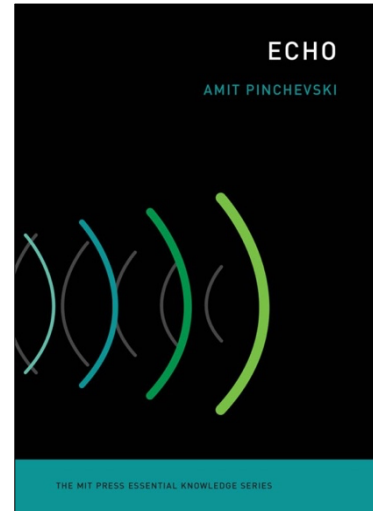


Amit Pinchevski, **Echo**, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2022, 232 pp., \$16.95 (paperback).

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Amit Pinchevski's **Echo** is a beautifully written, short, dense, and rich meditation on "echo," less the acoustic phenomenon *per se* than the way the notion has been appropriated in Western culture, *lato sensu*, over centuries, and its relevance to communication scholars. Navigating through multiple times and fields, it is also a plea for a holistic approach, in times of hyperspecialization. Mainly, all along, it is a rehabilitation of the notion of echo. Starting from the classic myth where the nymph is condemned to repeat sentences, Pinchevski suggests that echo has been mostly seen in a negative manner (e.g., as repetition [including in the modern digital echo chamber], pathology [echolalia], and unfruitful communication [absence of reciprocity]). Each time, he invites readers to go beyond such views, an invitation he expresses in incisive sentences, such as: "Indeed, Echo is nothing but responsive, relational but never assertional" (p. 104). Discussing the rhetoric of echo (that is, the use of repetition in language—poetry, dialogue), Pinchevski salutes its power: "While ostensibly repeating the same thing, echoing actually brings out the changing conditions of uttering, and in so doing, makes the original message susceptible to new meanings" (p. 99). I would concur, but note that, precisely in rhetoric, "echo" (that is, repetition with variation) has long been seen as a resource (e.g., as anadiplosis, anaphora, epiphora, diacope). More audacious is the attempted rehabilitation of the echo chamber, which it has almost become a cliché to vilify as antidemocratic: "And yet there are situations where echo chambers can be democratically enriching, especially for disenfranchised and subjugated groups" (p. 130).



This rehabilitation of echo (at least in human communication) is linked to a certain perspective on communication, away from the precise exchange of fixed meanings in a transparent, clear context. Here Pinchevski echoes J. D. Peters' (1999) *Speaking into the Air*, a book that suggests echo from its very title, although Peters does not consider the notion. For both authors, communication is not a transparent dialogue between reasonable minds but a "dance of differences" (Peters, 1999, p. 65), that is, differences that are not necessarily understood, like echoes would. Like Peters, Pinchevski invites us to consider human communication beyond the classic constraints of the discipline (communication technologies starting at the earliest from the print press), as a phenomenon worth analyzing in the *longue durée*. He does this in a very different manner, both more modest and wider, appropriating a polysemic notion in all possible ways, relying on existing metaphors and adding his own.

Some chapters leave us out of breath, running after the author who is himself going fast. This is especially the case of chapter 7, about "Past Echo." It starts with the story of the discovery of a "constant cosmic microwave radiation" by two physicists, Penzias and Wilson, a radiation "whose origin goes back to the creation of the universe" (p. 161). It came to be known as "the echo of the Big Bang" (p. 162). As

Pinchevski writes himself: "Surely astronomers know enough physics to know that cosmic background radiation is not an echo; it is neither the repetition of sound nor a reflection" (p. 162). But Pincheski takes his cue from the story to discuss events "that had ended long ago but whose consequences persist into the present" (p. 162). Then we move to Walter Benjamin (1937/2006) on *déjà vu*, less as a visual phenomenon (as the French words suggests), but as "events which affect us like an echo (. . .), one awakened by a sound that seems to have issued from somewhere in the darkness of past life" (p. 166), a somber vision contrasted with Proust's madeleine, a more positive kind of "echo." Then we move to an analysis of Palestinian poet Mahmud Darwish's poem where the father, from the distant past, repeats, "I am here," "Here I am," etc., an echo that, according to Pinchevski, is "there to resound the absence of what was once present—both father and land" (p. 170). Then, we learn some archeologists suggested that ancient paintings of mammoths "might be related to rock-sound reflection" (p. 173). We fast-forward to modern and contemporary monumental spaces, with their echoing properties, that may be places "where sound reflections play a comparable role to that played in ancient cultures" (p. 174), with a codicil on monuments where echoes are deliberately used by architects to create a "relational experience" (p. 176) with the past, and, finally, by way of the original myth, Pinchevski discusses the place of echolalia in the construction of the human subject, referring to Levinas.

In this chapter, this small book most clearly verges on the encyclopedic. Indeed, it could have been organized around an alphabetical index (expanding from the short one at the end). I would have preferred more elaborated discussions of the more original points, especially the stronger, more personal ones. In this respect, the final discussion of echolalia's place in the making of the human subject is both the most exciting and most frustrating part of the book. Going away from the multifold pleasure of tracing the uses of echoes across the whole of human culture, the author constructs a personal argument. Within the century-long discussion about the making of the subject, the place of "ego" and "language," he suggests an original contribution on the place of echolalia in the genesis of such a subject, before he masters language. Those pages are the strongest in a book that could have been so many different books but chooses not to choose, being contented with multiple echoes.

Yet, Pinchevski the "echologist" (a quite unimaginable expert, as we have seen) may answer that the very notion of echo invites us to limitlessly open the spectrum of interpretations. Consider trauma, on which a chapter was to be expected, given Pinchevski's expertise on the topic, but he went for new material, which is commendable. What are most traumas but endless echoes of the original trauma? Trauma has been discussed for witnesses (not direct victims), media witnesses (by Pinchevski himself), most recently for parents and companions of victims who can experience "trauma by ricochet" (Emmanuelle, 2020). Where do the echoes of trauma end? Shall we try to put an end to the process of echoing? One could imagine a chapter, in the same vein, rehabilitating Freud's repetition compulsion as a form of helpful echo. This is also a question of academic genre. I may be echoing any social scientist writing about a philosophical book. Pinchevski's book is not a little *précis* on echo (as its inclusion in the "Essential Knowledge" series of the MIT Press may suggest) but a personal piece of, at times, almost poetical philosophy.

Despite my reservations, I quite appreciated the book, less for its coherence than for its inspiring power. Regardless of their opinion about the approach, many readers from various specialties (*horresco referens*—yes, Latin again, but it seems befitting here) will find stimulating ideas. For this, they should not

rely on the titles of chapters: There are sideways paths opening up all along. For example, although the relation of echo to gender does not get its own chapter, it is considered at several moments, from the first pages: "Echo is unmistakably a female character, a fact that is consistent throughout the history of Western culture, from Echo the Greek nymph to Echo the voice-activated smart speaker from Amazon" (p. 2).

Later, on the chapter of rhetoric, Pinchevski cites Luce Irigaray, who contrasts "self-reflecting masculinity epitomized by Narcissus," symbolizing male domination, "robbing the female voice" (p. 106), as opposed to echo, dominated, but, then again, highly relational. Here is one of the many suggestions of the value in taking echo seriously, a notion overall more ignored than vilified by communication researchers.

References

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