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NARCISSUS IN THE TEXT

READINGS of Ovid's Narcissus story are not to be found within critical discourse so much as in the intertextual practice of other poets. It is by no means an innocent procedure when the literary historian points to the *source* of a particular work or says that one text *refers* to another. The moment we are drawn into the logic of concepts like source and referent, we are tempted to assume that the "original" text has an undisturbed and stable significance that later authors repeat. For example, the most comprehensive survey of Narcissus texts treats the Ovidian version as a collection of "themes" variously realized or expanded in other authors.* Ovid's narrative does not, however, supply a set of stable meanings that can serve to anchor another text's thematic organization; it does not even provide a plot that another text could innocently recapitulate, and it situates its central characters, Narcissus and Echo, in a way that allows contradictory interpretations of their relation to one another. Only by unraveling the fabric of Ovid's Narcissus will it be possible to open a way into that larger network of writings that read and rewrite Ovid's narrative.

I. *Mythos, Dianoia, Ethos*

A certain desire for mastery no doubt propels any reading of

*Louise Vinge, *The Narcissus Theme in Western European Literature Up to the 19th Century*, trans. Robert Dewsnap (Lund: Gleerups, 1967).

a literary text. Seeking theoretical foundation in the concept of literary form, the desire for mastery would be fulfilled at the moment when the literary discourse revealed itself to be a stable and coherent set of interrelated elements. Whether reached at a particular point in the reading process or held off by the temporal complications of a hermeneutical circle, the *telos* of the critical act has always been conceived as the apprehension of just such a unified totality.

Putting the concept of formal unity into question is certainly a major theoretical task today. However, that cannot be accomplished by means of a simple leap outside the borders of the critical tradition. The problem is not merely one of replacing old methods with new. The desire for mastery cannot be renounced so painlessly, precisely because it is incited by literature itself. A more difficult problem must be posed: To what extent has literature, throughout its history, authorized this desire of literary theory? In order to effect a radical break with our own critical tradition, it would be necessary to aggravate a tension that already exists within literary practice.

These problems and questions define the lines of tension within which our reading of Ovid's story of Echo and Narcissus (*Metamorphoses* III, 339-510) will be situated. In order to analyze that level of organization which leads us toward reading the Ovidian text as a formal unity, I am going to borrow a set of formulations from Northrop Frye. Frye has attempted to give a rigorous definition of the constituent elements of literary form and their interrelation. His definition is derived from Aristotle and so reminds us of the essential continuity that runs through the history of criticism in spite of its many avatars. The reference to Aristotle serves another purpose as well; Frye believes that in following Aristotle, rather than Kant or Hegel, it is possible to keep poetics at a safe distance from metaphysics. What allows Frye to construct an "anatomy of criticism" that systematically relates disparate critical procedures is a single conception of literary form that all critical methods (could) share. This conception grounds a multileveled theory of literature, arranged as literal, descriptive, formal, archetypal, anagogic. At any level of the system, whether the individual work (formal) or the whole of literature (anagogic), the constituent elements of literature's for-

mal unity are *mythos*, *dianoia*, *ethos*. Plot, meaning, character and setting.

At first, then, I will examine Ovid's text as a narrative system composed of these three elements. *Mythos*, or what Aristotle called *mimesis praxeos*, "is a secondary imitation of an action, which means not that it is at two removes from reality, but that it describes typical actions."* And *dianoia* "is a secondary imitation of thought, a *mimesis logou*, concerned with typical thought." A certain synthesis of space and time is fundamental to Frye's poetics in that the formal unity of the literary work is essentially the synthesis of its temporal movement, *mythos*, and its "spatial" pattern, *dianoia*: "The word narrative or *mythos* conveys the sense of movement caught by the ear, and the word meaning or *dianoia* conveys, or at least preserves, the sense of simultaneity caught by the eye. We *listen* to the poem as it moves from beginning to end, but as soon as the whole of it is in our minds at once we 'see' what it means" (p. 77). While Frye's definition of meaning as spatial pattern is undoubtedly open to question, there is reason to suspend a critique of this particular issue. Even a theory that sees interpretation submitted to a complex temporal movement presupposes, insofar as it posits an ideal *end-point* which orients its movement, that all the significations of a text could, ideally, be gathered into a unified meaning. Frye comes close to acknowledging such a position when he goes on to qualify terms like "the whole" and "at once": "More exactly, this response is not simply to *the* whole *of* [the poem], but to *a* whole *in* it: we have a vision of meaning or *dianoia* whenever any simultaneous apprehension is possible" (pp. 77-78). In pursuing an analysis of the narrative system of Ovid's text, I want to conserve the essential point of Frye's description of *mythos* and *dianoia*—namely, that their interaction is complete and synthetic, so that any "moment" in a text will at once develop the *mythos* and belong to the *dianoia*. Frye puts it thus: "The form of a poem, that to which every detail relates, is the same whether it is examined as stationary or as moving through the work from beginning to end. . . . The *mythos* is the

*Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), pp. 82-83. All subsequent quotations from Frye are from this edition.

dianoia in movement; the *dianoia* is the *mythos* in stasis" (p. 83).

In its sequential development Ovid's narrative oscillates between Narcissus and Echo, placing their encounter within the web of circumstances and consequences that make up the discourse we read. That oscillation can be charted and its center located as follows: Narcissus's birth and his character when he is sixteen; the origin of Echo's limited speech; Echo's pursuit of Narcissus and his rebuke; the wasting away of Echo's body; Narcissus's infatuation with his own image, and finally his death.

As Frye's habit of pairing *mythos* and *dianoia* indicates, it will be impossible to recount the tale without already entering into the interpretation of it. We are led, therefore, to synopsis and commentary: A beautiful nymph named Liriope gave birth to Narcissus after she had been raped by the river-god Cephisus while wading in his waters. Tiresias, the blind seer who had lived both as a man and a woman, was asked by Liriope if her son would live to old age and answered, "If he never recognizes himself." At age sixteen Narcissus is an attractive youth desired by both other youths and nymphs, but he possesses such "hard pride" that he never returns their love. Echo is a nymph whose speech has been restricted to repeating others' words, a punishment imposed by Juno. When Echo first sees Narcissus, he has become separated from his hunting companions. Following him through the woods and answering his cries with full or partial echoes, she emerges and tries to embrace him. Her intention is openly sexual: she cries "coeamus" (let us meet, let us come together, let us copulate), tries to throw her arms around Narcissus's neck, and as he flees replies to his rebuke with the words "sit tibi copia nostri!" (let my abundance be yours).* Abandoned and ashamed she lurks in the woods, neither her love nor her grief diminishing: "sed tamen haeret amor crescitque dolore" (but still, though spurned, her love adheres and grows on grief). Finally she wastes away until only her voice "lives in her"—which is to say that her (sexual) body dies—and her remains turn to stone. Then Narcissus, again alone in the woods, comes upon a clear pool where he falls in love with his reflected image. Seeing the whole of the body that the others have seen

*All references to Ovid's *Metamorphoses* are taken from the Loeb Library edition. The translations are my own.

and desired, he too desires: "cunctaque miratur, quibus est mirabilis ipse" (he admires all together that for which he is himself admired). In this encounter the failure to come together sexually is doubled. Just as Echo's shame and grief came when Narcissus fled from her embrace, his own anguish is in not being able to touch or embrace the image: "in medias quotiens visum captantia collum/ bracchia mersit aquas nec se deprendit in illis!" (how many times he dips his arms into the water, reaching for the neck he sees, but does not seize himself in them). When Narcissus recognizes that it is his own image he loves, his desire and anguish intensify to the point of death. In place of his body his mourners find a yellow and white flower.

It is clear that describing the narrative organization (*mythos*) and its thematic unity (*dianoia*) will entail specifying the relation between Echo and Narcissus. Taken separately, their stories are related to one another through a displaced parallelism—a parallelism in that each character is pushed toward death when desire is not reciprocated by another, a displaced parallelism in that for Echo the other is another like herself, while for Narcissus the other is his mirror image. In both instances sexual union fails to occur, first because Narcissus withholds it and then because it is impossible. Their stories intersect in a way that gives meaning to this difference. Narcissus's imaginary capture is presented as the "punishment" for his refusal to reciprocate the desire of others, and his encounter with Echo is obviously the narrative's most developed example of such a refusal. In short, the refusal to reciprocate desire is answered by the impossibility of having desire reciprocated.

Two other aspects of this displaced parallelism are more difficult to resolve and so install within our analysis its first *problem.* Associated with each character is a form of repetition or duplication: the verbal repetition in Echo's voice and the visual repetition in Narcissus's reflection. The effect of that parallelism and its displacement (verbal/visual) on the narrative cannot be calculated in advance or circumscribed within the borders of synopsis. Secondly, while both Echo and Narcissus suffer a death, death is represented differently in each. Here the problem will be to integrate, within the established coherence of *mythos* and *dianoia*, the difference between the death of Echo's body, which she

survives as a consciousness and a voice, and the death of Narcissus.

A nexus of thematic elements—involving sexuality, death, self and other—is thus given as a guide to the thematic organization of the narrative. The interpretive task will be to establish how each of these elements is determined or thought within the space of Ovid's narrative. Complementing this nexus, indeed anchoring it from the outset, is the characterization of Narcissus—that is, part of the narrative's *ethos*. Let us invoke Frye's glossary: "ETHOS: The internal social context of a work of literature, comprising the characterization and setting of fictional literature and the relation of author to his reader or audience in thematic literature." The characteristics proper to Narcissus, the properties that define his character and crystallize his status as a character with a proper name, are minimal. His relation to others is determined by his *beauty* and his *pride*. His beauty, the external quality visible to others, incites desire; his pride deflects desire. This characterization of Narcissus is placed near the beginning of the narrative, a reference point for the developing determinations of sexuality, death, self and other:

> multi illum iuvenes, multae cupiere puellae;
> sed fuit in tenera tam dura superbia forma,
> nulli illum iuvenes, nullae tetigere puellae.
>
> (Many youths and many girls desired him; but there was such hard pride in his tender form that no youths and no girls touched him, 353-55.)

The symmetrical pattern of these lines locates with precision Narcissus's crucial trait. His *dura superbia* intervenes between desire and touching and so interrupts the natural movement of sexuality, its proper history. Sexuality is the circuit of reciprocality between self and other in which touching, sexual contact, follows upon and exhausts desire. And, as the stories of Echo and Narcissus illustrate, when desire is neither reciprocated nor suppressed, death intervenes. By suspending Echo's desire, putting its aim out of reach, Narcissus pushes her toward death. In that sense, his refusal takes on the dimension of a crime. Moreover, his actual relation to a "social context" is less than minimal since he refuses any such relation and excludes himself from the world of others. And in that sense, his central characteristic is in fact an aberration.

In order to carry the analysis of the narrative system (*mythos*, *dianoia*, *ethos*) forward and eventually penetrate what I have designated as the problematic for that analysis—namely, the differing representations of death and repetition—let us turn to Echo's story. For it is there that the narrative solidifies its thematic pattern and moreover predetermines the significance of Narcissus's encounter with his reflected image.

When Echo enters the story she still has bodily form: "Corpus adhuc Echo, non vox erat" (Until now Echo was body not voice, 358). Her strange speech is a punishment imposed on her because she acted as a sentry protecting the secrecy of Jove's adultery with other nymphs. Whenever Echo saw Juno approaching, she would engage her in a lengthy conversation until the nymphs escaped unnoticed. Finally Juno saw through the trick and pronounced the punishment:

> "huius" ait "linguae, qua sum delusa, potestas
> parva tibi dabitur vocisque brevissimus usus,"
> reque minas firmat.
>
> ("To you," she said, "will be given scant power of that tongue by which I have been deceived and briefest use of voice," and the event confirmed the threat, 366-68.)

Echo is punished for the way she used the power of speech. Accordingly the punishment denies her control of her speech: she can no longer choose her own words or initiate dialogue. And the length of her conversations with Juno (*longo sermone*, 364) is matched by the brevity imposed on her speech.

What makes this punishment so severe? Most essentially, it threatens the very possibility of communication. Echo must repeat another's speech regardless of its relation to her own thought, so that there is always the danger that she will be prevented from saying what she intends or means. By breaking the connection between the self and its language, abandoning Echo's speech to others, the punishment threatens to break the circuit of communication between the self and others.

The danger posed by Echo's speech can also be formulated in terms of reading the narrative. Potentially Echo's very status as a character is undermined, and with it the coherence of the text insofar as the capacity to delimit a character is a necessary part of narrative fiction. If in the words assigned to Echo there

is a radical discontinuity between her speech and her mind, then her words, though readable, could not be read as hers. At an extreme, Echo would be unknown and unknowable, hidden behind the screen of words generated by others. The character with the proper name "Echo" would, at the extreme, be obliterated from the text by mere verbal repetitions.

The story edges toward this double crisis. Narcissus has been separated from his hunting companions and is wandering through the woods alone. The sight of him arouses Echo's desire, and she follows him furtively. She wants to speak—more precisely, she wants to initiate a dialogue in which to declare her desire—but cannot:

> a quotiens voluit blandis accedere dictis
> et mollis adhibere preces! natura repugnat
> nec sinit, incipiat, sed, quod sinit, illa parata est
> exspectare sonos, ad quos sua verba remittat.
>
> (How often she wants to come closer with alluring words and employ soft prayers! Nature opposes nor does it allow her to begin, but, as it does allow, she is prepared to await sounds to which she may send back her own words, 375-78.)

But even if Narcissus does initiate speech, there is no assurance that her echoed responses will be in *her own* words, "*sua* verba," abandoned as they are to the chance interplay of sounds.

Ovid, however, averts all these dangers by producing a series of utterances and echoes that opens Echo's speech to exactly the kind of reading that seemed threatened. The echoes are to be read as the replies made by one character to another. Moreover, Echo's responses are given within the context of remarks about her thoughts and feelings, and the continuity between those remarks and her echoes of Narcissus's words is complete.

Indeed, the danger posed by Juno's punishment is effaced in Echo's dialogue with Narcissus. In their first encounter (380-393), Narcissus calls out, "ecquis adest?" (Is anyone near?), and Echo replies with only "adest" (he/she is near). Orally and syntactically the echo loses the force of a question and becomes a proper response. Then "veni!" (Come!) and "quid me fugis?" (Why do you flee me?) are repeated in full. Then Narcissus says, "huc coeamus" (Here let us meet). But Echo, her passion

greatly intensified by now, replies "most willingly" (*libentius*) with only the word "coeamus." The more suggestive meanings, "let's come together," "let's copulate," come into play when the adverb *huc* is dropped. At this point "she promotes her own words" (*et verbis favet ipsa suis*) by emerging from the woods and embracing Narcissus. He spurns her: "Manus conplexibus aufer!/ ante. . . emoriar, quam sit tibi copia nostri" (Withdraw your embracing hands! May I die first before my abundance is yours). Echo repeats only the last four words, *sit tibi copia nostri*. When the word *quam* is dropped, the subjunctive clause becomes independent and changes meaning, so that Echo's response might be translated "Let my abundance be yours."

All that Juno intended, explicitly or implicitly, by punishing Echo fails to occur in this episode. Echo's identity is not obscured by a cacophany of repeated sounds, she is not prevented from participating in a coherent dialogue, and most centrally she is not prevented from expressing her desire to the one whom she desires. This last danger is not made explicit until Echo encounters Narcissus, at which point the threat that her limited speech poses to her sexuality becomes the very basis of the story's dramatic tension. We can say that the story of Echo emerges within the larger narrative as the drama of the self's identity and integrity restored. What could have been the mere play of significations left unattached to a speaker, a character, a consciousness, becomes the other side of an actual dialogue between autonomous speakers, between two equally realized characters.

In short, the dialogue between Echo and Narcissus avoids the radical *deception* that would result from her speaking words she did not choose. That deception has been the crucial issue all along is made clearer if we recall that Juno wanted to retaliate against that tongue "by which I have been deceived" (*qua sum delusa*, 366). Here, however, we again must note the existence of a problem. Overcoming the force of deception, which is what founds the drama of the self represented in Echo, requires that another deception occur. Narcissus continues the dialogue with Echo because "alternae deceptus imagine vocis" (deceived by the echo [image] of the alternate voice, 385). What makes Echo's words her own—*sua verba*, 378; *verbis suis*, 388—is the deception that makes Narcissus fail to recognize those words

as his own. Eventually the effect of this problem on the narrative's organization will also have to be measured.

First, however, it is necessary to measure the narrative effect of this restoration of a self that appears integral and identifiable within its own speech. Ovid's "intervention" on Echo's behalf is prefigured within the narrative itself. Tiresias, whose story frames the story of Echo and Narcissus, was also punished severely and unjustly by Juno; she deprived him of sight for arguing, with Jove, that women enjoy sexual intercourse more than men. Jove, restrained from undoing another god's action, compensates Tiresias for his loss: "pro lumine adempto/scire futura dedit" (in place of the sight taken away [Jove] caused him to know the future, 337-38). Ovid's intervention is analogous. He erases the effects of Juno's punishment without abolishing the punishment itself. That correspondence between Ovid's intervention and Jove's no doubt has thematic importance in that it gives a *value* to the intervention and indicates that the resulting restoration is indeed a movement back toward a normal relation between the self and its speech. But what makes this intervention possible and establishes its role in organizing the narrative system (*mythos*, *dianoia*, *ethos*), especially now that the effect of the Juno episode on the *mythos* has been completely neutralized, deserves a more precise development.

The intervention is made possible by the form of repetition involved in the verbal echoes. However, this relation between the verbal repetition and the intervention is open to two descriptions that seem to imply different consequences for our analysis. One description bears only on the fictional representation—Echo's speaking "her own words"—while the other accounts for the process that produces that representation.

At the level of representation, the restoration of Echo as the agent of her own speech takes place because of the elemental unity that joins the two voices of the repetition: voice repeats voice. Echo's speech exactly imitates what it echoes, so that the repetition remains the same as the original; neither the content nor the medium changes. Whenever Echo's speech does seem to distort what it echoes, by giving back only the last part, it is inevitably so that her words do not distort her own intention. It is because of this set of relations between the two voices—

their elemental unity, the exactness of the imitation, and the changes in meaning produced by partial echoes—that Echo's words emerge as her own and not merely as the repetition of another's.

At the level of production, the issue is not the possibility of Echo's restoration as the agent of her own speech but rather the possibility of *representing* that restoration. Linguistically, Echo can appear to speak "her own words" because of the operation of shifters, especially the personal pronouns "I" and "you," which designate the position of sender and receiver relative to the message. Thus, when Echo replies "sit tibi copia nostri," *tibi* designates Narcissus and *nostri* Echo, whereas the reverse designations were made when Narcissus pronounced the original utterance. So long as the meaning of a statement in which "I" refers to Echo does not clash with the descriptions of Echo (and it never does), she appears as a speaker, a consciousness, a character. By manipulating the repeated phrases and controlling the operation of shifters, the narrative turns the play of repetition and difference among signifiers into the emergence of a *character* by linking a proper name, "Echo," to a set of signifieds.

It is too early to calculate the interaction of these two "levels," in part because the metaphor of levels is provisional and perhaps suspect but also because we cannot yet judge the full scope of the distinction between representation and production. Does it apply only to two moments in the analysis of the text, or does it mark an actual division within the text? It will be necessary to come back to this question, but for now let us examine the role that Ovid's intervention and the restoration of Echo to her speech play within the narrative—that is, within the system of fictional representation.

This intervention, by neutralizing the effect of Juno's punishment on the narrative, in fact serves to weld *mythos*, *dianoia*, and *ethos* together and to predetermine the significance of the Narcissus episode. Its unifying function can be analyzed on several levels:

1. By suspending the effects of Juno's punishment, the narrative designates Narcissus as alone responsible for Echo's anguish. Her identity, her participation in dialogue, and her ability to express sexual desire all remain intact, despite her limited speech, until Narcissus flees her embrace and breaks off their dialogue.

His is the decisive gesture, and the full shape of his crime now becomes clear. He at once interrupts the reciprocal circuit that would fulfill desire and breaks the channel of communication that supports that reciprocality—namely, the dialogue exchanged by two integral subjects. He refuses all communication, sexual and verbal, with another. For Echo, the consequence of that refusal is death.

The narrative precludes any doubt concerning how Narcissus's act, the death of Echo's body, and the encounter at the pool are related. As soon as the separation of Echo's voice from her dead and transformed body has been narrated, we are told of a youth whom Narcissus has also spurned:

> inde manus aliquis despectus ad aethera tollens
> "sic amet ipse licet, sic non potiatur amato!"
> dixerat: adsensit precibus Rhamnusia iustis.
> fons erat inlimis. . .
>
> (Thereafter someone who had been shunned, raising his hands to heaven, said: "So may he himself love and not possess what is loved!" Nemesis agreed with his just prayers. There was a pool. . . , 404-407.)

The narrative thereby situates the pool as the place where Narcissus's transgression will be answered. It is the scene of a punishment. Nemesis is not so much the actual agent of justice here as an emblematic rubric placed over the description of the pool to pin down the meaning of the episode that will take place there even before it unfolds. The description emphasizes the pool's isolation and its clear and tranquil surface:

> fons erat inlimis, nitidis argenteus undis,
> quem neque pastores neque pastae monte capellae
> contigerant aliudve pecus, quem nulla volucris
> nec fera turbarat nec lapsus ab arbore ramus;
> gramen erat circa, quod proximus umor alebat,
> silvaque sole locum passura tepescere nullo.
>
> (There was a pool, silver with shining water, that neither shepherds nor she-goats pastured on the mountain nor fallen branch had ever disturbed; all around there was grass which the nearby water fed and woods that never would allow the place to grow warm from the sun, 407-12.)

The pool's isolation from the rest of the natural world is strikingly

complete. Nearly every descriptive detail negates or excludes the human and the natural. Not even a shepherd, the image of man living in nature, has ever come to the pool. Its surface is never disturbed by animals or fallen branches, and even the ubiquitous sun does not warm it. If the pool yet seems undeniably a part of nature since it is surrounded by flourishing grass, one more detail needs to be noted: it is the pool itself and not rain which sustains the grass, "quod proximus umor alebat." That Narcissus would go to a place no one else had ever found neatly corresponds to his own characteristic isolation from the world of others. The narrative is careful to mark this attraction to the pool and so give an internal motivation to a scene whose meaning has already been set:

> hic puer et studio venandi et aestu
> procubuit faciemque loci fontemque secutus.
>
> (Here the youth, exhausted from the excitement and heat of hunting, stretches out, attracted by the aspect of the place and the pool, 413-14.)

Besides being isolated the pool is perfectly clear and tranquil. Because of this it reproduces Narcissus's image with lifelike accuracy, with an accuracy capable of deceiving him. "Fascinated by the image of the form he sees" (*visae correptus imagine formae*, 416), he thinks he sees another youth:

> spem sine corpore amat, corpus putat esse,
> quod umbra est.
>
> (He loves a bodiless hope, he believes to be a body what is shadow, 417.)

On the scene of this imaginary capture, Narcissus, like Echo, will try to embrace the neck that eludes him and will die when desire exceeds the possibility of satisfaction.

What has emerged, therefore, is a relation between two punishments each of which involves a form of repetition, the verbal and the visual. As we have seen, the punishment imposed on Echo by Juno was unwarrantedly severe. Moreover, it is a punishment whose effects can be effaced. Narcissus's imaginary capture, on the other hand, is almost inevitable, the product of his own character and inclination. In order for Narcissus to be

punished justly there is not even need for an external agent to carry out that punishment. It simply happens. Here another crucial thematic element falls into place: justice as the final stability of the law reasserting its mastery. For Narcissus's aberration carries with it its own punishment, self-entrapment and death, and that punishment obliterates his crime.* And whereas Echo could be freed from her punishment when deception was suppressed, Narcissus cannot escape his because of deception.

All of these contrasts between the two punishments are the result of the difference between the two forms of repetition that are associated with Echo and Narcissus. A certain unity joins the voice that repeats and the voice repeated. They are in essence the same, so that when the repetition occurs, across a temporal delay, it has the same status as the original. Indeed it is no longer secondary or derivative at all since it is heard as the voice of another consciousness, another subject or character. In the reflection, however, it is by means of a delusion that the other appears as another like the self. In fact, even as there is no (visual) difference between them, the reflected image and what it reflects are divided by an absolute difference. A difference that inhabits and even constitutes the repetition: the original is *corpus*, its reflection is but *umbra* or *imago*. The other is not another like the self but the other of the self.

2. When Juno's punishment is suspended and Narcissus designated as agent of Echo's anguish, the narrative system also locks into place its determination of sexuality and death. Their relation to one another is by now obvious: death intervenes at the point where sexual desire, deprived of the other's reciprocation and unable to be suppressed, exceeds the possibility of satisfaction.

Death, however, as indicated already, is represented differently

*Because the *dianoia* requires this determination of justice and the law, two developments that would otherwise be possible are excluded from the *mythos*. The youth's plea ("So may he himself love and not possess what is loved!") could be fulfilled if Narcissus were merely to encounter someone who treated him as he has treated Echo and the youth. The thematic system will not allow this alternative, however, since if Narcissus encountered another who refused desire, another Narcissus would be produced. If the absolute mastery of the law is to be upheld, then the "narcissistic" aberration must be abolished by the punishment, not reproduced in another character. Nor is that other form of self-affection—masturbation—admissible. It too would contradict the logic of the narrative, which requires, again thematically, that sexual satisfaction be possible only in the circuit of reciprocality between self and other.

in Echo and Narcissus. Narcissus's death removes him from the world of others, sending him to his infernal abode and leaving in his place the flower that is the visible sign of his absence. Both he and the aberration he embodies are abolished in the ironic reenactment of his crime. Echo's death, on the other hand, is incomplete, for it affects only her body. She hides in the woods and grieves over Narcissus's refusal until her body has wasted away, leaving only her bones. Then:

> vox manet, ossa ferunt lapidis traxisse figuram.
> inde latet silvis nulloque in monte videtur,
> omnibus auditur: sonus est, qui vivit in illa.
>
> (The voice remains, her bones it is said turned to stone. She hides in the woods and is seen on the mountainside by no one; she is heard by all: there is a sound, which lives in her, 399-401.)

Her voice lives in her, and she lives within her voice. Although Narcissus destroyed the reciprocal circuit of sexuality and dialogue, he does not break the continuity between Echo's speech and her consciousness. Even after her bodily death Echo is present in the woods and in fact watches over the scene of Narcissus's death (492-501). She repeats in full his last three utterances as well as the sound made when he beats his shoulders in grief: "Alas!"; "Alas, boy vainly loved"; "Farewell!" In each case Narcissus addresses what he now knows is only the reflected image of himself, but Echo is obviously addressing that real Narcissus whom *she* loved and whose dying she laments.

Her sexuality has died with the body, but she has survived that death, passed through it as voice and consciousness. In Echo, then, consciousness and voice are welded together, separated from the body but intimately linked with one another. Sexuality is for her a past that she remembers but cannot recover. When Narcissus cries, "Alas, boy vainly loved," he speaks to an image that he *still* loves, but Echo, in her repetition of that cry, speaks to the boy she *once* loved—"quod *amaverat* Echo" (493). Desire has not been left in suspension, nor has it disappeared; rather it has been converted into pity for the one she had loved. Echo is heard once more expressing her inner sorrow as she echoes the funeral wailings of Narcissus's mourners: "plangentibus adsonat Echo" (507).

The difference between these two representations of death alerts us to a hierarchy organized within the narrative and organizing it. A hierarchy that is familiar in the history of Western thought: voice-consciousness (*vox*) / body (*corpus*) / reflected image (*umbra* or *imago*). Sexuality belongs to the body, and its non-satisfaction is tied to death. The unity voice-consciousness, however, possesses a life that is independent of the body, sexuality, and death. That is why Echo's feeling for Narcissus is pity not desire after the death of her body. As long as Echo lives within her voice, her speech occupies a position in this hierarchy superior to that of the body. Narcissus's reflection, however, is less than the body, derived from it, and already linked to death: it is the non-living representation of the body in a space external to the self. Thus, Echo's speech and Narcissus's reflection—the two forms of repetition situated within the narrative—are placed within a hierarchy on opposite sides of the body.

3. Suspending Juno's punishment has a third effect already implicit in the other two. The opposition between echo and reflection, as two forms of repetition, is converted into an opposition between the reflection and *speech*. In the drama of Echo, the echo becomes speech. This new opposition—the echo become speech *versus* the reflection as visual repetition—alters the issue of repetition. In order for the echo to become speech the power of repetition must be *suppressed*, and with it the possibility of deception. This move takes on a special value in the narrative insofar as it defines Echo's restoration as the subject of her speech and so positions the voice within the hierarchy *vox/corpus/imago*. Moreover, it crystallizes the contrast between Echo and Narcissus, since Narcissus is entrapped precisely by the combined force of repetition and deception.

This opposition between speech and the reflection is not, therefore, just one thematic element among others. It regulates the narrative system and seals the unity of *mythos*, *dianoia*, *ethos*. Every aspect of the narrative depends upon the possibility of the echo's becoming speech: Echo's stability as a character or consciousness; the determination of each element of the *dianoia*—self and other, justice and the law, sexuality, death; the meaning of Narcissus's imaginary capture; and the hierarchy voice-consciousness/body/reflection.

Up to this point we have been engaged in an interpretation guided by the concept of formal unity, defined as a unity of *mythos, dianoia, ethos.* It is clear that that unity is on the verge of being achieved with the emergence of Echo as a character, the echo's becoming speech, and the representation of a voice-consciousness. The Ovidian text, however, does not just give us with Echo a character and then the representation of a voice-consciousness. It also lays bare the very processes through which that character and that representation are formed: the dissemination of signifiers, in the play of repetition and difference between utterance and echo, is turned into a character's speech by linking a proper name, "Echo," to a set of signifieds. The result is the crystallization of a character and the representation of a voice-consciousness. This result surely is in accord with the thematic system of the narrative, but the exposure of the process contests that system. While the representation of Echo as voice and consciousness centers the narrative system, the text dislocates that center even as it puts it in place by showing that that representation is itself the product of a process of signification that precedes the apparition of a consciousness speaking in its own voice. The value given the voice at the thematic level, in the hierarchy *vox/corpus/imago*, is subverted. But the opposite is also true: when the representation of the voice appears and organizes the very coherence of the narrative, it hides the textual processes that lie beneath it. Repetition is suppressed, and that suppression is given a value.

Another moment that menaces the security of the narrative system has to be recognized. A part of the Echo/Narcissus opposition is the fact that while repetition and deception are suppressed in the drama of Echo, their power produces the drama of Narcissus. A problem encountered earlier now makes itself felt. For deception in fact inhabits *both* Narcissus's reflection and Echo's speech. Deception—in the failure of the one who hears to recognize the "image" (*imago*) of his own voice—plays a decisive role in the echo's becoming speech and, therefore, in the suppression of repetition and of the deception that Echo must be freed from and that Narcissus must not escape.

In each of these disturbances in the narrative system, a mark of value coincides with a suppression—of repetition and of decep-

tion—that leaves behind the vestiges of what it suppresses. These suppressions are integral to the narrative and thematic system that prepares for Narcissus's encounter at the pool by *designating* it as a punishment. That designation serves to prescribe the episode's meaning—that is, to orient its multiple significations toward a meaning that will remain consistent with the thematic constructs of the narrative. Does that gesture too entail a suppression designed to secure the stability and values of the narrative system? To answer that question we will have to change the strategy of our reading. If the Narcissus scene produces significations that the narrative system must suppress, they can be triggered only if we actively ignore the designation and the prescription which orient that scene. In making this strategic shift the reading process becomes a risk and an adventure: a risk in that it abandons the guarantee of its coherence, namely, the presupposition of the text's unity, and an adventure in that its efficacy, its ability to disclose the signifying productions of the text, cannot be calculated in advance.

When deprived of its prescribed meaning, what drama of the self is inscribed in the text of the Narcissus episode?

II. *The Drama of Narcissus*

We know that the drama of Narcissus will stand in opposition to the drama of Echo. There the integrity of the self was represented by the restoration of a voice-consciousness that survives the body, desire, and death. Without even reading the text in which Narcissus's imaginary capture is inscribed, we know: that the image which fascinates him is the non-living representation of the body, and therefore inferior to it, even as the voice-consciousness Echo is superior to the body it outlives; that Narcissus will not escape the desire aroused by the sight of the image; and that this entrapment and this desire will result in death. Freed from the obligation to read the Narcissus episode as the scene of a punishment, the place where a crime is answered and an aberration abolished, what we do read is a text that exceeds the limits prescribed for it by the overt thematic system of the narrative. This does not necessarily mean that the Narcissus episode constitutes another unity, a separate synthesis of *mythos*

and *dianoia*. Rather, it actively contests the narrative to which it belongs by at once incorporating and disorganizing all the elements of that narrative, repeating and displacing them in its own textuality.

Now, what most strikingly separates Narcissus's drama of the self from Echo's is the nature of the other. The other from whose domination Echo is freed when she is represented as the agent of her own speech, and to whom she may then speak, is another like herself. The narrative thereby provides a model of intersubjectivity as the process of exchange, through language, between autonomous consciousnesses. Narcissus, in his encounter with Echo, withdraws from that exchange and at the same time withholds the desire that would respond to Echo's. At the pool, Narcissus's desire is released because he does not recognize that the other, the image, is not another like himself. Narcissus's deception, as I have pointed out, results from the fact that the form of repetition involved in the reflection is visual. And the opposition visual/verbal, for reasons that are still obscure, serves to ground the contrast between the two dramas of the self, that of Narcissus and that of Echo.

Narcissus's encounter with his reflection is not, however, purely visual. The verbal/visual opposition gets incorporated into the scene itself, entering precisely at the point where Narcissus recognizes that he is deceived. Narcissus speaks:

> spem mihi nescio quam vultu promittis amico,
> cumque ego porrexi tibi bracchia, porrigis ultro,
> cum risi, adrides; lacrimas quoque saepe notavi
> me lacrimante tuas; nutu quoque signa remittis
> et, quantum motu formosi suspicor oris,
> verba refers aures non pervenientia nostras!
> iste ego sum: sensi, nec me mea fallit imago;

(You offer some hope with your friendly expression, and when I have outstretched my arms to you, you outstretch on the other side, when I have smiled, you smile back; and when I weep, I have seen tears on your cheeks; you give back signs to my nod, and, as I suspect from the motion of your beautiful lips, you return words that are not reaching my ears! I am that one: I have felt it, and my image does not deceive me, 457-63.)

Nearly every issue involved in Narcissus's drama of the self is

rooted in this passage. The recognition that he has been deceived, that the *imago* is not *corpus,* occurs not because Narcissus recognizes the simple, simultaneous duplication of his own gestures in the pool, but because he recognizes a difference within duplication. This difference, however, is not that between *corpus* and *imago;* that opposition, which has been at the service of the narrative system, is supplanted here by the opposition *vox/imago*: "nutu quoque signa remittis/ et, quantum motu formosi suspicor oris,/ verba refers aures non pervenientia nostras!" Narcissus sees the reflected image speaking but does not hear it. The image reproduces the visible, exterior signs of speech—the movement of Narcissus's lips—but not the sound of the voice. The image gives *signa* but not *verba.* It is only when Narcissus articulates this breach between image and voice that he makes the crucial statement about the self: "iste ego sum." "I am that one."

The image, then, is that which repeats the voice, in silence and visibly, in an external space. At first glance, there seems to be no difficulty in making this opposition of *vox* and *imago* conform to the requirements of the narrative system. What is prohibited in the encounter between Narcissus and his reflection is dialogue, so that in yet another way this encounter becomes the ironic reversal of the encounter with Echo: Narcissus's withdrawal from the dialogue with Echo is answered by the impossibility of dialogue. On the other hand, the opposition *vox/imago* seems to disturb the narrative system insofar as it supplants the hierarchy that organizes the contrast between Echo and Narcissus: *vox/corpus/imago.* We will come back to this problem.

On the scene of Narcissus's encounter, the voice as well as the self is put into relation with its other. The *imago* is not simply the other of the body, it is the other of the voice of the self. As the repetition of that voice, it is also the same, the same reproduced as the non-identical.

What, then, in the drama of Narcissus, defines the relation between the self and its other? The difficulty of this question lies in the fact that Narcissus does not come to recognize that relation except by speaking from within his mystified view of the image. To interpret this passage from mystification to recognition, it is necessary to consider yet another structure of difference. Narcissus's language incessantly indicates a certain spatial and

temporal difference between himself and the image. Changing verb tenses describe the image as making gestures *after* Narcissus does: "cumque ego *porrexi* tibi bracchia, *porrigis* ultro,/cum *risi*, *adrides*." The space separating Narcissus from the image is indicated by the adverb *ultro* (on the other side). These demarcations of difference, along with the use of prefixes ("*ad*rides," "*re*mittis," "*re*fers"), have the effect of turning the reflected gestures into responses. Narcissus imagines the temporal delay of a reply.

We can organize Narcissus's misunderstanding of what makes the image other than the self as follows: (1) The image is taken to be another like the self. (2) Narcissus thinks that the image is responsive to the self. (3) He understands that responsiveness as the other side of a dialogue between autonomous subjects. (4) He describes an illusory delay between his own gestures and those of the image.

How do we convert the language of Narcissus's error into a description of the actual relation between self and other? A simple solution is readily at hand: while there is a spatial distance between Narcissus and his image there is no temporal difference, since gesture and reflection are simultaneous. That solution, however, is inadequate. It must be remembered that the fact of simultaneity played no part in Narcissus's recognition. Narcissus declares "iste ego sum" only when, as he speaks, he brings together the silence of the lips he *sees* and the sound of the voice he *hears*. His illusion is fractured, that is, only when he articulates the difference between the *space of the image* and the *time of the voice*—the space of the other and the time of the self.

The text, however, does not allow us to think that difference as the simple separation of opposites. The predication "iste ego sum," taken literally—and what authorizes us to do otherwise?—enfolds self and other, voice and image, time and space into a relation in which one term is inextricably tied to its opposite.

In order to transform the four elements of Narcissus's mystification into a description of the actual relation of self and other dramatized by his encounter, it will be necessary to calculate the force of this moment that joins self and other, time and space, voice and image together. To make that calculation as rigorous as possible I am going to break out of the argumentative and

historical boundaries in which I have been operating. A dialogue can be constructed between Ovid's text and a series of philosophical texts—by Kant, Heidegger, Husserl, and Derrida—that approach the question of the self. The philosophical project of establishing or maintaining the purity of the self—that is, of protecting it from any primordial relation to what is other—pivots around the intimacy of the self's relation to time and to the voice.

Kant, in founding his transcendental aesthetic as "a science of all the principles of *a priori* knowledge," begins with a distinction between *matter* and *form.* This distinction controls the entire description of the subject's faculty of representation:

> The effect of an object upon the faculty of representation, so far as we are affected by it, is *sensation.* That intuition which is in relation to the object through sensation, is entitled *empirical.* The undetermined object of an empirical intuition is entitled *appearance.*
>
> That in appearance which corresponds to sensation I term its *matter;* but that which so determines the manifold of appearance that it allows of being ordered in certain relations, I term the *form* of appearance.*

What Kant here distinguishes as form cannot be attributed to appearance; it determines the manifold of appearance and is, therefore, a form of intuition in the mind. The form of appearance "must lie ready for the sensation *a priori* in the mind." The pure form of sensible intuition, therefore, "must be found in the mind *a priori.*" There are two such pure forms, which thereby serve as principles of *a priori* knowledge: *space* and *time.*

Another distinction now makes itself felt in the Kantian discourse, that between the *internal* and the *external.* More precisely, between "outer sense," as the property of the mind by which the subject represents to himself that which is outside him, and "inner sense," as that "by means of which the mind intuits itself or its inner state." The form that pre-exists and underlies outer intuitions is space: "Space is a necessary *a priori* representation, which underlies all outer intuitions. We can never represent to ourselves the absence of space, though we can quite well think

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**Critique of Pure Reason,* trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965), pp. 65-66. All subsequent quotations are from this edition.

it as empty of objects. It must therefore be regarded as the condition of the possibility of appearances" (p. 68). The other principle of *a priori* knowledge, underlying "inner sense," is time: "Time is nothing but the form of inner sense, that is, of the intuition of ourselves and of our inner state. It cannot be a determination of outer appearances; it has to do with neither shape nor position, but with the relation of representations in our inner state" (p.77). Kant proceeds to argue, however, that time is the formal condition of *all* representations and so refuses to let the distinction of time and space be construed as that of two forms of intuition involving dissociable areas of experience: "Time is the formal *a priori* condition of all appearances whatsoever. Space, as the pure form of all *outer* intuition, is so far limited; it serves as the *a priori* condition only of outer appearance. But since all representations, whether they have for their objects outer things or not, belong, in themselves, as determinations of the mind, to our inner state; and since this inner state stands under the formal conditions of inner intuition, and so belongs to time, time is an *a priori* condition of all appearance whatsoever." In this way Kant brings the distinction between time and space, inner sense and outer sense, back within a universal pure form of intuition which is inner and temporal. The distinction has become a hierarchy.

At stake in this creation of a hierarchy is the possibility of establishing the purity of the subject. It is Heidegger who, in *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, underscores the centrality of this issue and sees in it the very foundation of the metaphysical description of the self. "If, in general, it is possible to establish the universality of time as pure intuition, such an attempt will succeed only if it can be shown that, although space and time as pure intuition belong 'to the subject,' time is implanted therein in a more fundamental way than space."* The form that that demonstration would have to take is outlined in the subsection entitled "Time as Pure Self-affection and the Temporal Character of the Self." Heidegger's explication links the very possibility

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***Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, trans. James S. Churchill (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1962), pp.53-54. All subsequent quotations are taken from this edition.**

of the Kantian subject, the finite subject of knowledge, to the concept of time as that which allows the "pure succession of the *now*-sequence" to arise:

> Time is pure intuition only in that it spontaneously pre-forms the aspect of succession and, as an act both receptive and formative, pro-poses this aspect as such to itself. This pure intuition solicits itself [*geht sich an*] by that which it intuits (forms) and without the aid of experience. Time is, by nature, pure affection of itself. But more than this, it is that in general which forms something on the order of a line of orientation, which going from the self is directed toward. . . in such a way that the objective thus constituted springs forth and surges back along this line.
>
> As pure self-affection, time is not an active affection concerned with the concrete self; as pure, it forms the essence of auto-solicitation. Therefore, if the power of being solicited as a self belongs to the essence of the finite subject, time as pure self-affection forms the essential structure of subjectivity (p. 194).

What the conception of time as pure self-affection would prevent, therefore, is any primordial entanglement of the self with its other or with the spatial.

"Iste ego sum"—marking the moment in which Narcissus not only recognizes the image as image but also *recognizes himself* (as image), opening the way to the fulfillment of Tiresias's prophecy that he would live to old age "si *se* non *noverit*"—that articulation entangles the self with the other and with the spatial. This entanglement is here irreducible since self-recognition does not occur except in this relation to the other and the spatial.

It is precisely this moment in Narcissus's drama of the self that the metaphysical description of the self must exclude. Such an exclusion would, in fact, occur at the very "foundation" of that description and so take on a positive value. In the Ovidian text we have already delineated a series of gestures that would likewise restrict and even "exclude" the drama of Narcissus.

Within the *mythos* a value scheme is established when the Echo scene is treated as a reward and the Narcissus scene designated as a punishment; these opposing values are in turn supported by the solidification of a hierarchy (voice/body/image) and by a very finely differentiated attitude toward the two characters (pathos/irony). In designating the Narcissus scene a punishment

the narrative would restrict it to being a secondary or even false drama of the self, a drama of mere entrapment, futility, and death.

Our reading is still in the process of neutralizing the effects of that designation. It is the issue of the voice that must now be broached. The representation of the restoration of Echo as the integral subject of her speech, as a voice-consciousness, is the decisive moment in the narrative's distribution of values. The Narcissus scene differs from the drama of Echo and differs with it.

"Iste ego sum"—that articulation also links the voice of the self with its other, the "image." What is this *imago* of the voice? Certainly it is not another voice, as was the echo (*imagine vocis*, 385) that Narcissus failed to recognize as the repetition of his own speech. The movement of the lips reflected in the water is the *silent, spatial, visible repetition of the voice.* It is the other of speech. Indeed, grouped around the reflected image is an entire cluster of predicates that have traditionally been assigned to writing, precisely in order to pose its opposition to speech. As it has been classically determined, writing, the sign of a sign, is that which repeats speech, silences the voice by spatializing it, and so puts it outside the pure interiority of the self. As the non-living representation of the voice, writing installs a relation to death within the processes of language.

The analysis of the role played by this opposition of speech and writing within the entire project of Western metaphysics has, of course, been the work of Jacques Derrida. He has undertaken a systematic deconstruction of the "metaphysics of presence," principally by following the intricate strategies it employs to guard the determination of being as presence. The most central, because the most menaced, of these strategies is the opposition of speech and writing.

By determining writing as secondary to speech, its derivative or repetition, and then ascribing to writing all those properties of language that would contaminate the purity of presence, of truth, of subjectivity, etc., philosophy has privileged speech, the voice, as the authentic mode of human language.

I want to focus on that part of Derrida's discourse which deals with the link that binds the purity of the voice, the auton-

omy of the self, and the determination of time as pure self-affection. There are three major examples of his argument developed in terms of Husserl, Rousseau, and Saussure.* Husserl is no doubt the most important here, since the Husserlian text is so often the resource of Derrida's critique. Husserl attempts to layer three "strata" involving consciousness and meaning/sense, placing what he rigorously distinguishes within a hierarchy: indication; meaning (*Bedeutung*) and expression (*Ausdruck*); and, thirdly, a pre-expressive stratum of lived experience in which there is a primordial intuition of sense. In so doing, he inserts into the question of subjectivity and time the general problematic of the sign. Writing is the controlling, if somewhat hidden, example of indication, in that writing (and here Husserl yet follows the classical determination) is merely a worldly sign that *points to* the phonic signifier; unlike the phonic signifier, which stands in direct relation to meaning or sense (the signified), the written sign is but the signifier of a signifier. What allows speech to remain internal to the subject, insofar as he intentionalizes a meaning in expression, and what at the same time distinguishes it from writing, is that its substance, the phonic signifier, is purely temporal. Husserl can then describe the voice itself as pure self-affection: hearing oneself speak in the present and understanding oneself immediately, what Derrida calls the system of the solitary voice as *s'entendre-parler*. The pre-expressive layer of transcendental experience would simply be the full intuition of sense without recourse to expression at all. Husserl's project hinges on the possibility of rigorously separating, through phenomenological reduction, these three layers, even though "in fact" they are always found intertwined (*verflochten*).

Derrida intervenes at this point in a precise and decisive manner. Drawing on the Husserlian analysis of time, he overthrows the stratified hierarchy of pre-expressive experience, speech, and writing; a certain "protowriting" (*l'archi-écriture*) will be seen to inhabit speech and sense, to be linked with them in an *a priori* not just a *de facto* entanglement (*Verflechtung*). What Husserl introduced into the concept of temporalization as the generation

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La voix et le phénomène (Paris: Presses Universitaire de France, 1967), pp. 92-96, and *De la grammatologie* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1967), pp. 408-411 and pp. 95-100 respectively.

of the now-sequence is the necessary retention, in the present, of the now that has become past. Derrida: "The process by which the living now, producing itself through spontaneous generation, must, to be a now, retain itself in another now, affect itself, without recourse to anything empirical, with a new primordial actuality in which it will become a non-now as a past now, etc., such a process is indeed a pure self-affection in which the same is the same only by being affected by the other, by becoming the other of the same" (*La voix et la phénomène*, p. 95). However, if the now cannot be produced except out of its relation to the non-now, then the present is primordially divided by the *retentional trace*. "The living present springs forth out of its nonidentity to itself, and out of the possibility of the retentional trace. It is always already a trace. This trace is unthinkable from the simplicity of a present whose life is internal to itself. The 'itself' of the living present is primordially a trace." The retentional trace (and here Derrida effectively displaces Husserl's discourse) is not the (conscious) retention of that which was once present: "if the trace refers back to an absolute past, it is because it obliges us to think a past which can no longer be understood in the form of a modified present, as the past-present" (*De la grammatologie*, p. 97).

The trace, implying spatiality and nonpresence, is the force of writing in general, *l'archi-écriture*, and as such inhabits speech and sense, for the sense "intuited" in Husserl's "pre-expressive" stratum, just as much as the "self-affection" of the voice, is temporal in nature. "As the trace is the relation of the inwardness of the living present to its outside, the opening onto exteriority in general, onto the nonproper, etc., the temporalization of sense is, from the outset, 'spacing.'"

In this way Derrida takes the series of oppositions self and other, time and space, life and death, speech and writing—each of which the metaphysical project separates and orders hierarchically so that the first term retains value as pure, primordial, present, while the second is reduced to a derivative and negative status—and discloses the contradictory dependence of the "first" term on the "second," their "primordial entanglement."

Returning once again to Ovid, the thrust of our argument can be asserted straightforwardly: this same process, in which

the hierarchical relation of opposites is reversed and the valued term displaced and shown to be primordially inhabited and divided by its opposite, is at work in the Ovidian text. The drama of Narcissus—if deprived of its designation as a punishment, as the ironic reenactment of a crime that abolishes itself, and read as a drama of the self—puts the self in primordial relation to its other, to spatiality, to death, to "writing." It is not simply a drama of the same reproduced as nonidentical, but the same *produced* as nonidentical to itself: "iste ego sum."

This does not mean that the Narcissus scene constitutes another *mythos* unfolding its own *dianoia*, even as counter-*mythos* and counter-*dianoia*. This drama of self and other is never thematized as such; indeed, it is what is excluded from the thematic structure of the narrative. Or, rather, it is what the narrative would exclude by limiting its force, by containing it within a limit that denies its originality. We have already traced the process of that exclusion and that limitation: the pool as the scene of a punishment in which the image is but the source of an illusion that carries within itself the necessity of its own disappearance: Narcissus's death, the terminal point of his aberration and his delusion.

When the Narcissus episode is read by actively ignoring its designation as a punishment, it does not then simply fall outside the narrative system. It is neither purely external nor purely internal to it. The reading in which we are engaged, having renounced the prescribed relation between the Narcissus episode and the narrative as a whole, can now disclose an altogether different relation and an altogether different textual activity. For the narrative is transformed as the Narcissus episode contradicts the narrative organization by reinscribing the elements of that organization and displacing their interrelation. We can now begin to specify this movement of contradiction, reinscription, and displacement.

The narrative fixes the relation between Echo and Narcissus by linking Echo to the voice and Narcissus to the image and then distributing the chain of elements belonging to each side of the opposition voice/image across the two characters: Echo (the integral self, meaning, dialogue, life) / Narcissus (the other, illusion, nondialogue, death). What anchors these two chains, holding

them apart, is the constant reference to the body, *corpus*, on either side of which fall the *vox* of Echo and the *imago* of Narcissus. The articulation of self-recognition, "iste ego sum," occurring only as Narcissus brings together the image he sees and the voice he hears, elides that reference to *corpus;* in so doing, it joins the disjunctive terms *vox* and *imago*, speech and "writing," self and other, time and space, life and death. This nondisjunctive union of *vox* and *imago* collapses the hierarchy *vox/corpus/imago*, for the latter's stability depends precisely on the body as substantial, in contrast to the image, and as mortal, in contrast to the voice. In this way the text of the Narcissus scene at once reinscribes and displaces the very elements that (would) comprise the narrative system. Indeed, the drama of Echo in its entirety—dialogue of self and other, the other as another autonomous subject, the possibility of reciprocal desire—is inscribed within the drama of Narcissus: as Narcissus's illusion.

Since the text (and here one may grasp the constraints on its language) lets the relation between Narcissus and his reflection be read only in the form of Narcissus's error, our reading must intervene yet more actively, yet more productively, if the text of Narcissus is to be written. That is, if his language, as retroactively transformed by the articulation "iste ego sum," is to become readable. In short, the reading must allow the text to transgress itself in order to liberate the productive force of that text. Inverted and displaced, the four elements of Narcissus's misunderstanding of the image can be expressed as follows: (1) Rather than being another like the self, the image is the other of the self. (2) The image is not responsive to the self, it affects the self. That is, the self-affection of Narcissus is such that the self is affected by its other, by the representation of itself in an external space. (3) Thus, when Narcissus discovers that he is not engaged in a dialogue, it is because the other is not a subject. It is a nonsubject that affects the self, a nonsubject without which the self could not appear to itself or recognize itself. (4) What then of the delay that Narcissus imagines between his own gestures and those of the image? Once again it is a question of reversing the terms and displacing their relation. If the image as other does not respond to the self but instead affects it, then the delay indicated by Narcissus's language be-

comes, when displaced, the anteriority of the other as the nonpresent nonsubject primordially affecting the self: not as a prior moment in linear time, but as *pure anteriority*, as *trace*.

Here, then, is a moment, in the dialectic between reading and writing, where it is possible to make the text exceed the limit imposed on it by the narrative system. It remains to analyze three moments in which the text marks a limit, which will always conform to the thematic requirements of the narrative, and then transgresses it in the production of significations that the narrative can never master:

1. When Narcissus is first struck by the sight of his reflection, the narrator, in an apostrophe, pleads with him to free himself from his foolish desire:

> credule, quid frustra simulacra fugacia captas?
> quod petis, est nusquam; quod amas, avertere, perdes!
> ista repercussae, quam cernis, imaginis umbra est:
> nil habet ista sui; tecum venitque manetque;
> tecum discedet, si tu discedere possis!
>
> (Gullible boy, why do you vainly strive after a fleeting phantom? What you seek is nowhere; what you love, turn away, you will lose it! That one, which you see, is the shade of a reflected image: that one has nothing of its own; with you it comes and stays; with you it will depart, if you can depart!, 432-36.)

Narcissus, of course, does not hear. The knowledge that the narrator would impart to him can never reach his ears; by a structural necessity Narcissus is excluded from the process of exchange in which the language of the narrative participates. Beyond its obvious rhetorical effects, this interjection solidifies the relation between narrator and reader, since it is the reader who fills the void of this nonhearing as the actual receiver of the message sent by the narrator. In this conception, the text would be the vehicle of the exchange going from narrator to reader. Such a conception is implied in the second part of Frye's definition of *ethos*: "The internal social context of a work of literature, comprising the characterization and setting of fictional literature and *the relation of the author to his reader or audience in thematic literature*." The distinction here between "fictional" and "thematic" literature is largely conventional, since a fictional narrative is thematic insofar as it structures the narrator's relation to the

reader. The passage from Ovid gives this relation a precise shape: narrator and reader possess a knowledge superior to that of the character. This constitutes, of course, dramatic irony, but what needs emphasizing is that that irony is sustained by a particular relation of narrator/narrative/reader the description of which entails certain assumptions about the structure of literary discourse. Narrator and reader, as the stable subjects of the speech event, are held within the enclosure of an understanding; they have access to a knowledge that is always ahead of that of the character, the subject of the narrated event, whom they always comprehend. Free from the illusion which entraps him, they stand in a special relation to truth.

In the apostrophe itself, the narrator gives a particular logical and temporal structure to the passage from illusion to demystification. That passage would be the movement from the awakening of an irrational (impossible) desire to its proper suppression, from danger to security. Narcissus need only realize that what he sees is the image of himself, an image he can *separate* (*decedere*) himself from.

This pattern is homologous with others developed by the narrative. In the drama of Echo, language is the means by which the self, which properly pre-exists its involvement with language, reveals itself to others. Sex is the means of exhausting desire. And here knowledge would be the means of restoring the self's separation from its own mirage. In each case a reappropriation occurs: of meaning, of fulfillment, of self-presence.

The actual movement of Narcissus's demystification, generated by the inseparability of self and other, disorganizes all these patterns by reorganizing them. When he recognizes that what he sees is his own image, his desire intensifies uncontrollably, not in spite of but because of that recognition. Both before and after his demystification, there is an excess of desire over knowledge and over the possibility of satisfaction. Narcissus experiences an eroticism in which desire is inexhaustible except in death. His demystification is the passage from illusion to madness (*furor*). Calling this experience madness (Narcissus is said to be *male sanus*, 474) is another gesture of exclusion and confinement, another limit that is crossed when Narcissus *affirms* his desire and his madness. Far from involving a relapse into deception,

Narcissus's madness squanders a knowledge incapable of mastering desire and affirms that expense:

> "liceat, quod tangere non est,
> adspicere et misero praebere alimenta furori!"
>
> ("Let me look upon what is not mine to touch and fuel my unhappy passion," 478-79.)

What is the relation between this moment in the text and the apostrophe that sealed the unity of narrator, reader, and character? The contradiction between them is profound; in squandering the knowledge possessed by narrator and reader and affirming desire, the experience of Narcissus pierces the self-enclosure of the narrative system. Narcissus's relation to the narrator is dialogical: not as an exchange between two subjects, for the narrator is as deaf to Narcissus as Narcissus was to the apostrophe, but rather as the active work of reinscription and contradiction. Because the "narrator," the subject of the speech event, cannot comprehend or hear or speak this textual activity, "he" is alternately posited and obliterated by it, appearing and disappearing in the oscillation between limit and transgression, "himself" an effect of the text not its master.

2. Narcissus's death, as we have already shown, is positioned within the *mythos-dianoia* as that which puts an end to his aberration (his desire) and so answers for his role in the bodily and sexual death suffered by Echo. His death, then, would be the final suppression of a desire that, awakened by an illusion, could not be mastered even by knowledge. The text quite literally puts in place this border, the ultimate effort to contain the originality of Narcissus's experience, and then exceeds it. The moment of death is described as a final exhaustion and the closing of the eyes through which desire was awakened:

> ille caput viridi fessum submisit in herba,
> lumina mors clausit domini mirantia formam:
>
> (He dropped his exhausted head on the green grass, death closed the eyes that had admired their master's form, 502-503.)

But the seeming finality of death, this exhaustion of desire, is split open:

tum quoque se, postquam est inferna sede receptus,
in Stygia spectabat aqua.

(And even when he had been received in the infernal region, he kept gazing at himself in the Stygian waters, 504-505.)

Narcissus still watches his image, still desires, a shade gazing at a shade. That resurgence of desire signals its permanence and enfolds death and desire in a relation that is inadmissable for the narrative system. Death, rather than being the end of desire, whether as Narcissus's collapse or as the turning of Echo's desire into pity, is inextricably tied to desire—just as, in the process of recognition, the living voice of the self was inextricable from its nonliving other.

3. Framing the story of Echo and Narcissus are references to the blind seer Tiresias. It is his prophecy—that Narcissus will live to old age "if he never recognizes himself"—which introduces the story and is fulfilled by it; and it is Tiresias's fame that is increased when Narcissus dies in the manner he does:

Cognita res meritam vati per Achaides urbes
attulerat famam, nomenque erat auguris ingens;

(The occurrence, when made known, raised the seer's deserved fame through the cities of Greece, and great was the prophet's name, 511-12.)

Tiresias's enigmatic forecast, which "comes true" in the course of the narrative, puts him in a special relation to its truth; the narrative can be said to elaborate or unfold the truth of Tiresias's prophetic statement (*vox*, 349). We thus find Tiresias stationed at either end of the *mythos* and presiding over its meaning, the figure of the narrative's truth. And to the extent that the relation between his language and truth or meaning is analogous to the relation posed between the narrator and the narrative, Tiresias is even a "figure of the poet."

But, once again, a contradiction in the internal logic of the text menaces the possibility of these relations. A gap separates Tiresias from the text. "Cognita res," "the occurrence, when made known. . .": *cognita* is deprived of a subject. No one was present at the scene of Narcissus's death, except Echo, who cannot relate what she saw, since the limitation imposed on her speech prevents her from initiating speech, from saying what

has not yet been said. Narcissus's story falls within the dead space of a silence that cannot be broken. All who could hear of Tiresias and Narcissus are likewise severed from the narrator, because of the same structural necessity that separated him from Narcissus. Nor can the circumstances of Narcissus's death be reconstructed, for when he died he disappeared from the scene of his encounter and his mourners find only a flower:

> nusquam corpus erat; croceum pro corpore florem
> inveniunt foliis medium cingentibus albis.
>
> (His body was nowhere; they find a yellow flower in place of the body, its center surrounded by white petals, 509-510.)

This flower is the only access, at the level of the narrated event, to the drama of Narcissus, but it can have no meaning at that level since its significance emerges only out of the fabric of signs at play in the text. The flower itself is a sign, a substitution "*pro* corpore," "*in place of* the body," and not the product of a metamorphosis. As such it is caught up in the movement of a text whose significations cannot be tied to the knowledge of Tiresias, nor gathered within the stability of a *dianoia*, nor contained within the narrator's understanding.

At crucial moments in the Narcissus episode, then, it becomes impossible to resolve significations at play in that episode with the thematic requirements of the narrative. These "moments" of contradiction, however, are neither local nor static; the Narcissus episode actively displaces the elements of the narrative system by reinscribing them within another textual space. A critical synthesis would remain possible only if this work of reinscription, displacement, and contradiction were suppressed. Such a suppression is, in fact, marked within the text when Narcissus's encounter is designated as a punishment. In neutralizing that designation our reading has discovered that there operates throughout the text a dialectic of mastery and transgression. The Narcissus episode ruptures the self-enclosure of the narrative system—*mythos, dianoia, ethos*—which then becomes, not the formal unity that masters all the significations of the text, but the limit perpetually transgressed by them. And any attempt to reabsorb the drama of Narcissus into a homogeneous pattern of *meaning* would entail denying it *force* within the movement of the text.

In this sense the Ovidian text is *dialogical*: a process of writing that squanders the security of a stable meaning, not a dialogue between voices that can be tied to a consciousness. This second model of dialogue, which would protect the identity of a self and the primacy of the voice, is the one given value by the narrative itself; it is destroyed at the very moment when a voice, in identifying itself as that of the "narrator," enters into a textual process, a process of negativity, that abolishes the secure authority that that voice is supposed to possess.