An Introduction to Truth-Saying
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The following is an exposition in the sense of offering a description that brings forth in the interest of exposure. Revelation, after all, as Nietzsche (1992) remarked, is integral to the truthfulness of truth—its observability. This paper explores the presentability of truth, how truth appears, and perhaps more importantly, how we truth-seekers appear before it, there where the subject returns, as Roland Barthes (1975) says, “not as illusion, but as fiction” (p. 62). A desire for truth, in the last analysis, is the very truth of desire. But truth is a problem, too, tied in psychoanalysis, and in education as well, to fantasies of omnipotence, to language, to the transference, and to a desire to know and to affect the other—an anxiety over words and miscommunication. This paper proposes, following a suggestion by Barthes (1975), and with the development of pedagogy in mind, that we try to imagine an aesthetics of textual pleasure that would include a practice of writing aloud. This practice, however, will sit for the most part at the periphery of this paper, conveying a particular relationship to truth, but here still just a fantasy that if all goes well might give shape and force to the particular kind of thinking I want to explore.

I will, however, make a few fledgling speculations at the outset concerning what I imagine the practice of writing aloud to consist in. Writing aloud, conceived as a pedagogical practice, might offer a means of interrupting the holding forth of discourses in situations of teaching and learning. Writing aloud, on its side, requires a speaker who is their discourse, in the sense of becoming a speaking subject, and not one who comes from behind her words, or steps into her speech, as does the orator who presents a piece already committed to a particular discursive field. The reader of what is written aloud is
also a listener, which is to say, is also immediately present. We might imagine writing aloud, then, as a practice of improvised story-telling within pedagogical relations, and therefore as a telling of stories that can be interrupted, and influenced by the immediacy of others. And so, while writing aloud, as a concept and theory, would have an enduring significance for the nature of the meaning made within the contexts of its employment, the material resonance of this writing would be ephemeral, and therefore all the more vital, and at the same time more difficult to say anything factual about. In this sense, I am talking about narrative and about the poetic language of literature. I am also talking about what it would mean for these linguistic modes to resist, as much as is possible, a material orientation to what is called factual. This returns us to an original conflict in both education and psychoanalysis, namely, the question of the value of truth. This will be the primary concern of this paper, in the interest of which I employ the notion of writing aloud as something of a thought experiment. To this end, let us think of writing aloud as a practice in imagining rather than as a concrete conceptual investment.

I am interested in talking about truth along psychoanalytic lines in order to foment a meaningful affinity between psychoanalysis and the discipline of education—precisely, though, in the interest of a bit of undisciplining. I wonder what the status of truth, and I should say, of untruth as well, within psychoanalysis, might offer education as a means of thinking the plot holes of its own teaching narratives, its theories of and wishes for ethical and epistemological encounters with the otherness of other understandings. Perhaps, at bottom, a desire for truth might tell us something about that which we wish most to hide: our own incompleteness.
For Derrida (1979): “‘Truth’ can only be a surface. But the blushing movement of that truth…casts a modest veil over such a surface. And only through such a veil…could ‘truth’ become truth, profound, indecent, desirable” (p. 59). I am interested in how we might consider this blushing movement educational, and how truth might find pedagogical expression in a practice of writing that itself speaks, and therefore that faces the other. My claim is that where truth is desirable, and also pedagogical, there is always the other, and yet the other is already a layer over the surface of truth. The other is a mask, but a mask we find nevertheless that we ourselves are wearing, for a time. The value of truth, then, might be precisely this preference we develop for untruth in the face of the other—a relation that exposes the omnipotent self and animates the first breath of our desire to know. Truth, which here comes from behind the mask of the other, is already a story about the self, already a reflection, and already a story about incompleteness, vulnerability, and dependence. Truth, finally, is a relationship, always, to the truth of the other—that quite unknowable domain.

The idea I am developing is that our relationship to truth begins at the beginning of life. There are two stages in the development of a self in infancy that focus this relationship. These stages are theoretical, but nonetheless they can tell us something about how truth presents itself in the life of the individual, and about how an individual might find herself presented before ideas about truth. The first stage constitutes the moment we come to desire knowledge in infancy, and the second constitutes the impulsion we later come to feel towards claiming an identity we can know. These moments are essentially correlative, but thinking them separately can give us insight into the meaningful relationship between the formation of subjectivity in infancy, the
development of subjectivity in education, and the treatment of subjectivity in psychotherapy. The implications of this relationship are more familiar in psychoanalysis than in education. My aim here, then, is mostly toward familiarization, and then perhaps as well toward certain speculations concerning how these very human trajectories might be included within a thinking about pedagogy.

In infancy, the pleasure principle—which Freud (2006) called a fiction for the infant—characterizes a world in which wishes constitute conditions, and where what is found feels as though it was created out of need. D. W. Winnicott (2001) suggests that this state of affairs entails also a certain line of flight in early infancy. In other words, these fantasies that hallucinate the meeting of needs are, for the baby, defences against the acceptance of inner life. His majesty the omnipotent baby has aggressive insides, and a sense that he might fall forever if not met by a world under his control, gathered in by good enough provisions. Winnicott (2001) says of this defence against inner life, “one finds…a flight to omnipotent fantasy, and flight from some fantasies to other fantasies, and in this sequence a flight to external reality” (p. 130). A sequence of omnipotent fantasies brings the infant near to what is felt as external, near to what is later recognized as reality, in one form or another. Indeed, these fantasies, which allow the baby to imagine, for instance, as Winnicott hypothesizes, that the parent’s face is a mirrored reflection of the baby itself, are where the sense of self—with all its integrational assurances—finds its earliest affirmations. Which is to say, this is how the self appears in a way that feels truthful. From instinct, to fantasy, to reality, the beginning of the life of the mind intimates a sequential scene of exchanges, relational as well as undifferentiated, between self and other, uncertain even, or in other words, as much untruthful as truthful.
It is this theoretical sequence that moved Winnicott (2001) to profess: “one cannot compare and contrast fantasy and reality” (p. 130).

Truth, then, for the infant, arrives in the form of the reality principle, as something external toward which the baby learns to feel bound—it is educative, but precisely in its valance as a wish concerning what might come. At the outset, truth’s design is intimately connected to fantasy life, and is posed as a problem of relating. Hannah Arendt (1977) also asks after this problem, her concern is with the “kind of reality…truth possess[es]” in something like “a public realm,” and what this might mean “to beings who know they have appeared out of non-being and will, after a short while, again disappear into it?” (p. 228). At stake is the reality of our appearance within what Arendt refers to as a common world. This common world is made common, in psychoanalytic theory, by the very loss of a purely pleasure-principled omnipotence and by the gain of a desire to know, to know the other, perhaps, who stands promptly and exactly in the place of this primordial loss. The desire for truth, then, gives reference to our first appearance before others, where we are quite helpless, and quite involved in a search for remainders. In truth, we seek what might be rescued of each of us, self and other, _here within this scene_, which also means _there between us_—there between the necessary fictions of selfhood, otherness and truthfulness.

I propose, then, that the truth of our desire to know is a truth that appears, strictly, in relation to the otherness of the other, that inscrutable navel at the vanishing point of our fantasies of omnipotence. And therefore, truth in its conceptual manifestation is a relationship between the infant’s efforts to think and the external reality that literally leans over against them. Truth is conscripted by a desire that seeks, not satisfaction, but
the place of a loss. The desire for truth is a desire to know the other, a desire that both binds affect to ideas and ideas to affect, and unbinds them in turn. Therefore, an inference: if thinking at the start of psychic life is a fantasizing that stops at the moment of its encounter with the exteriority of the other, and if what is missing there is abruptly substituted for what is wished for, then truth, where it meets the subject’s desire, is recourse, is not reality itself, but a turning between fantasy and reality—that blushing movement composed of fantasies that cannot be compared or contrasted with the reality of their stops and starts. The persistent problem of truth, and of untruth, is this constitutive relationship to the other. Truth implies, always, an appearance of the self before the other, and it thereby always already carries a communicative impulse—exposure and presentability, which is to say, the relational vagaries of a rudimentary attachment to an other that can’t be known. The question, then, is: how might the field of education learn to make new meanings from the obscure communicability of truth? And further, what can an idea like writing aloud facilitate in the way of an approach to this difficult question?

If we turn to education, truth is a question concerning the interpretation and transmission of stories, and of knowledge, indeed of knowledge itself as a story about individuals who know, or are presumed to know, and so specifically a story about otherness. For teaching and learning, this question gives us a distinction between truth as it is, and truth as it is for the self, or rather, truth as it is felt, communicated, and shared. This is a question, too, of truth’s authority before the learner, or what Deborah Britzman (2003) describes as a “volatile combination of anticipation and retrospection…[that] places at odds two sorts of authority: the authority of ideas and the authority of the
learner” (p. 45-46). Pedagogical truths pass through the unknowable time of the other, and find themselves entangled within the stories we tell each other, and ourselves, about our desire to know, and about how we learn, together, and how we learn to live together, with each other as much as with our desires. As Arendt (1977) observes, whoever “says what is…always tells a story, and in this story the particular facts lose their contingency and acquire some humanly comprehensible meaning” (p. 261-2).

The broader theme I am signaling, then, is a fundamental and instructive parallel between three meaningful contexts in human life and development: the formation of the subject in early infancy, the development of subjectivity in and through something we call education, and the treatment of subjectivity in and through something we call psychoanalysis. If knowing is always an interruption to thinking, where thinking is our first foray into fantasy life, and further, if knowing is always oriented towards the other, and, further still, if the desire to know is always a desire to communicate to the other a loss, then the fantasizing that brings us into proximity with reality at the start of life is part and parcel of the emotional situations of teaching and learning. And in so far as there is no way to make up for the lost time of omnipotence, the value of truth and untruth in these three very human environments is reducible to the problem of how binding the desire to know to objects of knowledge might be said to turn fantasies into truth-functions, and therefore to put an end to thinking.

We can approach this problem, of the value of truth in teaching and learning, with the help of Paul Ricoeur’s description of the fourfold property of truth in psychoanalysis. Ricoeur (2012) holds that truth in the situation of analysis has the properties “of being able to be said, to be addressed to another person, to be fantasized, figured, or...
symbolized, and to be recounted in a life history” (p. 30). In effect, Riceour (2012) clarifies two categories from which truth arises: “the category of the text, and hence of meaning, and…the categories of energy and resistance, and hence of force” (p. 35). Quite simply, Ricoeur (2012) notes that analytic experience is based on “desire coming to discourse,” and concludes, “the sort of truth that best answers to it is that of a ‘saying-true’ rather than a ‘being-true’” (p. 37). In education, too, desire must find its way to discourse, and therefore we might encourage in education a sensitivity to the pedagogical significance of a “saying-true” in the place of the epistemological tradition of a “being-true.” We may take a cue, as well, from Jacques Lacan (1985), who calls truth “the name of that ideal movement which discourse introduces into reality” (p. 63). For Lacan, “saying-true” is the fundamental and constitutive shape of truth, and therefore, like for Derrida above, truth for Lacan is a movement that veils, indecently, with the trace of the other.

Along this line, I raise again Barthes’ suggestion that we imagine a practice of writing aloud, but now as means of bringing together the concept of a “saying-true,” which comes to us from the situation of analysis, with the desire to know, which leads us to the rare and necessary fictions of our identities and their most scrupulous identifications. In education, the notion of writing aloud offers insight into how we can begin putting into practice that upon which Freud (2006) so often insisted, namely, that “an intellectual function differs from an emotional process” (p. 97). Drawing from the situation of analysis, the field of education can begin to theorize the development pedagogy according to practices of “saying-true” in place of the standardized and
standardizing practices of “being true.” We can, in fact, begin to speculate in what form such saying practices might take shape, practices which are after all a kind of speech act.

I urge that we turn our attention to the act of writing, which so commonly brings desire to discourse in education, to see, where a “saying true” might find, at least provisionally, some pedagogical significance. For Barthes (2004), writing always has as its task to “put the mask in place and at the same time to point it out” (p. 34). This writing mask, like the veil of truth, points itself out to the other for whom such a mask is worn. In speech, on the other hand, Barthes (2012) espies the holding forth of everything, “meant for immediate consumption, and words, silences and their common mobility are launched towards a meaning superseded: it is a transfer leaving no trace and brooking no delay” (p. 11). Perhaps it is a matter then of proposing for pedagogy a form of speech that also writes, or what Barthes (1975) calls an aesthetics of textual pleasure that would “have to include writing aloud” (p. 12). I return now to the concept of writing aloud, and with it to certain questions concerning practicality: What would writing aloud look like in the classroom? And how might writing aloud meet the developmental beginnings of the learner desiring to know? How would writing aloud differ from regular speech? And more to the point, in what ways does writing aloud recognize not the intellectual function of omnipotent fantasies, but their emotional processes?

My conjecture is that where writing puts a mask in place and at the same time points it out, writing aloud might put a mask in place and at the same time remove it, its meaning superseded, its retrospections and anticipations bound and unbound here by the authority of ideas, there by the authority of the learner, but always before an immediate other threatening epistemological interpellation. This idealized notion, writing aloud, is
of course, nothing here but fantasy, a wish for an environmental provision that might meet pedagogical needs unconditionally. Writing aloud, in its potential for truth-saying, still has many developmental needs of its own: categories of both text and force, learning outcomes, particular relationships to particular curricula, and the assignment of roles and responsibilities for writers and listeners, and teachers and learners. And yet, the truth of this proposed practice, and its compensatory, perhaps even emancipatory, potential is found precisely in the idealized—and shall we say blushing—movement of its fantasizing. The fantasy flees inner aggression and finds external reality, loses omnipotence and finds the other, and in so doing finds a relationship to truth. From the place of this loss, we might also write the stories of our desires for truth, and our desires to know each other. We might even begin to write these stories aloud. Where truth is concerned, there too concerns, always, an emotional process, and an indecent movement that says something true while not itself being true, or at least, not in so many words. The task, it seems, as it has been from the start of life, is one of imagining something first so that we might bring it into view.
References


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