

## E C H O

I want to draw together a series of threads that I have been unravelling in encountering the presentations of Kathy Cleland and Mari Velonaki. The tense is here that of a future anterior, of what I will have encountered as anticipation, an echo without an originary voice. In this it follows something of the temporality of the echo, or at least a temporality I would want to explore concerning an echo without an origin. But, let's commence with mirrors and what can and cannot be done with and to them. We go to the source, so to speak, to the Model endlessly repeated, to Plato's Republic, Book X, Section 596:

But how would it be if there were a man who produced everything that every single other craftsman is able to make? That would be a man of enormous power, uncanny and astonishing. In fact, there is such a man: he produces everything and anything. He can produce not only implements, but also what comes forth from the earth, producing plants and animals and everything else; and indeed himself too, and besides that, earth and sky, even the gods, and everything in the heavens and in the underworld. But such a producer, standing above all beings and even above the gods, would be a sheer wonderworker! Yet there is such a *demiourgos*, and he is nothing unusual; each of us is capable of achieving such production. It is all a matter of observing in what way he produces.

And what *tropos* is that, which makes possible a production that is capable of producing anything and everything? Such a *tropos* presents no difficulties: by means of it one can go ahead and produce things everywhere and without delay. But you can do it quickest if you just take a mirror and point it around in all directions.

We understand in this dialogue between Socrates and Glaucon that Plato has really scored his point with the example of the mirror, going to the heart of his Doctrine of Forms and understanding of mimesis. We are, no doubt, already familiar with Plato's three "makers," that of the ideal form as model (the gods); that of the artifact as copy (the artisan) and that of the copy of the copy, the image (the artist). We are aware of Plato's denigration of the artist as the one leading us from the truth, and the artisan's artifact being a shadow of the Idea. And then there is the other dangerous mirror-story, that of Narcissus and the reflected image. The mirror so far, it seems, is anything but virtuous.

There is another story implicating Narcissus, that of Echo: For having tricked the goddess Juno, Echo is punished by losing the capacity for original speech, only being able to repeat the last words she heard. On encountering Narcissus, and wanting to seduce him, Echo is repelled by the youth who retreats into his own self-enclosing gaze saying "I would die before I would give you a chance at me." Echo can only repeat endlessly the last of his words: "I give you a chance at me." Then her metamorphosis (this is one of Ovid's stories after all):

Her body dries and shrivels till voice only  
And bones remain, and then she is voice only  
For the bones are turned to stone. She hides in the woods  
And no one sees her now along the mountains,

But all may hear her, for her voice is living

Death of the living voice or life of the dead voice, there are other versions of this encounter that moves between a scene of seduction, a mirror of reflection and a Dionysian dismemberment and scattering. The most complex account is that by Pierre Klossowski concerning *Diana at her Bath*. With Klossowski we engage two lines of complication to the Platonic model and copy, one in a direction most fully explored by Gilles Deleuze with respect to his understanding of simulacra and the other in a direction opened initially by Martin Heidegger in his reading of the passage from Plato we have already cited, aimed not at the denigration of mimesis but rather at the question of making.

We will approach the second one first. In Plato's text, just after the passage we cited there is something of a cesura or break, a kind of breaking off of the text dealing with the Model, the Copy and the Image. Plato will move to another trio, that of the user, the maker and the artist. While the maker produces an artifact from an ideal form, this same maker needs to take advice from someone who uses what is made in order to make correctly. What is at stake is not a denigration of mimesis as a false copying, but a grappling with the *tropos* of making, the manner of making such that the Idea produces itself as present. The mirror image of the sun reflected in its surface is a producing of the sun, but it is not the producing of the *eidos*. The question becomes how does the outward appearance of an Idea (that is Being) reveal itself except through its appearing through something else, either through the wood of this particular bed frame (Plato's example), or the painting of this bed frame or the reflection of this bed frame? The Platonic dialogue will conclude that Being, the pure outward appearance of bedframeness for example, is an *eidos* not seen by virtue of any medium. It is not produced, nor found in the mediums of things produced. It is given in the revealing of the whatness of beings, and crucially, the orientation or turning of the making to this giving is what is crucial.

But how would this making proceed if not by model and copy, if not from the recognition of identity to that of difference as that which differs in identity? How would "making" proceed as *tropos*, as a way of being, if not by *eidos* and mimesis? Deleuze presents us with a proposition concerning two distinct readings of the world. One invites us to think difference from the standpoint of a previous similitude or identity. The other thinks similitude or identity as the product of a deep disparity. The first defines the world of copies and representations, the world as icon. The second defines the world of simulacra, world as phantom. Difference occupies the centre of a decentered system. The first tells the story of Narcissus, the second makes sense of Echo. Klossowski's *Diana at her Bath* infinitely complicates these two worlds, a choice between them or the movements from one to the other. What Deleuze learns from Plato is the Nietzschean project of the overturning of Platonism. Plato will emphasise that the simulacrum is not a degraded copy. Rather, it denies the very distinction between original and copy, model and representation and in this sense undermines the whole Doctrine of Forms. Hence, it cannot simply be equated with the false copy of the artist. Simulation is the phantom itself, the false as a power. Deleuze suggests that for Klossowski Being is the simulacrum whereby the same and the similar are produced. Though, we need to emphasise that the artificial is not the simulacrum; rather, they are opposed. To invoke the artificial is already to return to a Platonism of the copy of the copy.

Let us say something about Klossowski's reading of the myth of Diana. Diana is an Olympian deity, at times coinciding with Artemis. She is the huntress with silver bow (a lunar figure)

and silver arrows who in taking on human form hunts deer for the Cyclops and Hercules in an eternal return that moves from the hunt to bathing to Olympus and again to the hunt. Actaeon is human, a hunter with his hounds whose desire is to catch Diana bathing. As a goddess, Diana is not visible, so what is it that Actaeon strives to see? Diana bathes, not because she is exhausted from the hunt but to return to the serene uselessness of Olympus. Actaeon wears a stag's head in order to snare Diana. The pool, site of bathing and Actaeon's aim at seduction forever offers the scope of reflection. But here is Klossowski's complexity:

Of course, invisible Diana, while contemplating Actaeon as he is imagining her, muses on her own body; yet this body, in which she will manifest herself to herself, she actually borrows from Actaeon's imagination. Diana could have chosen some other visible form: doe, bear or, assuming she wanted to manifest her principle, some form that would have terrified Actaeon and kept him at a distance. But on the contrary, adorable as a goddess, she wants to be adorable also as a woman, in a body which, once seen, will excite the passions of mortal man.

For Klossowski, there is a daemon as intermediary that is Actaeon's imagination and Diana's mirror. The daemon is constitutive of simulacra, existing between the immortal serenity of gods and the mortal passions of humans, which is to say both passionate and immortal. This passionate immortality would be Klossowski's understanding of Being, as the simulacrum that in an eternal return opens a recognition of the beings that are. How does this play out? Diana bathes to purge the images that the name "Diana" calls forth for Actaeon: mortality, passion and blood. At the same moment Actaeon needs to shed his hunter's mentality for Diana to approach the pool to wash. The stag's head he wears must have the virtue of inciting him to an authentic act at the moment of pure imposture. And this is the power of the simulacra and the hidden origin of the virtual, as it is located not in the point of view of the false copy of a mirror, nor even in an ideal model that would guide a producing, but in the point of view of the virtue of the authenticity of contrivance. It is Actaeon who is required to take on the very transparency of the pool in which Diana is to bath.

As it transpires, Actaeon by chance, which is to say by accident, encounters Diana unexpectedly at her bath. She, startled by his appearance, covers herself with one hand and with the other splashes water in his eye to obscure his vision, while uttering: "Now you may tell you saw me here unclothed / If you can tell at all." And, simultaneously, she turns him into a stag which his own hounds immediately ravage and decimate.

There is a complication of becomings emphasized in this account that cannot be quite unraveled by separating out the actants from the field or scene of the action. Rather the phantasms of simulation, expressed for Klossowski in the daemon, are at once neither a distribution of forms and representations, along the lines of mimesis or similitude. Nor are they a play of signifying elements premised on a radical absence. It would not be the case of a radical misrecognition nor the insistence of the letter in the unconscious. Rather, we might begin to recognize along the contours of this daemon, a way of considering the notion of avatar as it has been activated in contemporary discourses on digital contrivances.

As most of you would already know, "avatar" originates in Hindu myth. It is a Sanskrit compound of *ava* connoting "down" and *t'r* connoting "to pass over"; hence translated as "descent." It seems to have first entered the English language in 1784, with the implied meaning of the descent of a divinity to earth in an incarnate form. One may immediately

think here, for example, of Diana at her Bath. This date suggests that we could not separate the arrival of the word outside of a European expansion to the East, a colonialism that by 1859 will find in the expression “avatar” something of its own simulation: “manifestation or presentation to the world as a ruling power or object of worship.” By 1880 it had taken a broader reading of “manifestation or display.” Though we recognize this word activates a terrain that is immersively digital, we also recognize the extent to which the oldest concerns themselves activate the most current terrain of the avatar. It is still the circular engagements with appearance and reality, as if Plato did not put it to rest, or Kant, or Hegel, or Heidegger, Deleuze or Derrida. There is truly something that will not rest in the face of more than enough extraordinary accounting for the conundrum of seeing and saying. The digital avatar is merely another genesis in the impassability of this question. We might yet approach it again from the point of view of a curious conversion or crossing of meanings that first made their appearance in Eurocentric cultures around the 14<sup>th</sup> century. I am referring to the convergence of *ingenium* and *machina*.

We understand machine, in its earliest meanings to refer to a contrivance, indeed, to be able, and in this sense related closely to the proximity of *techne* and *tropos*, where *tropos* concerns a question of orientation and turning, how in the process of making one maintains oneself, applies oneself, to what one ties oneself or binds oneself in making. How does one belong to one’s making? *Techne* concerns a knowhow in making. By the 14<sup>th</sup> century it would come to mean a structure of any kind, material or immaterial. By the 17<sup>th</sup> century, its emphasis became that of the suppression of manual labour. Engine is derived from *ingenium*, initially referring to a “native talent” or genius, an actual disposition or temper. It moved to emphasising the human skill in contriving, ingenuity but also artfulness, cunning and trickery, also machination in the sense of contrivance. By the 14<sup>th</sup> century it began to refer to the instance or product of ingenuity, artifice, contrivance or device. By the 15<sup>th</sup> century, it became a mechanical contrivance, a machine, implement or tool.

We may trace via a series of genealogies the coming apart of the human and the machine, on the one hand from a simple etymological engagement with the emergence in the 14<sup>th</sup> century of an instrumental question of the world. Equally we could appeal to Heidegger’s work on technology and the radical departure from a Greek understanding of poesis as a bringing forth or revealing of Being in a work where the essence of *techne* is this revealing as a belonging of human being to Being. Heidegger will contrast this with modernity’s production as a challenging forth that reveals the severance or oblivion of a belonging of human being and Being in the standing reserve of whatever is for production. In this sense, the question of the human and machine, perhaps activated by recognition of the avatar as phantasm opens a relation between *ingenium* and *machina* that will not repeat the circular paradox of appearance and reality but will reveal the virtuous as the greatest number of simulacra.