of repetition and difference among signifiers’” (Scott 291).

Imagination and fantasy are inextricably linked to the workings of memory and retrospective identification. Active memory is both echoic and palimpsestic. It is a circuit of writing and overwriting in which the traces of previous impressions are still apparent beneath the new impressions. The repetitions or echoes of the voices of memory are fantasies insofar as they are constructed, distorted, or narrativized instantiations of previous experience. Scott explains that the act of fantasizing itself is not the “object of desire, but its setting. In fantasy the subject does not pursue the object or its sign: he appears caught up himself in the sequence of images” (Scott 288). Invoking Žižek, she writes: “fantasy operates as a (tightly condensed) narrative” in which “contradictory elements (or, for that matter, incoherent ones) are rearranged diachronically, becoming causes and effects” (289). Memories are the “imagined repetitions” of previous experience and are constructed as tightly condensed narratives that rearrange contradictory elements into a coherent scene in which the rememberer gets “caught up...in a sequence of images.” Rather than being

the resonance of one voice, a fantasy-memory is a conglomerate of a multiplicity of voices and images that are cut or edited to form an apparently logical narrative. To invert Gerard de Nerval’s famous statement that “to create is to remember again,” it is clear that to remember is to create again.

Henri Bergson theorized that the inner self is perpetually doubled in the dialectical relationship of the remembered past and the experience of the present. He argued that this “duality of self is the *reflection* we have of ourselves in the memory of our immediate past, or the immediate doubling of self in actuality and in memory. Therein lie these two additional forms of being...one self is *actual* while the other, mirrored in memory, is *virtual*” (Maxwell 132). For Bergson the inner self has two levels that are inextricably interrelated, the actual self in the present and the virtual self of the past. These two I’s are “inseparably entangled, interwoven and intermingled, one cannot exist without the other” (Maxwell 136). This relation is not always one where the actual, present self appeals to a distant, imagined virtual self. Oftentimes “it is difficult to differentiate present perception from immediate past memory...At that mysterious frontier between the present and the past, memory and perception are inextricably intermixed” (Maxwell 134). This everyday experience of “the Bergsonian mirror image of the self reflected in memory” is emphasized similarly by Kristeva in reference to Proust’s writing: “Let us emphasize this two-faced ‘being’ which Proust seeks to name in his writing—perception is always in a state of being stretched between the world of the present and the historical self” (qtd in Maxwell 136). In this way, every subject is like the dual-faced god Janus, looking inward and outward, backwards and forwards simultaneously, so much so that its double vision becomes a single mode of perception.

The virtual self of memory is an image of a fanaticized past self. Just as the actual (not to be understood as more authentic or real) self is informed and partially determined by the imagined self of the past, the virtual, past self is perpetually rewritten in the present. This bi-directional self-identification is the quotidian condition of how the repetition and reverberation of the voices of memory (re)constitute the self. Maxwell writes: “the various successive layers of self that have over the years been superposed...are comparable to a succession of mirror images like those between parallel and facing mirrors, but the subject wants to see only the ‘original’” (138).

Theodor Reik—a Freudian who sought to psychoanalyze the voice—appealed to this same image to describe his method of “listening with the third ear: what one might call a listening by echo, or a catacoustic interpretation” (Lacoue-Labarthe 164). Reik believed that an individual’s voice could be psychoanalyzed and he attempt to develop a method of “listening with the third ear” that could properly interpret the nuances of voice to reveal aspects of the patient’s unconscious. He believed that “certain vocal modulations,” the “particular pitch and timbre” of the voice, “speech rhythm,” “tone, pauses, and shifted accentuation,” “inflection,” “intonation” and “nuances of pronunciation...betray a great deal to us about a person” (qtd in Lacoue-Labarthe 162). Reik writes: “A voice which we hear, though we do not see the speaker, may sometimes tell us more about him than if we were observing him. It is not the words spoken by the voice that are of importance, but

what it tells us of the speaker; its tone comes to be more important than what it says. ‘Speak, in order that I may see you,’ said Socrates” (qtd in Lacoue-Labarthe 162-163). For Reik the key to interpreting the grain of the voice lies in the analyst’s ability to have “free access to his own unconscious...He must be able to reach his own experiences, which form a concealed reservoir of emotions and thoughts, a subterranean store room of unconscious memory-traces. These hidden memories secure the means to understand the other person” (qtd in Lacoue-Labarthe 162). Lacoue-Labarthe explains that, for Reik, “all perception is at bottom listening...listening is quite simply seeing” (162-163). According to Reik, “the unconscious *speaks*. And the voice, that is the *lexis*, is that by which it speaks” (Lacoue-Labarthe 162). As in the work of Valentin Volosinov, here the unconscious, the deepest recess of interiority, exists on the outside and is carried by the medium of the voice. Reik’s analysis of memory and the voice posits the possibility of theoretically reducing the distinction between the visible and the audible, and implicitly that of interiority and exteriority. Lacoue-Labarthe writes, “no example better illustrates this than Reik’s way of joining systematically and seamlessly the motif of listening with the Goethean motif of *repeated reflections*” (163).

Reik theorized that “listening by echo” or “listening with the third ear” can reveal to the analyst the latent, hidden meaning behind particular instances of neurosis. Reik appeals to Goethe’s doctrine of repeated reflections (*wiederholte Spiegelung*), which the latter takes from entoptics, to describe the function of “analytic listening” (Lacoue-Labarthe 164). Reik writes: “In one essay [Goethe] tells us to consider that repeated reflections ‘not only keep the past alive but even raise it to a higher existence’ and reminds us of the entoptic phenomena ‘which likewise do not pale as they pass from mirror to mirror, but are actually kindled by it’” (Lacoue-Labarthe 164). While Goethe appeals to this reflective phenomena for the literary purpose of expressing hidden meaning in the repetition of related images, Reik believes that the same method could be used to reveal secret meanings in the grain of the voice. In another text, Goethe writes “contemplation of the reflection of the past not only preserves it as a living reality but elevates it to a higher level of life. Similarly, entoptic phenomena do not fade from mirror to mirror, but are, by the very repetition, intensified” (qtd in Lacoue-Labarthe 163). The echoic resonance of the voices of memory and the repeated reflections of the images and feelings of the past do not affect the subject as banal recollection, but in their continual repetition these images and sonorities become intensified and their formative capacity does not diminish but rather becomes ever more secure. In terms of describing the continual writing and overwriting of the self, the protean (re)construction of the self in terms of a Janus-like memory-perception, “one may pass almost immediately from the optical analogy to the acoustic analogy—from reflection to the echo” (Lacoue-Labarthe 163). Lacoue-Labarthe writes that, “in short, resonance (or echoing) and reflection are perfectly interchangeable as theoretical or theorizing figures of repetition, of the reactivation of the trace, or of...analytic *reading*” (163).

Narcissus and Echo, the classical figures of visual repetition and acoustic resonance continue to be of great importance for modern authors and theorists not merely because of their place in the history of ideas but because they are as relevant for us as for Ovid in

our endeavor to understand the basic functions of identification, self-knowledge, and the role of repetition in memory’s writing of the self. Just as the inner voice—both our own and those of reverberant memory—is a faculty of cognitive sense that is foundational for the way interiority constitutes our perception of ourselves and the outside world, the faculty that is as wedded to the inner voice as Narcissus is to Echo—eidetic vision—is the ocular counterpart to the acoustic voice(s) of interiority and is equally formative for the subject. While echo and reflection may be “interchangeable as theoretical or theorizing figures of repetition, of the reactivation of the trace,” it would be more productive to see how the two forms of phenomenal, cognitive sense work together with memory to constitute self-identification. Though they may be figuratively interchangeable, and though they are inextricably linked and as such may be the product of a single cognitive function, the phenomenal experience of the inner voice and inner vision are distinct. In any case, these aspects of memory and cognitive sense continually participate in the dialectic of the inside and the outside, of interiority and exteriority.

In his *Creative Evolution* Bergson discusses at length what he calls “the cinematographical mechanism of thought” (313). For Bergson, the mind attempts to comprehend and process the radical becoming of the world by establishing a certain rhythm of enframement, a method of cutting the world into snapshots and running them successively in the mind in much the same way as the cinema creates the illusion of movement with the rapid succession of images. For Bergson our perception of the real (becoming), indeed all of our knowledge, proceeds from this method of cutting, editing, and arranging the world into a series of images that, when thought cinematographically, simulate unified movement and reality. He writes: “Perception, intellection, language, so proceed in general. Whether we would think becoming, or express it, or even perceive it, we hardly do anything else than set going a kind of cinematograph inside us. We may therefore sum up [by saying] that the *mechanism of our ordinary knowledge is of a cinematographical kind*” (Bergson 306). Similarly, Michel Butor refers to our inner vision as a sort of *cinéma intime*, while both Evelyne Ender and Antonio Damasio call this experience that of a “movie-in-the-brain” (Ender 80-81). The experience of eidetic vision or the phenomenon of seeing with the mind’s eye, like ‘hearing’ the inner voice, is seemingly an everyday occurrence hardly worthy of closer scrutiny. And yet, this faculty of inner sight, this *cinéma intime*, is the form that our experience of memory most often takes; and like the characteristic reverberance of the inner voice, the eidetic sense is subject to Goethe’s *wiederholte Spiegelung*. If Echo is the mythological instantiation of the inner voice, then Narcissus is that of the repeated reflections of fantasy-memory experienced cinematographically.

The fantasy echo of memory most commonly takes the form of inner vision. In keeping with Žižek’s model, fantasy-memory “operates as a (tightly condensed) narrative” in which “contradictory elements (or, for that matter, incoherent ones) are rearranged diachronically, becoming causes and effects” (Scott 289). We experience fantasy-memory cinematographically, ‘seeing’ the imagined repetition of a past event, but this remembrance is always already a retrospective construction. The images of our interior cinema, like the reverberant voices of memory, are necessarily distorted by repeated reflection. Certain

aspects of a remembered scene become intensified by repetition. Moreover, as memory and imagination are hardly distinct functions, memory visions serve as the “repetition of something imagined or an imagined repetition.” On the one hand, the phenomena of inner vision and voice are the interiorization of our experience of the outside, on the other, these cognitive functions largely determine the way we perceive and interact with the outside world. The outside is turned inward in the form of inner voice and image and is re-experienced through the reverberation of fantasy-memory, constituting the self.

We have spoken at some length about mnemonic mechanisms and the role of interior sense in identification, but one must ask: what accounts for the sustained repetition and tenacity of certain voices and images in the mind? We have addressed the formative capacity of the inner voice and vision, but how do we account for the resiliency of particular fantasies, memories, and voices? The answer is affect.

Evelyne Ender writes that “our most powerful memories are sustained by an underlying preverbal emotion that emerges at the juncture between image and sound, [and so] rememberers cultivate a poetic relation to language in trying to bring about a coincidence between a representation and affect” (Ender 167). Similarly, David Pillemer, a psychologist, writes: “memory’s vividness is related to the perceived strength of affective reactions: the stronger the emotions, the more vivid the memories” (qtd in Ender 272n). This too is bi-directional, not only do past affects determine the persistence of certain memories, but affects in the present “drive remembering subjects...insensibly as it were, towards certain images” (Ender 173). The voice is often the catalyst for this associative process. Paraphrasing Maine de Biran, Ender argues that the power of certain words to bring forth an affect is a consequence of their place in memory, and these affective words and their “correspondence with impressions represent our medium of communication between the exterior world and our inner mental universe” (Ender 163). Ender asks, “could it be, perhaps, that our deepest, least accessible memories are encrypted in the music of language? Could it be, then, that we respond as much to the voice of the past as to its images?” (165). There are certain voices, words, and images that serve, like Proust’s famous madeleine, to recall an affect in the past that has been preserved in memory. That which maintains the link between inner echo and reflection, voice and image, is the impression of an affect.

Recognizing this intimate relation, Lou Andreas-Salomé calls for a “reconceptualization of memory in terms of affect” (Ender 195). Salomé argues that “our existence unfolds as a series of impressions that mark the encounter between our inner emotional lives and the structures or ‘patterns’ imposed by the outer world” (Ender 189). Remembrance, then, “represents the coincidence between an inner experience and an outer incident... Thus, in finding the words to describe the ways in which the outer world impresses itself on our psyche, we have the necessary elements not only for self-knowledge but also for defining our place in the world” (Ender 190).

Affective impressions, therefore, become associatively embedded in the mind, linked to voices and images, both real and fanaticized, that may originate in the mind or in the world. The terrain of these impressions, as Salomé intimates, is the threshold at which the dialectic of interiority and exteriority is continually played out. By mapping this territory

we may observe (1) how self-identification is a consequence of the imagined repetitions of remembered voice and image, or the reverberations of the internalized exterior, (2) how we are, in part, spoken by memory, (3) the mnemonic interrelation of voice, image, and affect, and (4) the ways in which aspects of interiority (like inner speech, eidetic vision, and memory) serve to determine how subjects experience the outside and are affected in the present. In these ways we can see how the vicissitudes of the dialectic of inside and outside construct the self as well as our modes of perceiving the world around us.

Perhaps the most emblematic literary representation of these complex processes is Samuel Beckett’s *Krapp’s Last Tape*. In this work, Beckett presents a performance of the dialectic of interiority and exteriority where the voice of Krapp’s virtual self shares the stage with his actual self and processes of fantasy echo constitute the play’s action. The scenario is this: we see Krapp, now an old man, in the course of performing a yearly ritual. Each year on his birthday Krapp both tape records his reminiscences of the past year and listens to reels that he has recorded over the course of his life.

His reels of memory represent Krapp’s endeavor to exteriorize his inner voice, to place on the outside, to materialize into a concrete sign the reverberant sounds and images of his inner life. Listening by echo or with our third ear, as Reik would have it, can allow us to distinguish how retrospective identification is at work in this recital of fantasy echo. First, the particular character of the recordings. Each recording is the retrospective account of the last year or of its particularly memorable moments; therefore, listening to the reels in the present, Krapp is twice removed from the actual events. The fantasy echo, or the imagined repetition of past events or ideas are recounted and set down on the reels. Their auditory repetition through the years and the altered signification that accompanies Krapp’s method of selective listening is an exterior performance of Goethe’s repeated reflections, or even Echo’s alteration of meaning through fragmentary repetition. A series of concentric cuts are made with each recollection. On each birthday certain affective impressions from the past year are recalled and recorded—this is the cut (not the first as many have been made since the initial experience) made at the moment of recording. His method of fragmentary listening, his ability to edit memory on the outside, constitutes the subsequent cuts. In this way Krapp is able to further alter the fantasy echoes in terms of present desire. As an old man he has become obsessed with particular moments, particular echoes of his virtual self, and the repetition of these memories becomes an annual compulsion. For Krapp, the reels are a material instantiation of his virtual self, and by controlling the reverberant voice of memory and the imagined life that it recalls, old Krapp can formulate, retrospectively, who he was and what he has become. His archived voice and the fantasy echoes that it articulates determine Krapp’s conception of both his virtual and actual self.

Krapp’s reels are each nodes in an expansive, self-referential network of nested memories and overlapping echoes. The recurring image of the bell and listening to bells is of course a deliberate allusion to the way in which, like memory, his reverberant past voice affects his present voice. At times his virtual voice even speaks on behalf of his present voice in moments of ventriloquy. As Scott observed, fantasy echo, like “the toll of bells can become cacophonous when echoes mingle with the original sound; when the sounds are words,

the return of partial phrases alters the original sense and comments on it as well." In the first reel that Krapp listens to, we hear the "rather pompous" "strong voice" of a younger Krapp that is radically distinct from his present "cracked voice" which possesses a "distinctive intonation" (Beckett 57, 55). In this reel Krapp mocks the self overheard in an even earlier reel: "the voice!...Hard to believe I was ever that young whelp" (58). And when recording his tape in the present Krapp reflects on this derisive voice: "Just been listening to that stupid bastard I took myself for thirty years ago, hard to believe I was ever as bad as that" (62). It is not so much the displeasure that the past voice invokes that is of greatest importance here, but rather the repetitious incursion of the voice of memory into the present and the manner in which the past voice effects how Krapp self-identifies in the present. His listening experience is very Bergsonian in that he feels alienated and distanced from himself when attempting to reconcile his imagined virtual self with his equally constructed present identity. The recorded voices do not provide immediate access to an authentic or unique past self, but are merely one voice among many that continue to echo through the years, occupying the space of one register within the conglomerate voice of later years. With each session of listening and speaking, of remembering, Krapp is "embarking on a new...retrospect," recollecting differently, and recollecting something different with each compulsively repeated immersion into the fantasy echoes of imagined memory (58).

The selection of particular memories to record is especial important. This selection is clearly a consequence of the affective imprint that certain fantasy-memories have impressed upon Krapp. He compares his selectivity to sitting "before the fire with closed eyes, separating the grain from the husks," that is, cutting out "those things worth having" (57). The reel Krapp speaks, recalling how he envisions his memories, preparing to record them: "I close my eyes and try and imagine them" (58). Krapp's memories are largely imagined, fanaticized versions of experience, recounted retrospectively, subject to the echoic distortions and intensifications of repeated reflection. The tapes allow Krapp to be "drowned in dreams," to overhear and attempt to re-experience moments in his life that carry the greatest affective weight, namely the loss of a lover and the loss of his mother.

The voice that recounts these fantasy-memories does so in a very cinematic fashion, describing the tightly condensed, filmic narratives the way they appear to the mind's eye. The scene of the reel, Krapp's acoustic impression of an imagined memory, is an attempt to fix and stifle the reverberations of the inner voice and vision by externalizing them. By recording the memory he believes that he can calcify and thereby preserve the moment in its present mnemonic form and with it the particular feeling that it evokes at that time. In several ventriloquial moments, old Krapp's "lips move in the syllables of" his virtual voice so that he might "be again...All that old misery. Once wasn't enough" (59, 63). Krapp's repetition compulsion is one that compels him to "stop and listen" to the echoic voices of memory, to these fantasized, cinematic versions of past moments so that he might remember who he is. His memory speaks him, or speaks across him. Krapp speaks on his own behalf in many heart rending moments of autoventriloquy in which we witness how the voices of our imagined selves and the incessant reverberations of fantasized memory constitute the substance of our present self-identification.

Krapp's external memory archive and the performance of his annual ritual dramatize how the inner voice, eidetic vision, affect, and memory are the compound juncture at which the threshold between exteriority and interiority, between the outside world and the mind becomes indistinct. As Beckett's play stages, the feelings that emerge at the junction between voice and image, which "mark the encounter between our inner emotional lives and the...outer world," and their reverberant indwelling in memory are the bases for our retrospective identifications, or our plagiarized mode of understanding the world and ourselves.

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Notes

¹ Here, Riley is quoting Deleuze's *Logic of Sense*, 298.

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