

Between Narcissus and Echo: the Agony of the Subject

Abstract:

How to speak of the relation between psychoanalysis and deconstruction? Might the truth of the former be evinced by the very work of the latter, always already at work in the questioning of the subject in the former? Taking up the thought of Maurice Blanchot in confronting the truth of analysis (which Lacan links to myth), this paper aims to disclose this secret truth in its very default, (re)inscribing the fundamental myth of psychoanalysis not as that of Oedipus, but rather that of Narcissus and Echo. In complicating the reflections of Lacan, Leclaire, and Legendre in contestation with themselves through the mirror of Blanchot's writings, the absent and unspeakable truth of analysis is lured out by a linguistic, abyssal play of mirrors. Thus, perhaps, might the difference between deconstruction and psychoanalysis be seen as echoing or (re)doubling a difference internal to each itself.

Keywords: Blanchot, Double, Narcissus, Psychoanalysis, Truth

«Entre la mort et soi, quel regard est le sien!»
(P. Valéry)¹

The relations between deconstruction and psychoanalysis run far deeper than the engagements and polemics of Derrida (and thinkers associated with him) with Freud and Lacan (and the many that listen and speak from beneath or behind these names). The mirrorings, images, and echoes radiate from a shared (though distanced) investment and investigation of language linked to the unlinking, the unweaving of the threads binding certain traditional concepts to themselves and their origins. Primarily, in what shall follow, the primacy of consciousness and its status signified somewhere between the I and the Ego, *das Ich* and *le moi*. Analysis, from the Greek *analysis*, already bears, by its name, a sense of this unravelling, this loosening, this dissolving. And the psyche, Latinate derivative of the Greek *psūkhé*, carries in its movement the breathing expression and impression of the image, suspension or interval between life and death, living and dying, which has mythically borne the signature of the soul or the mind as the essence of the self or the I. Perhaps our breath has already caught in our throat as these initial threads of the name of psychoanalysis have begun to unravel themselves? Perhaps the work of deconstruction borne by the very work designated by psychoanalysis – the *analysis* of the *psūkhé* – has already begun to evince itself in the loosening of the I, the ego, from “itself” (the signifier from the signified; the concept from its referent)? Taking neither the work of deconstruction nor that of psychoanalysis (the one and the other *so named*) at its word, perhaps we might unwork – that is, disclose, untangle – what fails to come to term, to give birth in language, in either discourse, yet which silently marks both in their division, their splitting. By attending to the echoes of the unsaid in each discourse (as (re)doubled echo of the other), undertaking a translation, an *Übertragung*, a transference always already underway between the thoughts which bear the names psychoanalysis and deconstruction, we will attempt to give word to this wordless child, dead before ever born, which haunts the absent place of origin, the ground, of the I. To give birth to this *infans* – which is to stage the “scene” of its death once more (as we shall see) – in the word which echoes and resounds the silent effacement of this I; to (re)inscribe its image in the mythical distance between Narcissus and Echo (and thus between Narcissus and “himself”); to lend

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¹ Valéry (1957), p. 195.

yet another word (perhaps one not yet spoken, despite being a citation) to this agony of the subject who says “I” – these are provisional outlines, hazardous *précis*, of the analysis which shall follow. Between these words or speeches, these *paroles*, foreign to one another and yet intimately (uncannily) entwined, there resounds a nascent echo. Serge Leclaire remarks that «there is only psychoanalysis when in truth it produces an encounter of two nascent *paroles*»² – let us listen well, for the analysis has already begun.

Were this analytic endeavour not already strange and displaced enough, there remains one final element to which we have yet to refer. Playing the lead role on the side of deconstruction will not be Derrida, but one who might be considered, in a different mythical guise, as his already-dead father (an Oedipal analysis being deferred for the time being...) – that is, Maurice Blanchot. The latter, described by Leslie Hill in his most recent work as an «*artisan de la déconstruction avant la lettre*»³ never *properly* took up the name of “deconstruction”, though his work bore a marked influence on much of Derrida’s thought⁴. Perhaps this displaced position marks Blanchot already as a privileged player in this *mise en scène* cum *mise en abyme*. But just as central here is the apparently far from central role that Blanchot’s limited engagements with psychoanalysis played in his thought and writings. For though he only engaged directly with psychoanalysis on a few occasions (to which we shall return below), these few encounters strike to the very heart of analysis, its interests or investments in language, and evince what psychoanalysis is debarred or screened off from saying, from thinking – said otherwise, perhaps, what psychoanalysis repressed, or, at the very least, could speak of only through a complex denegation (*Verneinung*; *dénégation*).

Said otherwise, Blanchot brings into question the *truth* of psychoanalysis. As he suggests in his essay on «Analytic Speech»⁵, the truth of the analyst lies in «retrieving death»⁶ – by listening and thus speaking, in response, «on the part of the impossibility of speaking»⁷; translating (as an echo) what in the words of the analysand can only remain as a supplementary silence, attesting (in their refusal) to an «original lack» or absence, a «defaulting affected as fault»⁸ in what remains impossible, dead, in the living speech of analysis. And, as analyst Serge Leclaire notes, «living speech can [only] be sustained [or “sustain itself”; *se soutient*]» by means of a perpetual «setting in question [*mise en cause*]»⁹, returning this impasse of speaking (and thus of living) to its *cause*, its fundamental *question* – the question of its impossibility, the effacement of its truth, and the originary lack (of origin) that this question bears. A question, as we shall see, bound to writing, and, more specifically, to myth – inextricable from this truth and the absence it echoes, refuses, and screens.

In a seminar from 1953 given before the Collège Philosophique, edited and published by Jacques-Alain Miller in 1979, Lacan refers to analysis as an art (of listening and responding, of letting speak) which is troubled, if not doubled, in that analytic experience «always implicates within itself the emergence of a truth which cannot be said, since that which constitutes it [truth] is speech, and that it would in some manner say speech/speaking [*parole*] itself, which is to properly speak that which cannot be said as speech/speaking»¹⁰. Analytic experience, then, touches upon the unspeakable origin of language, its truth (which Blanchot links with death – a point whose import shall emerge shortly), which it can only speak or let speak by means of a mirroring or doubling of this silent truth. But the mirrored double is always other, altering, insofar as the language

² Leclaire (1975/98), p. 110 / p. 67. Translation altered.

³ Hill (2020), p. 9.

⁴ The most explicit perhaps, though certainly not the only case, being Derrida (1986/2011) – a book collecting some of Derrida’s essays devoted to the work of Blanchot.

⁵ Blanchot (1969/93)

⁶ Ivi, p. 354 / p. 237. Translation altered.

⁷ Ivi, p. 348 / p. 233. Translation altered.

⁸ Ivi, p. 346 / p. 232. Translation altered.

⁹ Leclaire (1975/98), p. 98 / p. 59. Translation altered.

¹⁰ Lacan (1979), p. 292. Translations from this seminar are my own.

finds itself always already repeating itself, doubling itself, in faultily expressing the inexpressible by means of betraying it, defaulting from this (absence of origin) which it wants and means to say [*vouloir dire*]. In attempts at speaking *speaking* itself, saying the *saying* as *said* [*dire le dire comme dit*], language must distance itself from itself so as to grasp itself in a word, and in so doing it loses itself. It thus demands a subterfuge, a game or a play by which to take itself from behind, so to speak, and ascertain itself in, or *as*, the very echo of “itself”. The doubling supplementation of its truth, so as to identify itself via the truth of supplementation. Language and (its) origins, as Derrida has famously explicated, are bound to the aporetic logic of supplementarity¹¹.

Lacan will continue his speech on the speech of analysis and its (absent) truth by remarking that the supplementary means of doubling speech so that it may echo itself is affected by means of myth. «Myth is that which gives a discursive formula to something that cannot be transmitted in the definition of truth», and so speech, unable to speak its speaking itself, «can only express [its truth] – and this, in a mythic fashion»¹². In order to express expression *itself*, to turn its reflective gaze back on itself reflexively, speech demands the supplementary intervention of myth, inscribed in the empty place of its (absent) truth. Referring to this seminar of Lacan, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe notes the echo-structure of myth in relation to psychoanalysis (wandering somewhere between art and science) as «fundamentally, that which supplements in default of the truth»¹³. At its origin, in returning to it, psychoanalysis discovers an original default, a speaking which bears its fault on its face – that is to say, in its very words. It discovers its truth in an absence of truth, an originary absence of origin – in a death underwriting its life, remaining, haunting, as a silent absence ever marking its trace and its impossible effacement. An unspeakable instance accompanying the emergence of language, parasitically within it, following it, like a shadowy double in abeyance, ever in the process, *en instance*, of a repetition invoking a disappearing («its subsistence in its dissolution», Blanchot will say)¹⁴. In order to speak, a death must be exposed and repeated, recited (even as myth), so as to enter into the domain of language. An unspeaking child, the *infans*, must be killed so that we may speak, and in so doing, be. Psychoanalysis, ever returning to its truth, to its originary myth, its primal scene, in the experience of language itself, exposes and is exposed to breakdown, inundated by echoes and (re)doublings, in the instance of what Blanchot will call (echoing Leclaire) an «impossible necessary death»¹⁵.

In discovering its «essence»¹⁶, its truth and its word [*parole*], already (in the) other, as a mirrored double – that is, in and through myth – psychoanalysis is always already caught up in what Lacoue-Labarthe identifies as a «mimetology»; in the staging of a mirror-play of «double splitting (or doubling) [*double dédoublement*]»¹⁷ which cannot be sublimated, internalized, or reconciled by any dialectics.¹⁸ The fate of analysis is thus inscribed not in the death of the father, as in the Oedipal myth, but rather in the death (the impasse of an absolute interdiction) of the one who seeks to identify themselves through this mythic speech – the one who remains transfixed and yet eternally unable to reconcile “themselves” with the mirror image which gives them this “I” that they functionally take themselves to be; the one whose words remain but an echo (of themselves), faltering in fragmentation. Analysis, we are suggesting, is inscribed not under the myth of Oedipus, but rather the myth of Narcissus and Echo. For not only is the (neurotic) subject caught up in this

¹¹ See Derrida, (1967/97).

¹² Lacan (1979), p. 292.

¹³ Lacoue-Labarthe (1979/98), p. 254 / p. 169. Translation altered.

¹⁴ Blanchot (1955/89), p. 342 / p. 255.

¹⁵ Blanchot (1980/95), p. 203 / p. 67. Cfr. Leclaire (1975/98), p. 22 / p. 10.

¹⁶ Lacan (1979), p. 292.

¹⁷ Lacoue-Labarthe (1979/98), p. 255 / p. 170.

¹⁸ There is thus in the instance of instauration of psychoanalysis a doubling of the inauguration of the I via the Lacanian mirror stage, though in this (de-)doubling there is a further remove of a distancing gap, (*se*) *écarter*, which holds analysis apart from itself and its truth, inappropriable by any dialectical play. Cfr. Lacan (1966/2006).

«*situation de quatuor*»¹⁹, as Lacan calls it – this quartering or double splitting/doubling; but psychoanalysis *itself*, as a discourse and a practice, finds itself already doubled and rent in and from itself even before it doubles down on this myth yet again, reverberating its echoes in the (analytic) experience of the (neurotic) subject. The primal scene of analytic experience and interpretation bearing upon the I would thus be a reiteration, a repetition, a recitation even, of the primal scene of (analytic) language *as such* (unspeakable, devoid of all language). The same mark or fault of a fundamental «insufficiency», testifying to its «failure» and its «original tearing»²⁰ – an absence or default of and in the place of origin – inscribes the language of analysis and the work of its truth (as well as that of (imaginary) death, as Lacan also notes)²¹ to the same questioning of primary narcissism as self-investment and -identification²². Narcissus, as the original figure or *Gestalt* (that is, “original” double or echo) for the myth of the analytic subject in its agony – ever severed from identification with himself, suspended between “his” image and the “I” which he may only *be* by means of echoing this image which is supposed to be “his” double, and thus never able to *properly* speak, to speak in his own name, according to a truth that would be properly his own – would thus appear to be the figure, the double, of another psychoanalytic type or image. Would Narcissus not already be (the echo of) the *infans*?

Psychoanalysis thus finds itself caught up in an abyssal mimesis, in the *mise en abyme* of this mythic “identification” of and with «itself»²³. The displacement and faulted identification of its truth or essence are fictively (re)doubled time and again in the relation of analysis and (its) language with “itself”, repetitively reproduced in primary narcissism and its relation to its originary object (its “I”), and on down through the quaternary doubling of the neurotic and their images (of themselves, the father, etc.). What is primary narcissism supposed to signify? What is “primary” about it? And what “I” is narcissistically implicated in this investment, supposedly prior to any subject and devoid of any object?²⁴ This (primary) question of analysis (reflected back upon itself) reveals to us once more the case that psychoanalysis is always already “under deconstruction”, deconstructing “itself”, as *analysis*. The work of analysis comes to unwork itself, to disturb and disrupt the functioning of itself as work, insofar as its very undertaking exposes its originary fault, that is, its default of origin (in the sense of a failure (to appear or answer, in account of and for itself), of an absence, and a loss without lost object). At the origin of analytic experience (exposed precisely through analysis), there is discovered or disclosed a necessary absence, a death already (though impossibly) eventuated (without having occurred as event). At the instance of installation, the constitution of the I, there appears to be a break, a gap, which can only be addressed by way of a fictive mirror, so that the abyssal void or hole which would mark the position of the unseen seer, the blind-spot of vision (in the double genitive), might come to light in its originary default, may be spoken to in its unspeaking death. The “primal scene” of psychoanalysis doubles itself in belying the very absence of truth which allows for its speech, inscribed in its primary, narcissistic myth (the myth of Narcissus). Let us turn to Serge Leclaire, and his engagement of the primal scene with the figure of the *infans*, so as to elaborate on this primary analytic decomposition which doubly inscribes the fate of psychoanalysis – at once under the mark of a scene to be repeated, staged, and addressed, as well as the impossible impasse of this scene, its insuperability, and the fault that it marks upon the work of analysis. Between death and the self (the “I” or ego, and thus analysis “itself”, bound to the mythical (re)doubling of the scene of Narcissus), the question of whose gaze, which regard bears out and may thus bear witness (in speech) in answer to this very question, between death and

¹⁹ Lacan (1979), p. 300.

²⁰ Ivi, p. 305.

²¹ Ivi, p. 306.

²² Narcissism being «decisive in the constitution of the subject» (ivi, p. 305) – in this case, the subject of psychoanalysis, in both the sense of the patient *and* the science/art of psychoanalysis as such.

²³ For more on this complex displacement of origins and identity, see Lacoue-Labarthe (1975/98).

²⁴ Cfr. Laplanche and Pontalis (1988), p. 338, where the authors question «*what* is supposed to be cathected» in such a “primary” narcissism.

identity, becomes aporetically unanswerable, always already fragmenting itself in (re)echoing the question. «Who? Who? Who?...».

In his book *On tue un enfant*, published in 1975, French psychoanalyst Serge Leclaire brings together these questions of death, truth, language, and primary narcissism by proposing the (figureless) figure of the *infans*²⁵, the child without speech (*in-fans*), prior to the integration and assumption of language, and thus anterior to the assumption of the identity of the I or ego. Certainly, Leclaire does not introduce this figure into the language and thought of psychoanalysis (Lacan speaks of the *infans* as an «exemplary» figure of a primordial, pre-objectified I)²⁶ – rather, it is the transfiguration of its staging, of its role or import for analysis and thus for the life of the I, which bears remarking upon. According to Leclaire, prior even to the mirror stage in the formation of the I, the very possibility of the child’s vision, the opening of the mirror as doubling in what Pierre Legendre terms the «transcendental theatre»²⁷, that is to say, the disclosure of the empty space of the Imaginary and the Symbolic yet to be inscribed, there is the speechless child, without image or I (and thus, in a sense, *not yet* “there”, never yet present “on the scene”). And this opening – of the possibility of identity via language and image – necessitates a default at the instant of origin or opening. The possibility of language, and thus of the I and of psychoanalysis itself, demands the death of the *infans*. The staging of this death scene, of this “scene” which is no scene, but only an *après-coup* artifice for attempting to speak to the fundamental default founding all language and appearance (via the Imaginary), is essentially entwined with the essence and fundamentals of psychoanalysis in its truth and its practice. Leclaire states:

Psychoanalytic practice founds itself [*se fonde*] upon bringing to the fore [or, literally, setting in evidence, *mise en evidence*] the constant work of a force of death – the death of the marvelous [*merveilleux*] child who, from generation to generation, bears witness to parents’ dreams and desires. There can be no life without killing this strange, original image in which everyone’s birth is inscribed²⁸.

Leclaire thus sets centre stage in the drama of psychoanalysis a death, a defaulting, and a doubling. The I (the ego, *le moi*, *das Ich*) is born the double of “itself”, having already died a death without event, without proper place or possessor – an anonymous and neutral death, impossible and yet necessary. Lost to “itself” in figuring itself in the mirror of being figured by others, their desires and their gazes, the I remains ever haunted by its “double”, by the image without image of an original identity which never was and never will be, but which demands response, that we bear witness to what we could never have witnessed, for what ushered us into language by means of being silenced, and which remains the secret of our lives. Life is thus secretly, anacritically, propped up as the double²⁹ of a *proton pseudos*³⁰, standing in the place of an impossible and unfigurable (that is, non-(re)presentable) death inscribed in a primal scene suspended (in both its primacy and its status as scene) by a question and/of parentheses. “(A primal scene?)” – this will shortly return us to Blanchot, by means of (or as) a necessary detour.

²⁵ «An unfigurable figure», according to Fynsk (2000), p. 72.

²⁶ Lacan (1966/2006), p. 94 / p. 76.

²⁷ Legendre (1997), p. 221.

²⁸ Leclaire (1975/98), p. 11 / p. 2. Italics in original. Translation altered. For the linking of this death to language, cfr. Blanchot (1980/95), p. 110 / p. 67.

²⁹ Double without original, displacing the origin, and thus rendering every person, as “I”, «astray in themselves and as their own ghost [*revenant*]» returning to their lives for the first time to haunt it as a life which is never properly their own, but belongs to no-one, to (a) *personne*. The cited phrase is from Blanchot (1955/89), p. 347 / p. 258. We shall return to the displacement of the image and the imaginary that this text signals below.

³⁰ See Laplanche (1976), p. 34. On page 48, Laplanche calls this originary deception «the “internal alien entity”», which he also links in its foreign status to «the parental universe» with its language and (fundamental) myths. Laplanche also makes much of the anacritic “propping up” throughout this text.

The *infans*, as «primary narcissistic representative»³¹, as «the most “primal” [or “originary”, *originnaire*]»³² phantasm, the *proton pseudos* by which the origin of this primary narcissism is (re)presented in its very default, its absence from the “scene” of this primal scene and its language, remains the figure closest to us (as our “double”) yet the farthest from “us” in the identity of our “I” – figure of «the strangest, most intimate and disquieting of all»³³. Yet this figural double which haunts us in our heart of hearts («close to a heart that beats no more») is itself, abyssally, a double of a double – for the *infans*, always already dead and defaulted so long as “I” *am*, «cannot appear»³⁵ except by means of a subterfuge, a figure whose presence and presentation marks the absence of that which is already forgotten in death. For, as Christopher Fynsk notes, «the figure [or double, the image of a death without image] of death marks the *site* of the *infans*»³⁶. A phantasmal figuration of an impossible death, «which has never been and never will be – and which, however, by its absolute strangeness, constitutes the most secret, even the most sacred ... of this that he is»³⁷. Marking the void or gap, the *écart*, at the decentered center of the I and its truth, the death of the *infans* opening onto an abyssal explosion of displacement in (re)doubling figures via an interminable play of mirrors, we find ourselves, in pursuing the “truth” of psychonanlysis and its identity, returned to the myth of Narcissus.

As Pierre Legendre, French scholar of law and psychoanalysis, notes, «The entire dramatization of this scene [of Narcissus and “his” image] depends upon the concept of the *écart*, which duplicates Narcissus»³⁸, and holds him apart from an internalizing investment of the image as himself, as his *own*. The death of the *infans*, in its abyssal mimesis, will thus be shown to be the pre-original staging (the *répétition*, in the multiple senses of this French word) of the myth of Narcissus, that «model or mould of all *scenes of origin*»³⁹, of all the *Urszenen* which attest to the insuperable loss at (and of) the very grounds of the one who is to attest to it, and thus ever remains an echo of “themselves”, echoing a silent secret underwriting all of their words.

In (re)turning to Narcissus in the wake of the death of the *infans*, as this death continues to echo now in the inscription of this myth, let us consider how Narcissus and his image (reflected, echoed) (re)doubles the figure without figure of the *infans* in the suspended yet infinitely repeated death to which each of our words, all language, silently attests.

The first point for reflection turns around the doubling of Narcissus in his image, and thus the displacement and defaulting of any possible «primary narcissistic figure» in the doubled relation of the one to the other – the madness of the original. Legendre remarks, following Ovid, that «the subject is gripped tightly and unrelentingly by the image»⁴⁰, which, to recall Ovid’s formula «he did not know what he was seeing», constitutes the enigmatic stake in the story of Narcissus»⁴¹. The image, the double, presents itself as an enigma in that it displaces the common conception of reflection and mimesis, of the original and its resemblant, interrupting the dialectic of recognition and (re)integration via (auto-)identification. Blanchot also stresses the non-recognition of Narcissus gazing at “his” image, in the last of three fragments bearing the title “(a primal scene?)”, in his late work *L’Écriture du désastre* (*The Writing of the Disaster*)⁴². Here he notes that «if [Narcissus] does

³¹ Leclaire (1975/98), p. 14 / p. 5. Italics in original.

³² Ivi, p. 15 / p. 5.

³³ Ivi, p. 22 / p. 10.

³⁴ Blanchot (1980/95), p. 117 / p. 72.

³⁵ Fynsk (2000), p. 70.

³⁶ Ivi, p. 75. Italics in original.

³⁷ Leclaire (1975/98), p. 22 / p. 10. Translation altered.

³⁸ Legendre (1997), p. 216.

³⁹ Ivi, p. 220.

⁴⁰ A point which Blanchot, too, makes much of in his discussion of the “fascination” of the image.

⁴¹ Legendre (1997), p. 212.

⁴² In a conversation between Pascal Possoz and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, the former remarks that Blanchot stresses that «Narcissus doesn’t know himself, and cannot construct selfhood». This interview is published (in translation) in Lacoue-Labarthe (2015), and the citation is located on page 101. This interview is not published in the original French edition of this book.

not recognize himself, it is because what he sees is an image, and because the similitude of an image returns [or “sends back”, *renvoie*] to no-one: the image characteristically resembles nothing⁴³. This reflection on the image, originally published in *Le Nouveau Commerce* in 1978, before being integrated fragmentarily into *L'Écriture du désastre* in 1980, is itself a reflection or echoing of what Blanchot had written concerning the image in his *Les Deux versions de l'imaginaire*, (*The Two Versions of the Imaginary*), first published in *Cahiers de la Pléiade* in 1951 and then added as an appendix to his 1955 work *L'Espace littéraire* (*The Space of Literature*). The distance of over two decades bears this echo of the image as «doubled by itself», and thus of its being «resemblance *par excellence*», in that it resembles «nothing»⁴⁴. The myth, as inscription and bearer of this resemblance to what defaults from every figuration, thus marks the myth of Narcissus as the myth of the impossibility of myth, or, as Blanchot phrases it, «a fragile myth, myth of fragility»⁴⁵. And what is fragile is the thin line, no more than a breath, trembling and wavering just beneath the word ever on the verge of collapsing into its abyssal displacement of imaginary resemblance; the faltering of a vertiginous life, bereft of identity, borne up by the words which let it down in the failure to bring to term, to bring an end to this interminable dying in which death is ever absent⁴⁶.

Caught in the suspension of this «between-two [*entre-deux*]» which Narcissus mythically figures⁴⁷ – between breaths, between life and death, between himself (as “I”) and “his” image, and thus between “Narcissus” and Echo – the myth of this myth in default bears us back to the heart of the problem of psychoanalysis and its truth, the fragile thread we have been following through this labyrinth. We are returned, sent back, in the distance and proximity of this silence borne in our words, to the deathly doubling which displaces “us” from as though before “our” beginning. «[A]n uncrossable distance, an irreducible gap [*écart*], or a void which cannot be filled»⁴⁸, reflected or doubled in the image and its myth (Narcissus, the myth of the image).

Blanchot continues to speak of Narcissus by noting that «what is mythical in this myth is that death is almost present there without naming itself»⁴⁹, that the mythical is precisely the expression of the inexpressible in its necessary failure, bringing us near, through the image, to the «intimacy» of this void, this impossible death figured in the figureless *infans*, which «speaks to us» as the affirmation of, or in, disappearance⁵⁰. Said otherwise, it speaks to us via a detour or diversion [*détournement*] of language so as to let echo a silence which words can only let speak in their fading disappearance. Narcissus, in another echoed passage of Blanchot's past writing in *L'Écriture du désastre*, is the figure of the break within the (Lacanian) Imaginary, exposing this other version of the imaginary, by which «Man [*L'homme*] is made [*fait*] in his [“own”] image», but with the important caveat that «this formula must first be heard/understood [*entendue*] thus: *man* [*l'homme*] is *unmade* [or, perhaps, ‘defeated’, *défait*] according to his image»⁵¹. Narcissism is supposed to entail the investment of one's own I, oneself, with our libido, by making our image the object of our desire, and appropriating and integrating it into ourselves as the (auto)constitutive relation of (self-)identification. But when the image does not resemble the I (for it resembles *nothing*), and we find ourselves displaced in resembling *it* (the image, as other, coming before the I), the I is cast into an abyss of non-identification, suspended between a life

⁴³ Blanchot (1980/95), p. 192 / p. 125. Translation altered.

⁴⁴ Blanchot (1955/89), pp. 346-347 / p. 258. Translation altered.

⁴⁵ Blanchot (1980/95), p. 194 / p. 126.

⁴⁶ Cfr. *ivi*, p. 113 / p. 69, where Blanchot, in remarking upon Leclaire and D.W. Winnicott, speaks of this impossible death as «the infinite patience of that which never accomplishes itself once and for all», for «there is no death now or in the future (of a present to-come [*à venir*])» (p. 114 / p. 69). Translations altered.

⁴⁷ *Ivi*, p. 194 / p. 126. For the suggestion that Narcissus is «the figure of the between-two», see Lacoue-Labarthe (2015), p. 101.

⁴⁸ Legendre (1997), p. 228.

⁴⁹ Blanchot (1980/95), p. 193 / p. 126. Translation altered.

⁵⁰ Blanchot (1955/89), p. 341 / p. 254.

⁵¹ *Ivi*, p. 350 / p. 260. Italics in original. Translation altered. For the re-inscription of these lines in unacknowledged auto-(re)citation, see Blanchot (1980/95), p. 194 / p. 126.

(which cannot be “its own”) and a death which belongs to an-other (the *infans*)⁵². Unable to (re)appropriate the image of the other into itself (even by figuring itself as a split-subject), this person, this no-one [*personne*] (one cannot quite call them “I”), remains ever less than themselves (though always divided and (re)doubled), always already disappearing into the fault which effaces them, the default which marks the disfigured place of the absent (narcissistic) I⁵³. Narcissus, the “primary” mythical figure of the subject, is thus suspended in agony (the *agon*, that is, the struggle or conflict, the contestation of this between-two), tracing out for us (*après-coup*) the image of an event which is necessarily committed to forgetting, though not repressed (unless, if such is thinkable, *originally* repressed) – rather, immemorial, impossible absence of any memory – what we have termed, following Leclaire, the death of the *infans*, in this myth which «leaves the trace of that which has not occurred»⁵⁴.

Suspended, in agony, gazing and gazed at, lost somewhere between the echoed image and the echo of the image devoided of its status as original I or primary narcissistic I, we return from Narcissus to Echo, to the echo which Narcissus is disclosed as “being” (suspended between inverted commas). As unable to recognize “himself” in either the gaze or the figure of the image, he must live a death which is not “his own,” and which always escapes him – leaving him in the agony of an infinite and impossible dying without death. Turned away from himself⁵⁵, yet also turned away from any repose in a “possible” death, “Narcissus” is bound to an infinite effacement, a tormenting continuance or pursuit (*poursuivre*) at once demanded and denied, and thus suspended in this collapse of place. He “lives” the absence of life, the haunting return, which is the double, the echo, of that of the *infans* in its (figural) death. Blanchot himself refers to the connection of these two figures, when he remarks that «Narcissus», like the *infans* in Leclaire, «never began to live»⁵⁶. Recalling that Narcissus is the «child-god», Blanchot expresses that he is thus «very near to the marvellous child, always already dead and yet destined to a fragile dying, of which Serge Leclaire has spoken to us»⁵⁷. The two figures are intimately close (as well as being intimately bound to “us” as “our” image(s)), echoing and doubling one another, the one to the other, in different registers. For between this death of the *infans* and himself, Narcissus, which gaze (and the regard it bears in relation to the other and thus, reflexively, back upon his regard to himself) is his? “Who?” Who would be this “he”, this “it”? Narcissus, the *infans*, or the subject, the I? Or, perhaps, as *neutre*, neither one nor the other(s), it speaks to, speaks of, and speaks as no-one, the anonymous (that is, nameless) person, *personne* – and thus, by another paradoxical turn, everyone, all of us, yet never yet as “us,” as “ourselves”, as “I”. But language, in its fragility, draws thin, exhausting itself. Perhaps it is thus that we know, without knowing, that we draw near.

Between Narcissus and the *infans*, there is thus figured the difference which is that of a doubled expression of an interruption of identity, of a «breakdown» of the very possibility of self-identification (to borrow a term from D.W. Winnicott, which he employs to «describe the unthinkable state of affairs that underlies»⁵⁸ and underwrites the constitution of the ego). Between these two figures here staged in a drama which eludes (and yet demands) being figured as a “scene”⁵⁹ (in the effacement of this very scene as primal), perhaps there is evinced (however insufficiently) the secret of this question (of psychoanalysis and its

⁵² One might consider this maddening collapse of identity in relation to Dostoevsky’s novella, *The Double*.

⁵³ Cfr. Blanchot (1980/95), p. 125 / p. 78: «The crack: fission of which would be constitutive of me [*moi*; *le moi* is the French translation of Freud’s *Ich* (Ego, most English translations)] or would reconstitute itself in me [*moi*], but not a cracked me/ego [*moi fêlé*]».

⁵⁴ Ivi, p. 205 / p. 134, a fragment on Narcissus a few pages on from that which we had been discussing. Cfr. note 46, above, as well.

⁵⁵ Ivi, p. 193 / p. 126, where Blanchot claims that Narcissus «must always remain» as such.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*. Translation altered.

⁵⁸ Winnicott (1989), p. 88. Cfr. Legendre (1997), p. 243, where the myth of Narcissus is taken as revelatory of this very breakdown.

⁵⁹ On the insufficiency of the term “scene” for staging this non-appearance, see Blanchot’s second fragment under the title of “(a primal scene?)”, in Blanchot (1980/95), p. 176 / p. 114.

“truth”) which we have been pursuing. Evinced, perhaps, by means of the turn of Narcissus, his turning or being turned away from “himself”, in his suspended gaze turned toward the double, the image, echoing the *infans*. Gazing in fascination into the abyss of the image, the abyss of the image gazes (back) into him (and “us” as well, insofar as “he” figures each of “us”) – the appropriation of the gaze is displaced, *détourné*, in its return, suspended in the echoing of the between which language opens in attempts at tempting this secret into speech.

As Derrida remarks, in relation to Narcissus and this very defaulting we have been tracing (on the margins, perhaps, of all we have been speaking to):

Gaze of the figure, figure of the gaze, the source is always divided, carried away outside of itself: before the mirror it does not return to itself, its consciousness is still a kind of unconscious. As soon as it makes the turn of Narcissus, it knows itself no more. It belongs to itself no more. Narcissus only defends himself from death in living it⁶⁰.

This living-death, not quite living yet not quite dead, existing between the two, marks a survival, *survivance*⁶¹, living on and off of this death which parasitically effaces and displaces it in relation to “itself” as source or origin. Having turned away in turning toward “itself,” the I is always already lost in finding itself somewhere in the echoplex of the between-two. For this living-death, dying-as-living, is but another echo of the *mort-né* of the *infans*.

And Blanchot, by means of an anterior-echoing of what would only later come to (re)inscribe itself in words in the first fragment bearing the title of “(a primal scene?)” in *L’Ecriture du désastre*⁶², will refer to this «primal agony»⁶³ as a «primordial conflict», which we have only lived

as though having always already lived it, lived it as other and as though lived by another, consequently never living it, but reliving it and unable to live it. It is precisely this time lag, this ineradicable distance, this redoubling and indefinite uncoupling [*dédoublement*] which, every time, constitutes the substance of the episode, its unfortunate fatality, as its formative power, which renders it ungraspable as fact and fascinating as memory⁶⁴.

Fascinated by this memory which is not one (the immemorial of an infinitely forgotten), of a life never one’s own, always at a distance, only echoed in the fictioning of “our” life⁶⁵, we are forced to bear witness to this (non-)event of this scene without appearance, without presence – the “(primal scene?)” Such a “scene”, staged between Narcissus and Echo, Narcissus and the *infans*, involves the paradox of its necessary inscription despite its absolute lack of appearance (and thus the ineluctable subterfuge of the *après-coup*). For, as Blanchot himself notes, it matters not if it ever really occurred, took place, as an event (for, unavoidably, it could not have, as we have attested to above). It matters not, because it remains «ungraspable because it is always missed [or lacking, having failed, *manqué*]» in ever being an instant which was not one, never occurring as present, and thus always remaining other than “itself” as lived or livable, «a lack in relation to itself»⁶⁶. The secret of this “truth”, underwriting psychoanalysis, approaches in its reserve.

By re-inscribing the myth of Narcissus and the death of the *infans* in the echo of a “scene” which (as just noted) is not one – a fictive memory composed *après-coup* concerning one who is no-one – Blanchot presents the first fragment under the title of “(a primal

⁶⁰ Derrida (1972/82), p. 340 / p. 285. Translation altered.

⁶¹ See, once more, Derrida (1986/2011).

⁶² Blanchot (1980/95), p. 117 / p. 72.

⁶³ See Winnicott (1989), p. 89.

⁶⁴ Blanchot (1969/93), p. 347 / p. 232. Translation altered.

⁶⁵ Cfr. Blanchot (1951/85), p. 156 / p. 69: «Anyone who wants to live has need of placing themselves in the illusion of a story». Translation altered.

⁶⁶ Blanchot (1969/93), p. 347 / p. 233.

scene?)", as a narrative, a *récit*, which suspends and withdraws all that it comes to say, functioning around the turn of a caesural rupture⁶⁷. In the "scene", a child, unspeaking, is exposed to the radical finitude of his existence divested of proper grounds in an infinite withdrawal, which leaves him speechless still, to «live henceforth in the secret»⁶⁸, of this haunting experience without experience. He must survive within this secret distancing and displacement from a proper life, a life in which a death *as one's own* remains a possibility. Living thus, living on and within «the always suspended question»⁶⁹, as Blanchot notes in the second fragment titled "(a primal scene?)", which reflects upon and further questions the first fragment. In explicating this survival, this sustaining of effacement, Blanchot notes (however cryptically) that the child, this *personne*, remains, «[c]onsequently, waiting and watching, since suddenly wakened and, knowing it henceforth, never wakeful/watchful enough»⁷⁰. Wakeful, watchful, over what – responsible for what? For the secret, we must answer, which he bears and which bears itself through "him", echoing silently in his words, but which he cannot present, renders itself as a gift to the analyst in the experience of a *parole*.

The truth of this analysis, of psychoanalysis as such, has thus found itself disclosed in a withdrawal of any answer proffered by speech. A secret, in other words, in which it finds and loses itself "at once", in an instant of the suspension of time – a silent caesura. We return to a phrase of Leclaire, who notes that «to be a psychoanalyst is to remain in the breach to hold it open»⁷¹ – the breach or rupture of the I which reflects or doubles that between I and another, and thus allows for a translation or transference in «the encounter of two nascent *paroles*»⁷². For such an encounter always already falls back upon an anterior exposure, within "oneself", of the faltering "I" before the image, redoubling itself mimetically in the abyssal figuration of the myth of Narcissus and the death of the *infans*. This secret, borne in silence, suspended in the interminable agony which displaces or substitutes (supplements, perhaps) the life which will never be properly "our own", bears with it the "truth" of language and analysis as response ever in (answer to) default.

In so figuring this response to our question (of the truth of analysis and its essential relation to deconstruction), not as an answer, but rather as a deferred echoing of this originary question (of origins), any fault found with this response bears in no way (and yet absolutely) upon "ourselves". It is, as it is hopefully evident based on what has so far been traversed, unavoidable. For, perhaps, "we" have been pursuing "ourselves" this entire time, or, better, "our own" echoes – remaining ever a step apart from "ourselves". This too remains (necessarily) without definitive answer, committed to the secret which bears it away from itself in the perpetual unravelling of its very question.

"We" ("I", "you", psychoanalysis, and even language "itself") find ourselves insufficient before the demand to respond to the question of this truth and its secret. Language itself is found lacking. "We" are returned, then, to our originary fault, this insufficiency in relation to this impossible death which bears everything in suspense, vertiginously, and "I" first of all⁷³. Every time, inevitably, that we take the turn in returning, turning back, reflexively (through thought, memory, language, or any other "mirror"), upon "ourselves", the insufficiency of "our" power, possibility, and "our" very *being*, return to "us" like the echo of a unforgiving ghost (without a face, except for that of "ourselves", never "our own")⁷⁴.

But this insufficiency returns us once more to Lacan, though, as remarked before, without answer – rather, only the reflection, the echoed reverberation, of our original question (the agony of Narcissus having come to displace and erase Oedipus). And this

⁶⁷ Blanchot (1980/95), p. 117 / p. 72.

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁹ *Ivi*, p. 179 / p. 116.

⁷⁰ *Ibidem*. Italics in original. Translation altered.

⁷¹ Leclaire (1975/98), p. 99 / p. 60. Translation altered.

⁷² See note 2, above.

⁷³ See note 20, above. In addition, cfr. Lacan (1966/2006), p. 97 / p. 78.

⁷⁴ Cfr. Blanchot (1969/93), p. 346 / p. 231.

default of an answer – which Lacan, with his ego, could not bring himself to hear in its open secret – which returns us to the question once more (infinitely, interminably): is this not, in this pursuit (which we have been analyzing and so echoing, repeating) of the infinite question, the absence of this absconded “truth”, precisely the “truth” of analysis and language? The return, without end, which marks the infinite translation and transference of this interminable (*auto-*)*analysis*, the work and the unworking, ever oscillating between the two in their double inscription? The question of analysis *as well as* that of deconstruction (proper to neither the one nor the other, answering to neither name – it remains neutral in its questioning)?

Giving birth to a nascent word, but *mort-né*, born dead, absent in life and present in its absence, marking the *écart* of a neutral survival in effacement – is this not what “we” are called to respond to? “We”, the ones already bound in the agony of this question which is never properly ours, always coming from an-other, carrying the burden of a secret? “Who?” – “We”, “us”, the echoes left to wander errantly between the interdiction of a life and an impossible death, of a namelessness marking itself between language and silence. Not Narcissus, nor “I” – already borne away by what remains less than a word, not even a shibboleth, but which passes under or between the movements of a breath awaiting its suspension. Not a truth (not even a truth), but only, perhaps, a secret. Akin to that which seized Narcissus in his (re)doubled suspension – that which was «madness, and death»?⁷⁵ Perhaps – it is not for “us” to say.

To conclude, though certainly not to end (for the *analysis*, the deconstruction, the questioning, remain interminable, abysally redoubling), one further question agonizes “us” (an iteration of the original, perhaps): have we failed to attest to this secret, or have “we” not borne witness to its necessary *default* in all that has passed here, in writing, in reading, echoed between one and another, in words and in silence (watching over this secret in the infinite discretion of a testimony never watchful enough)?

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⁷⁵ Blanchot (1980/95), p. 204 / p. 134.

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