

# SEXUAL ANAPHORA: A METHODOLOGICAL DAYDREAM...

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*[We] can even say that anaphora is the most basic form of repetition. It is then a figure that plays materially and uniquely on the sound of words. We have anaphora when, in a segment of discourse, a word or a group of words is taken up again at least once, just as it is at whatever position in the text this might be.*

— Georges Molinié, "Anaphore"<sup>1</sup>

If I open my discussion of sameness with this quotation, it's not just because one beginning is as good as another — though one may as well set out from a paperback reference book as from a Hellenistic grammar; it makes little difference if one has no idea where one might be going and intends only to drift from one point to another. Or indeed, if one intends, as I do now, only to establish that the suppositions I will be making might indeed be points — at least they would have this in common, other than the sound or echo of philosophies of the self — the same and the object in their complex interaction.

But it is also that Molinié's definition might seduce someone who is listening attentively for the sounding of a same-desire in the noise of language. In Roland Barthes' *A Lover's Discourse* is it not the same thing that always lacks? Does not this thing always appear only through words, without its sameness ever having more of a name than lack, or loss or simply failure — whatever the intense particularity and differentiation of each configuration in his dictionary of love?<sup>2</sup> In the illustration below, the replication of taut concaves, the superfetation of the *sèmes* of sex and conventional codings of sexual desire overwhelm the visual field in an anaphoric ecstasy that projects longing beyond the inevitable cumshot.

Molinié goes on to give his own example of anaphora, a quatrain from Paul Valéry that uses the word *voir* four times; "but," he remarks, "despite the apparent syntactic symmetry, the distribution of this repeated word is not rigorously identical." In the extraordinary complexity of *voir*'s positions and relations, then, anaphora gives an attractive breath of life to its text, a rhythm and a suspense. It is as if the figure itself, with its

elusive stability, pleurably allows *différance* its quality as a condition of the subject. The anaphora is both the rhetorical accomplishment of a sovereign subjectivity and a kind of stammering or semantic postponement of the subject, although the figure itself is necessarily not a unit of meaning but a microstructure.

There are dryer or more rigorous expositions of anaphora. One need only turn to Tzvetan Todorov's discussion of the repetition of pronominal functions to see that anaphora is not always quite the same as itself and that its forms — which structure pronouns, nouns, and verbs — do not work in exactly the same way.<sup>3</sup> But I will stick with Molinié's relatively simple version not only for its charm but because it enables me to approach sameness without immediate recourse either to comparison, analogy, or homology; that is to say, without running through the canon of its theoretical framings and the grounds on which it can be established. Rather, as in Valéry, the idea of an unfolding, a reprise, or a condensation of meaning in difference, throughout the duration of an utterance or the length of a paragraph or stanza, sets sameness free from the structures of comparability, which otherwise establish its character as a concept for classification and control.

The introduction to Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things* is so complete in its exposition of this matter that it leaves us with little choice other than to imagine how we might, as a political gesture, set about finding an escape from comparability without lapsing into a sentimental individualism (if that could ever be the outcome of avoiding a rhetorical procedure). Evidently sameness and comparison can hardly be taken apart and each is a starting point for thinking about the other and the narratives that surround them. According to the formulation given by the Abbé de Condillac in his *De l'art d'écrire*, comparison is a figure concerned primarily with the relation of like to like. Yet, to follow Foucault, it may well be that comparison alone establishes the likeness of two things by organizing and disclosing the categories of appearance that can name their similarities or samenesses within a particular dispositif. As a political gesture, then, comparing the unlike seems to be an inevitable and desirable abuse of invention, a positive turn to catachresis as resistance. Following the unsettling of the sign in *différance*, the ironically deconstructive gesture of turning things over into sameness might in turn become deconstruction's nemesis. This points to the conceptual absurdity of sameness after Foucault, Freud, or Derrida.

Sameness itself has always itself to be contained and ordered in order to order and to name. Comparing two paintings with each other — suspected Boticellis, for example — each against an established Boticelli to see if either or both are by the master himself, is not quite the same as comparing one's lover to a summer's day or Achilles to a lion. In fact, as we know, in the second case the summer's day falls short of the lover's attributes, while in the third the lion is the only proper measure of heroic courage. But in all three cases comparison has to do with establishing a set of common properties shared by or common to objects (Achilles and the lion both roar?) or

subjects. Inevitably, comparison concerns the location and measurement of attributes within the framework of a specific system such as an art-historical canon, the poetics of affect, the figuring of the epic, and so on. In the event, the lover is more temperate than a summer's day; Achilles is exactly like a lion in respect of his courage; the earlobe in painting 1 is less like that in an established Boticelli than the lobe in painting 2, which is in turn a separate difference or sameness from that of the story — perhaps all three depict the same scene in the life of Christ — yet another sameness which is not necessarily related to the other details compared by the connoisseur.

In and between all our instances, sameness is conjunctural, particular, partial, different, and, while tending to tautology, liable to disperse into disparate kinds of narrative. In the case of the Boticelli, for example, such a comparison could lie at the heart of a story of crime or forgery, an illegal export, mafiosi doings, and so on. Or it might just as well be an element in some studies of art historiography and the theory of the connoisseur. In the case of the summer's day it has to do neither with the loved one nor with the summer's day but with the opening of a space for the hyperbolic figuring of the lover's capacity to love. To insist on my point, then, sameness is only conceptually valuable within a narrative framing that renders it specific or as unlike other instances of sameness as possible.

Anaphora is not dependent: on the contrary, we might think of it as an excess to comparative sameness's tautology while remaining ambivalent with respect to the agency of the utterance. My illustration is indicative of this in its elaboration of a difference between sameness and resonance, which in this particular cartoon is as much invested in contingency of butt and breast as that of dick and dick. As the whole cartoon unfolds, the drifting between metaphor, metonymy, and synecdoche becomes a play with the unsameness of the comparable, the swelling of a leathered buttock, a dick-head, a nipple, or a breast.

It is one of the very few Tom of Finland cartoons that involves a female. She has been ordered away from the young sailor she has picked up by a marauding cop, who takes the sailor for himself. As a small male orgy builds up before the frustrated girl, the cop hands her



From *Kake* (samizdat copy, Paris, circa 1983)

his nightstick. In his own way Tom is telling us about the difference between the penis and the phallus, and that whatever this might be, they *can* have the same effect. Or he is telling us that the substitution of the penis for the phallus via the fantasy of the hypertrophic male organ produces an echo in which the penis becomes differenced from itself in its escalating but impossible approach to the dimension of the signifier; which here, in the shape of the symbol of police power, can anyway be set aside to be absorbed by the female “lack.” This complexity is what gives the images its anaphoric resonance rather than collapsing the various terms into a categorical cum-shot.

Ironically, this resonance sounds in an image which is unproblematically gay, one that needs hardly be read against the grain to produce its gayness, or against the grain of historical interpretations — as, say, is the case with Caravaggio. In this respect gay pornography is not very queer. In some sense, it is even the inverse of queer insofar as its excess derives from its fanatical adherence to the comparison of like with like, which anaphora eventually structures as never truly identical. Read against the grain precisely to reveal itself as their repressed or uncanny signified, the queer that discloses itself in historical materials is analogous to anaphora’s echoing, but in a different way. It proceeds by means of a form of repetition that, in eliding its agent through the serendipity, naturalizes the self’s echo in historical materials, enabling the queer subject to see or hear itself as such in all fragmentary emergings. If these are disclosed after the event, it is by no means in the *après coup*, but rather as the fully and deliberately restaged trauma of exclusion or repression.

In search of an analogy for this I want to drift into a reflection about the inseparable fates of Echo and Narcissus. Between the laterally inverted same reflected in Narcissus’ pool and the repetition of others’ last words to which Echo is condemned — that is to say, between repetition in vision and in hearing, each disjoined from identity by inversion or delay — there is a mournful or a joyful enunciation of either loss or presence, yet indifferently, as if they were the same.<sup>4</sup> The queering of historical culture, whether of an artist like Caravaggio, a whole genre of nineteenth-century social novels, or of an urban space, entrains the recognition of a self that can only be perceived as such after it has been reclaimed both from and through inversion; from its own inversion and elision in history, and through the riposte that is the inversion of historical significance. Those historical gestures or enunciations, once revealed as factitious, which is the quality of the queer, then come to refigure the newly discovered self as both like and unlike itself — if only because facticity is now played out as essence. The fake assumes the sometime authority of the copy in the performance of sex and gender, as the price of signifying and admitting the (im)possibility of origin. The performance is nothing but the acting out of disclosure that marks the queer critique of identity. It is as if Narcissus’ tears, which shatter his reflection, and Echo’s repetitions, which unvoice her, have merged signs of the inauthentic.<sup>5</sup>

This figure of sameness as a series of disguised yet similar and coexisting hyper-particularities occupies a curious apposition to those that haunt conflicting philosophies of the seventeenth century — in Locke and Descartes, for example, where the same or sameness is a crucial concept for the stability of knowledge in the subject-object relationship, a guarantor of the subject’s stability. In the end we might find ourselves, in our post-textual universe of theory, more at home with the fragile, nervous, and rather hysterical certainties of René Descartes’ thinking of the molten wax in his “Second Meditation,” with its subtle oxymoron of “an infinitude of similar changes,”<sup>6</sup> than with John Locke’s syllogistic and anti-essentialist sureness in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*:

When we see anything to be in any place in any instant of time, we are sure, (be it what it will) that it is that very thing, and not another, which at that same time exists in another place, how like and undistinguishable soever it may be in all other respects: And in this consists *Identity*, when the *Ideas* it is attributed to vary not at all from what they were that moment, wherein we consider their former existence, and to which we compare the present. For we never finding, nor conceiving it possible, that two things of the same kind should exist in the same place at the same time, we rightly conclude, that whatever exists any where at any time, excludes all of the same kind, and is there it self alone. When therefore we demand, whether anything be the same or no, it refers always to something that existed such a time in such a place, which ‘twas certain, at that instant, was the same with it self and no other: From whence it follows, that one thing cannot have two beginnings of Existence, nor two things one beginning, it being impossible for two things of the same kind, to be or exist in the same instant, in the very same place; or one and the same thing in different places.<sup>7</sup>

It is hard to know quite where to engage with Locke’s argument, which is so complete in its logic and so utterly unqueer in the terms I have been elaborating. Unfix “place,” for instance, as Freud does in his metaphor of Rome as a map for the human mind, with its untoward facts of coexistence, and Locke’s logic loses its footing straight away. It is a logic of and for the same as a counter-problematic, as a viable category of the positivity of knowing — even though the syllogism may, for a modern ear, sound like a fetishistic practice in its repetitions. It is a logic that will continue to echo through analytic philosophy, just as Diotima’s more precarious or teleological discourse on the same topic in Plato’s *Symposium* echoes weakly or perversely here, underlining the confusion of the old idealist and materialist logics of the same:

Even during the period for which any living being is said to live and to retain his identity — as a man, for example, is called the same man from boyhood to old age — he does not in fact retain the same attributes although he is called the same person....What happens with pieces of knowledge is even more remarkable; it is not merely that some appear and others disappear, so that we no more retain our identity with regard to knowledge than with regard to the other things I have mentioned, but that each individual piece of knowledge is subject to the same process as we are ourselves.<sup>8</sup>

If in Locke one thing can correlate only to one space, in Plato there is effectively no space at all, as it dissolves before the sophistic question. Diotima's differencing of the same is shortly to be sublimated into the category of the beautiful, which contains all the differences that pertain to it, as if it were a form of entropy. And in this sense the sameness of the human or the "piece of knowledge" is nothing but a rhetorical anaphora, fleetingly pleasing to the ear before it fades into beauty's flat-footed and categorical sameness — which is so unlike the stretchy effects of the sublime. It is not at all the same as Descartes' looking at himself looking at the wax that changes and, despite this, still seeking the minimal guarantee of self-sameness which is built on the awareness of its own challenge or disruption. Despite the romantic history of the *Symposium*, Diotima's reproductive theory of sameness and immortality is as straight as straight, and sames the same(-sex) just as if it were any other longing for the beautiful.

Yet were we to take the desired perpetuation of one's sameness through the possible forms of progeny Diotima outlines — through social, sexual, or intellectual reproduction — it is striking how queer this becomes as a retroactive process. The progeny of the queer is always in the past, or in the spaces of the present, disrupted as it passes by. The future exists as little more than the promise of a democratic entropy finally brought on by recognition, the absorption of the desire for the same into a universal sameness or de-differentiation due to the equality of all desires. The iterative project of the queer is to bring its own historical presence into the preconscious of contemporary enunciation and to announce that self hyperbolically as always having been the repressed precondition of the normative's enunciation.

But were we to emphasize the anaphoric structure of Locke's argument, it would dissolve into rhetorical procedure as the other of logic's persuasive, well-judged mode of sounding a conviction that syllogism can secure only as tautology. Anaphora would then be the hysterical symptom of the unavailability of the same in language, here masquerading as logic or as rigor. But still, the same to which Narcissus' flowery memorial and Echo's voice belong is not a thing in Locke's sense at all, though it does seem like an *objet* in Lacan's; nor is it an object in the sense of the common origin for two separate things, a reverberation and a flower, though both — flower and echo — are comparable as things only in terms of that common moment of their origin. This same is a same of before language and yet only in it, the desire of the other; and, in consequence, if we are to pursue a logic of a kind, Echo and Narcissus are similar in that they are equally effects of desire's absence — they are a way of telling absence. Locke's "...from whence it follows..." is terribly beside the point of this sameness, yet allows us to see that this other sameness of things, in coexistence and imbrication, as an effect of the object's lack or absence, is always profoundly historical. It has to be remade at every human contingency. The same has to be invented as a supposition at each moment of its iteration, but each new moment is overdetermined and, in that, the same is also old, as old as the differences that enable it to appear.

If this queer kind of sameness of contingency resembles something in Locke, it is rather more like the relation between substance and qualities, the perceptible and the imperceptible, the concept and the sign. It, as a form of relation, has something of performance to it, insofar as it is only the perceived, in its transient particularity, that realizes the concept.

In a different register again, examples of this might be the “oceanic” feeling or the “uncanny” in Freud, the triggering of which depends upon a same mechanism of a contingent relation between the earliest of repressions and a now, while the now is never the same, even if it triggers the same kind of effect.<sup>9</sup> But here the same suggests some kind of a transfigured regression, to a sameness that precedes the differentiation of individuals. The sameness after differentiation is the sameness of belonging to a series, such as the series of numbers tattooed on the inmates of concentration camps. The final effect of this sameness is the de-differentiation of life and death.<sup>10</sup> Sameness is accomplished through the elimination of any signs of incomparability, which is another form of the hyperbolic enunciation of identity. The French writer Jean-Louis Bory, pointing out the accumulation of serial numbers that register us as drivers, with social security, in the passport office, at the bank, and so on, noted that none of these have as yet become the same as us.<sup>11</sup> And even if denotation arrived at the moment of wholly instrumentalizing difference — this driver is not that driver — how would these numbers relate to his Denise, his not-quite-the-same-as-himself gay self? The question is less dramatic than that of the camps; but the very difference between them touches once again against the menace of a non-anaphoric entropy, the untoward effects of badly invested desire.

Or, we might begin to see that the same is not comparable with the same. At the moment of its performance, or execution, the thing is as if a metaphysical thing, fully present, yet it is anchored only in the *énoncé*, determined as possible by the *dispositif*, and referring either to no-thing or to some-thing that precedes the entry into language, the initial repression of the drives for example. The problem of a syncretic theoretical field is mapped out in the microstructural figure of this last sentence of mine, in the repetition of the same word, “thing,” in a non-iterative relation to itself and a non-systematic relation to its context, being by turn either subject or object of a performance, and so disrupting both the passivity of its concept on the one hand and its usual close liaison with “no” and “some” on the other. If this is so, and can be admitted, then the theory of the subject risks merging with its poetic. And that we might say, is a pure utopia: where the poetic and the thetic become the same.

My thanks to Barbara Engh for her help with this piece, which I hope she will enjoy.

1. Georges Molinié, *Dictionnaire de rhétorique* (Paris: Les usuels de poche, 1992), 49. It would have been more dignified to begin with Cicero or Dennis of Halicarnassus than an undergraduate handbook, yet Molinié has a subtle way of treating his discussions as an after-effect of these long histories.  
My essay is so clearly indebted to the work of Judith Butler, Jacques Derrida, Jonathan Dollimore, Leo Bersani, Michel Foucault, David Halperin, and Pat Califia, among others, that I let their words often echo through mine without footnotes — my confidence that my references will be recognized is matched only by my idleness.
2. Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), is exemplary in its repetitions-in-difference, at both the complex, structural level of the iteration of interlocutory names, “Lacan,” “Werther,” and so on, and at the local and particular moment of trying to seize on a meaning or an image.
3. Oswald Ducrot and Tzvetan Todorov, *Dictionnaire encyclopédique des sciences du langage* (Paris: Seuil, 1972), 358ff. Ducrot and Todorov's reading of anaphora is far more complex than mine. For an approach closer to mine, see Algirdas Julien Greimas and Joseph Courtès, *Sémiotique: Dictionnaire raisonné de la théorie du langage* (Paris: Hachette, 1979), 14, 15.
4. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Book III, trans. Frank Justus Miller (London: W. Heinemann, 1984). See also Naomi Segal, *Narcissus and Echo: Women in the French Récit* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991) for a discursive overview of the myth as literary practice.
5. The repetition of this process in the larger field of what we call identity studies enlarges the anaphoric figure as a canon of cathected objects — Artemisia, Caravaggio, Gertrude Stein, Oscar Wilde, and so on. But that is yet another story of comparison taking hold, mapping field and habitus.
6. “No, certainly it is not that, since I imagine it admits of an infinitude of similar changes, and I nevertheless do not know how to compass the infinitude by my imagination, and consequently this conception which I have of the wax is not brought about by the faculty of imagination. What now is this extension? Is it not also unknown? For it becomes greater when the wax is melted, greater when it is boiled, and greater still when the heat increases; and I should not conceive [clearly] according to truth what wax is, if I did not think that even this piece that we are considering is capable of receiving more variations in extension than I have ever imagined” (René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, in *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, vol. I, trans. Elizabeth S. Haldane and G. R. T. Ross [New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979], 155, brackets in original.)
7. John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 328. References to Descartes and Locke were originally located on the internet by searching the words “same” and “sameness” on philosophic and psychoanalytic sites. In effect this process is essential to the slightly bizarre composition of my essay, which itself repeats the anaphoric structure with such research methods.
8. Plato, *The Symposium*, trans. W. Hamilton (Baltimore: Penguin, 1951), 88-89. See, for example, David Wiggins, *Sameness and Substance* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980) for an acme of the contemporary analytic philosopher's relation to a problem that has not even a perspective on a post-Derridean displacement of the question of meaning.
9. Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. James Strachey et al. (London: Hogarth Press, 1953-1974), 21:64; Freud, “The ‘Uncanny,’” in *SE* 17:217-256.
10. See Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (New

York, Zone, 1999) for a sustained discussion of this question. Agamben's Adornian critical pessimism articulated through Benveniste's principle of enunciation is especially pertinent to a critique of the desire for infinite differentiation.

11. Jean-Louis Bory, *Ma moitié d'orange* (Paris: Julliard, 1973), 115-116.

