I

What is knowing how to listen? By which principle sign does one recognize the fact of
being well listened to? Why is it so precious, somebody who knows how to listen? Three
questions that point towards the same quality. Confidence. Confidence that the listener
inspires and that the listening builds up. This phenomena is well known in psychotherapy, but it is no less present in any human relation. It is quite possible that people who are confident in themselves and their relationship in the world have been well listened to. We tell more easily our positions and put out our hand more easily when we have confidence. This is obvious. However, we all have known arrogant and self-sufficient people who are overflowing with self-confidence but are incapable of listening. How can this be? When they have been listened to? When they have been privileged when listening? Precisely no, they have probably never been well listened to, their sufficiency is a symptom of a great lack of confidence—a symptom that hides the problem. There is an equation between self-confidence and listening at least in the following sense: all capability of assertiveness between self-confidence and listening which is not accompanied by a listening capacity hides a profound lack of self-confidence.

One could believe that every good listener enjoys good self-confidence. This is probable but it is too early to say that. There is a least one shadow in this picture, people who have learned to listen through inhibition or timidity (though an inherited handicap or a violent and chaotic environment) seem to suffer a low level of self-confidence. Yet their level of listening is often very high. We’ll have to come back to that in our conclusion.

But the important thing is first to understand the gamble of listening: to offer to the other the occasion of building his or her self-confidence, and this seems possible even when the listener does not benefit him or herself of greater self-confidence.

II

Autobiography is generally understood as the written narration of significant events of one’s life. The white page listens well to the solitary soul. One confides often more easily to that than to one's relatives, particularly when nobody around listens well.

But the page which listens to me starts to talk as soon as it is full. It will even repeat exactly what I have told it, or at least the words will be repeated. But only the words? Have I succeeded to write what I wanted to say? Have I even tried? And, especially, is this even possible?

Between the signs that the page receives and repeats everything that I have to say the distance is generally abysmal. (Generally I have to say something sufficiently important to myself that I deem needs to be listened to and yet is not necessarily understood). This in fact is a great source of frustration when we write in order to put the content of our consciousness in writing. Then we risk having to start everything again or to simply abandon it. However the page has listened well to us. But then we ought to be able in turn to listen to what the page tells to discover the lapses the symbols the keys of the unconscious that the writing permits even against ourselves. That is what in fact listening should reveal. Because all authentic listening invites to reveal to oneself hidden things often well-hidden.

The first moment of listening is only a recording. The analyst who gives me one empty hour of his time to listen to me does not listen to me less in proportion of the time of the hour that I fill with my talk. He only records. He often sends me the keys of the unconscious when he hears them. Because that’s what he does in a way. He listens to what I tell, in order to understand what I do not tell or rather to allow me to understand what I do not tell. Perhaps in fact, he doesn’t understand anything. It’s not really his business but not quite. He only listens well to enable me to understand what I wasn’t able to listen to.
myself or in the structures of the unconscious such as it acts in me.

But for listening/understanding (entendre) I need to trust myself. So I need to be listened to. How far can a blank page go? As far as the complete recording of what I tell in writing. This is not bad. But what can the blank page do for me? The page that I fill with my confidences can she still listen to me? When I read myself what am I reading? It is possible that I am only reading what I believe I wrote? It is possible that the level of my reading stays at the same level of my writing. And it’s generally the case for whoever writes in the first degree. In this case the full page stops listening. But in the opposite case where my level of reading allows a certain critical distance from my level of writing, it is possible that the filled page allows me to listen to what I haven’t listened to/understood before. And the examples are many of writing practices which have therapeutic benefits. But all of these cases of success imply a level of self-confidence already sufficiently high because only confidence allows critical distance, particularly to oneself.

But then two questions arise. Why encourage the practice of writing which only benefits the author when the benefit is already there somehow. (In fact, the level of self-confidence has to be sufficiently elevated so that we can develop it some more). And why encourage writing practice which apparently only benefits its author?

We can easily answer both questions in the same way. As far as we write for ourselves and we feel sufficiently strong for the adventure of self-discovery, it is a great exercise. A very valid way to educate oneself. But what is the intention of this exercise, this way of writing to the writing itself? Many authors are ambitious to publish. What then are the conditions?
III

Literature never imitates reality. At best it doubles it. (ref. Chapsal, 1994). As exemplary as can be a life, there is no interest in publishing it without writing it. i.e. without reworking it in the literary space itself. The strength of literature is precisely to create reality from imagination; all attempts to copy the real directly ends in unbelievability (irresemblance).

When we want to tell and publish one’s life, it’s better to give the writing to somebody else; biographers are also writers—they are literary people. Of course there are exceptions from Rousseau to Emerson. We have found extraordinary autobiographies but these may be first masterpieces of literature. Let’s not forget that. We can bet then that even and especially in these cases that la doublure is perfect. (note from transl. La doublure means the doubling and also the inner lining/facing of a coat). Indeed the realism grows bigger and more involving as the imagination fantasy grows on the surface of this reality; that opaque surface behind the mirror transforms transparency in the reflection.

Leiris has practiced an art of autobiography in which the language occupies first place. Instead of telling his life through language, he offers himself to language so that that language tells itself. It’s difficulty to be more clear regarding the relative and secondary place that self-conscious and self-affection-narcissism (the narcotic pleasure that the subject offers to itself in speaking of himself and his life) have in autobiography. We are very close to poetry if not already in there. Should we then conclude that an autobiography that does not answer to the cannons of literature is without interest for the reader? The question deserves to be asked specifically because autobiography occupies an important place in education, I mean, in research.

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IV
It is certain that autobiography gives data to research. Certain researchers (Pinot) have helped people in the writing of their life and elaborated a publishable objectivisation within the cannons of research. It is certain that the publication of life stories or at least part of them as an accompanying document becomes necessary and relevant.

Several self-published publications can indeed provide privileged material on life stories. It is then certainly interesting for research that autobiographies, even literarily bad ones, are published. Their mediocrity insures in fact a great authenticity (a better transparence of reality). Imagination and style may not alter too greatly the events. One may then have empirical data which is relatively objective for the research of some representations of subjectivity.

V

Autobiography would then have a least three principle modalities: therapeutic (building up and deepening one’s self-confidence); literary emphasis (contributing to the development of literature) and objective emphasis (empirical data for analysis and research).

Three modalities which can in fact be in the same text.

And modalities which do not necessarily correspond to the intention of the subject-author. We can believe the authenticity of its tales to its objectivity and yet find an exemplary piece of poetry, a piece that refers to a truth outside referencing. A text within which we can see the truth where the truth is on the other side of the empirical, in the literary space. The unconscious is that much more able to cheat the subject-author as the author doesn’t suspect it. It is then possible to find “autobiographies” à la M. Jordan (trans. Note: M. Jordan writes literature without believing he does so). And the opposite is no less true—we find indeed stories which want to be novelistic but whose imitation of reality kills the text. We can also imagine therapeutic intentions which do not work but which constitute extraordinary material to study the illusions of conscience or a text in the objective modality despite coming out of a therapeutic intention. Finally, we can say that literary works which came out of lived lives have also served as therapy to their authors and who knows who without them knowing it.

And the combinations and proportions in the mix are many, but this is not yet essential to our quest. The question is rather—knowing if autobiography might consist in a modality deeper yet and upon which the three others depend which would ensure the listening and development of self-confidence of the reader. A modality which would allow the autobiographical text to really listen to the reader. A written page filled with words that continue in the reader the work begun on the blank page of the author.
VI

I propose to call this fourth modality acousmatic. The acousmatic is an old practice of ancient Greece that consists of listening while hiding behind a curtain; the listener never sees the one who is speaking. I borrow the word and, of course, I recreate its meaning.

Given our definition of listening, if the text listens well, the reader has a chance to understand something, maybe something new about himself, but this is not necessarily original; we could say that all the great literary texts listen well because the reader hears unexpected things that are part of his reading. But Barthe (no date) has shown it is the very notion of the text itself which is in question.

The text, if we need to remind ourselves, is not the printed thing that the author publishes but each of the readings of the printed page and even the sum of all these readings which always contain a part added by the reader. When I close a book, and continue my reading in my own images, I’m always in the text provided that I weave the link between these images and the text. The danger for the reader is to project himself into the text of reading himself, of only listening to himself, that is, not to weave any links between the text and himself or that this “self” that he listens to is a surface subject which he doesn’t see is totally made up.

A text that listens, which belongs to the listening modality, attempts to push the reading process towards the discovery of this fabrication, of oneself in the region of one’s own symbols, of one’s own textuality; the reader is always invited to weave links among the
different parts of himself.

The “text” following Barthe is then the self of the reader; the acousmatic text, the text written intentionally or not in the modality, listens to a subject going deeper inside and that becomes his or her own text. Conditions of security are created within which the subject-reader begins to build sufficient self-confidence to have the courage to explore his inhibitions, and then his own profound symbols and significations. The reader is listened to and encouraged by the text to hear himself from the depth of the language or the unconscious.

Once more, all good texts, particularly those texts in which connotations can provoke that modality—that is listening well—an acousmatic intention is not necessary for the modality to be present in the text. But this modality perhaps implies, as we will see, editorial conditions that published texts rarely meet. The unity itself of published texts (the unity of all the parts in a coherent whole that makes the work fit to be published) very quickly imposes contraints on the reader to compose with the content of the printed text (that which would be recognized by a majority of readers as being indeed the content of the text). As does a certain intention of the author to say something, to speak rather than listen. And an author, in the absence of a clear and explicit intention, could very well be the unconscious itself but one that speaks with other symbols (exactly those that make the unity of the published work). As well, there are unknown symbols that the listener must learn to deepen his quest in himself. Without any recognizable touchstones, the reader is often taken into a world too far removed from himself; he hears something but he does not feel that it speaks for himself, in short, the reader does not feel called. The listening is not for him anymore, the text does not listen to him anymore.

And the opposite is no less true; the text that is too ready and that only confirms the author in what he thinks, this text listens very badly. The reader hears something but everything remains on the surface: the reader only hears what he has always heard. It is a variety of the case of projecting oneself in the text.

We can of course attribute the responsibility of these failures to the reader, but this will not help at all his or her self-confidence!

VII

I bet that autobiography practiced in the thickness of the frontier between self and language on the very limit—extensible at will as we will see in rule number 6—between the empirical and the literary is certainly interesting for educational research. Because, despite all the defects of the possible defects of the text—its perverse effects that primarily are narcissism, unrealism or the deformations of reality[2]—a mixed autobiography (that uses language to talk of oneself but that offers itself to language so that language talks of itself) creates holes in the text and veins as well that mark its modality and which completely misleads the reader who would like to project himself inside the text, to entertain him or herself or simply to judge it.[3]

Establishing a frontier between the real and the literary (the thing and its doublure to use the metaphor of Chapsal) is establishing a distinction sufficiently clear between telling the events of one’s life as they happen and reinventing them in writing with all the power of words and imagination. The mixed autobiography seems therefore to ignore this frontier. Let’s rather say that it installs itself in it and stretches it as it requires. To the point where
the story seen from whatever side of the frontier seems always interrupted; incoherences and realness and all sorts of hesitation slip in; paragraphs, phrases, even incomplete words; argumentation mixed with events, elliptical theoretical references—in short a series of annoyances often minor but sometimes major that make difficult if not impossible the unity of the text and therefore its publication.

I make the hypothesis that these defects of the text are markers of the acousmatic modality. I’m not saying they shouldn’t be corrected but one has to take carefully the editorial work as a function of the presence of these markers.

A recent rewriting of a mixed autobiography in which the last stage looks like an unfinished novel allowed me to identify seven rules or rather suggestions to follow in order to favour the importance of that acousmatic modality in the revision for publication of the text and even of all the other texts that I have written in about ten years on these questions. And each of these rules echoes another set of seven rules that I have closely followed doing the editing of my mixed autobiography.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing:</th>
<th>Editing:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Welcome words, all the words and find a manner sweet and respectful to put them aside—especially do not erase or cross out or delete.</td>
<td>1. Order the words and paragraphs obtained. Play with them and start selecting. Reject anything which seems useless from the start.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Welcome the characters, all the characters with the same generosity. Welcome them as they present themselves. Write under their dictation and do not judge their apparent incoherence or unrealness.</td>
<td>2. Ensure the coherence and realness of characters. Be fair to them by treating them with all the required respect for the doublure itself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Recognize or admit the path of the body in writing and experience/feel well all tensions. Welcome all the emotions.</td>
<td>3. Include the emotions but do not be taken by sadness, discouragement, and loss of self-confidence coming from the act of writing. Separate between the emotions that are experienced or depleted in the writing and those that we really feel in front of the text to be finalized. Push away the sad passions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Recognize influences and borrowings marked by some sign one’s appreciation of the other’s unparallel path. Welcome</td>
<td>4. Show your preferences related to a real concern for truth, a concern for ethical truth regarding oneself, an</td>
</tr>
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5. Make a place for the other not to answer his or her or its presumed questions but the knowing it/him/her in the need to be listened to. Write with the goal to be an ear. The text as a drum tried out without even understanding, trace the innervations of hearing. Try to say nothing.

5. Write while knowing someone somewhere needs help. Help that does not come from oneself but from the text as mediation. A mediation that has more chances to succeed as it is written in the desire and the consciousness of helping the other. The help and the other as motif/style of the edition. Refuse systematically to let the success of the text for oneself to be the main thing. Think of the other with the only intention of offering a space not a message where the other can express him or herself with confidence/trust and to say to him or herself the necessary truths to his or her education.

6. Give even to god the chance to help myself/oneself. Welcome grace.

6. Keep alive the idea of mystery. Any opening towards transcendence, teleology, or of the supernatural must remain problematic. But stretch yourself up to there but do not dive or jump in unknown abysses. Real intellectual flexibility, its essential opening, is in the linking not in the jumping.

7. Welcome the unknown…

7. Launch the text. Risk what’s coming back, the misunderstandings, the mistakes. The text does not belong to anybody even though the author is responsible to make it
I’d like, as a conclusion, to come back on a question that I left suspended—the good listener who has low self-confidence. I think that this person is already ready to profit the most from the acousmatic modality in autobiography. Because of being sensitive to listening by experience! and to the lack of self confidence, he or she can without doubt recognize more easily than anybody else the quality of the space that was created in the ear of the text.

Yes?

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[1] The term acousmatic was first used by the followers of Pythagoras. When lecturing Pythagoras sat behind a screen so that content was heard but the source was not seen. Acousmatic has been taken up by composers most notably from France and Canada who suggest that we detach cause from sound (car, voice, sea "sounds like a bird" etc.).

[2] One may have identified the three defects corresponding respectively to the therapeutic, literary and objective modalities.

[3] We have to agree that we don’t yet have criteria to judge the acousmatic modality; we will develop them as we practice it and see its effects. I’m asking for your indulgence before judging this modality with the criteria of other modalities particularly literary necessities/criteria.


[5] Seven rules that enabled me to define the two movements of the hermeneutic circle: the descending spiral that allows the deepening in self in the concrete rooting in the world, and the upward spiral that allows the theoretical elaboration through which one’s work can be judged in light of its contribution to (the) culture.

[6] The acousmatic text does not replace the therapist. But as a mediation of relevance it can however open to the reader the perspective itself of therapy, if that need may exist.
A specialist in curriculum theory and philosophy, Jacques Daignault (University of Quebec, Canada) foregrounds how French philosophers, notably Gilles Deleuze, can offer new perspectives to education particularly in the following three areas: pedagogy as aesthetics, acousmatic in narrative work and the virtual in technology. His last book (H)opéra pour Geneviève (2002) witnessed his political, existential and theological preoccupations which took form in a philosophical, pedagogical, novel-like story wherein writing autobiographically in education is portrayed alongside its neglected epistemological, poetical and methodological indispensables (http://jd.levinux.org/Livres/Hopera_pour_Genevieve/index.html).

His present interests revolve around the Free Software Movement (FSM) as both a philosophical and pedagogical occasion towards eliminating the digital divide. These interests have led him to develop proficiencies with respect to networking recycled computers using Free Software. He has created computer labs in schools as well as in a number of other organizations in economically challenged contexts in Canada and Africa (Gabon and Morocco). He just finished his term as president of the Quebecois Primary and Secondary Teachers Computing Association, the largest group of school-based technology users in Quebec. He has created computer labs in schools as well as in a number of other organizations in economically challenged contexts in Canada and Africa (Gabon and Morocco). He has just finished his term as president of the Quebecois Primary and Secondary Teachers Computing Association, the largest group of school-based technology users in Quebec. He has spearheaded a non-profit organization “Équinux” which is dedicated towards digital equity. He is presently writing a book about the philosophy underpinning the Free Software Movement and its relationship to both the virtual and to pedagogy writ large.

**About the Translator**

**Catalin Ivan** is an independent student and researcher in Toronto, who also produces Internet and e-learning projects. He is currently interested in the contemporary manifestations of hospitality: its meaning and ethical make up, vocabulary and relevance to neo-nomads, immigrants, Open Source, globalization.

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