

Lucy Cash
Where / When Does An Echo Begin

1.
Fated only to respond with the last words
she hears, Echo's condition doesn't allow
her to find a beginning.

Fated only to repeat, to speak in quotations,
she nevertheless exchanges a different ver-
sion of the words already spoken:

"Echo who cannot be silent
When another speaks. Echo who cannot
Speak at all
Unless another has spoken.
Echo, who always answers back." [1]

I first read her story in Ovid's
Metamorphoses, but now unable to find
my copy of the book, I settle for reading Ted

[1] pg 75, Ted Hughes Tales From Ovid, Faber and Faber,
London, 1997



Hughes' version of the story in his **Tales from Ovid**.

According to Ovid / Hughes, Echo's condition is inflicted upon her by Juno for attempting to hide Jupiter's amorous misdemeanours. More precisely, Echo distracts Juno with a "rignarole of chattering"²³ and Juno realising that she is being misled, turns this volubility against the nymph – making her silent unless spoken to.



When Echo later sees and falls in love with Narcissus and he spurns her, she withdraws from the world. Her body is described in its pining as, fading from view. But whilst Echo's body disintegrates, her voice roams off by itself, "unseen in the forest." [3] Narcissus meanwhile is left to fall in love with his own reflection, and unrequited, (unanswered by his silent image) he too, dies.

[3] pg78, ibid



As I'm re-reading Echo's story, a friend calls to find out whether I've heard about the imminent initiation of the new LHC project. I haven't, and so she tells me that the Large Hadron Collider is a project that involves a particle accelerator machine, particle detectors and a global network of computers and interpretative softwares.

My friend is nervous about the effects of Hadrons colliding and whether this might create a tiny, but universally fatal, black hole. Distracting as the idea of artificially created mini black holes are, I'm intrigued by the LHC project as yet another attempt to find a more accurate description of how the world began: to solve the beginning of all beginnings.



"The rain falls without beginning or end.
As it falls time and space become mixed
and entwined until no distinction remains
between the two.
And then I too deteriorate, from the centre,
like rotting cabbage." [4]



[4] text from "It's an earthquake in my heart", Goat Island, 2001

"Somehow in one's body, in one's genes,
there are perhaps memories
that don't even quite really belong to your
life,
but belong to lives before your own....
That's what I mean by genetic memory. "
John Berger, Radio 4 interview, 20th August
2008



2.
Body-Mind Centering (BMC) is a systematic investigation of the ways in which the mind is expressed through the body and the body through the mind. Conceiving the mind/body as an integrated whole, bodily experience is explored in relation to the different systems of the body (neurological, muscular-skeletal, lymphatic etc). BMC has many applications across a spectrum of creative / physical/ psychological fields.

It's also very revealing of how we humans once began.

In his/her early life a child goes through a series of coordinated movement patterns which initially culminates in the ability to walk. What is so very beautifully particular about this series of patterns is how they echo the various stages of species evolution.



So for instance, a child's first movements involve wriggling and rocking along the spine and are initiated by pushing before developing into the reach and pull of his / her head and 'tail'. This spinal push is immediately familiar as the conical inching movement of the caterpillar or earthworm.

Later, when a child learns to push with the arms and upper body, we can see an echo of amphibian locomotion. By the time a child can 'cross-crawl', (crawling with a coordination between opposite hands and knees) the gait of many mammals is visible. Once a child is upright on two feet, he or she seems uniquely human and unless specifically reexplored, the echoes of our complex evolutionary progress fade from view.

Our early movement patterns reveal us as the animals we are, whilst simultaneously disclosing our connections to the environment around us. (It's interesting to remember that a 'body' can refer to the entire physical structure of a human or animal, as well



as a discreet mass of water or land.)

More personally and haphazardly, our human ancestors have frequently bequeathed idiosyncratic gestural details whose appearance cannot be explained, nor whose beginning understood or even remembered.



Recently two sets of close friends have had their first child: one a boy and one a girl. These two children appear, before my eyes, to shift resemblances between their father and mother like the sun coming in and out on an uncertain summer's day.

I know from popular psychology that all children are meant to resemble their father in their first few weeks of life (to provide visual reassurance of paternity).





But several months on, both these children provide irresistible glimpses, of how their father, now their mother. They seem to quote their parents at will. These visual echoes catch at me like a genetic puzzle and I wonder how these traits will shape their histories as they live them.







3. When as a baby Ben Underwood underwent an operation to remove both his damaged eyes, his mother Aquanetta, refused to use the word 'blind'. She told him:

"Ben, you can see me with your hands: you can touch me. [...] you can still see me, Ben, with your nose: you can smell me. And with your ears too, Ben, [I said]: you can see me with your ears. You can hear me."^[5]

Refusing to allow Ben his lack of sight, Aquanetta provided Ben with the opportunity to learn a new way of seeing.

Spontaneously Ben managed, by the age of five, to teach himself how to use the bounce or echo of sound against different surfaces to provide himself with visual information.

^[5] from 'Seeing with Sound' Joanna Moorhead, article in The Guardian newspaper, January 27th, 2007

Called 'echolocation', it's the same system that bats and dolphins use to 'see' with their ears. Using small vocal clicks to generate echoes, Ben's life differs imperceptibly from that of an ordinary sighted person.

Taking the repetition of sound as the potential for a different kind of knowledge; Ben transforms the echoes he hears in an act of perceptual creativity.

The original Echo's condition resulted in the disappearance of her visual presence, Ben's neural interpretation of his condition has allowed him to make the visual world reappear. A world that is as rich in nuance and texture as the world Echo left behind.



After speaking to my friend, I look up the definition of a black hole. Defined as the evolutionary endpoint of a star, one such black hole is thought to be a possible cause of the 'Big Bang' that resulted in the beginning of our universe. A black hole has a gravitational field so intense that neither sound nor light can escape from it. With little to betray its presence, this final frozen ending of a (celestial) body's end is almost perceptually impossible to imagine. In a black hole, time and space become mixed and entwined until no distinction remains. When and where can no longer be defined as such. An end is the same as a beginning.

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