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Speaking and the World:  
A Phenomenology of Voice

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in  
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of  
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Abstract

Speaking and the World:  
A Phenomenology of Voice

Chris Kaposy

The aim of this work is to describe how the human speaking voice can be simultaneously present and absent to those who hear and listen. A significant portion of the work is devoted to a study of Joseph Conrad's novel Heart of Darkness with a focus on the character Kurtz who is described as "little more than a voice". As well, I investigate Maurice Merleau-Ponty's idea of "authentic speech" and how that relates to a phenomenon I describe as "speech projecting a world". In the last section of the thesis I confront some realist presuppositions about how we understand the meaning of the term "the world" in order to show that realism is inadequate. The work concludes with a consideration of the ontological and metaphysical implications of saying that the human voice in speech is both present and absent.

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Preface

This work is a descriptive enterprise using the methodology of phenomenology to understand some aspects of the speaking voice. What interests me is how the human voice can be invasive, seductive and persuasive. I do not attempt to descriptively exhaust the phenomenon of voice. There are many other aspects of this topic which I do not touch upon: such as singing voice. My attention is directed towards the necessarily circumscribed area of speaking voice in its invasive aspect, and the relation between such a voice and the world.

The main author I read in my research is Maurice Merleau-Ponty. In the chapter entitled "The Body as Expression and Speech" in his work Phenomenology of Perception, Merleau-Ponty suggests that "The spoken word is a gesture, and its meaning, a world" (1962: 184). Speaking voice is gestural in nature: it is not all that different from other ways in which the body moves significantly. Part of this signifying capacity of the body is the way in which signs efface themselves in favour of what the signs themselves mean. When someone speaks to us, we do not hear sounds - we hear words and sentences. Our attention is drawn away from the acoustic fact of the voice itself towards what that voice says about the world that is common to the speaker and the listener. This is how "the world" enters into the equation. The main thesis or motif of this project will be to show how the human voice projects a world and how listeners are forced, by the

invasive efficacy of the speaking voice, to participate in the world that is projected.

It is a curious fact about the human voice that it invades us at the same time that it effaces itself. There is an interesting play of presence and absence here that is of some interest to contemporary philosophy: especially those areas of philosophy that question the assumptions of the "metaphysics of presence" that has been said to have dominated the Western philosophical scene since ancient times. To get a handle on this presence-absence characteristic of voice, I look at a particularly illuminating example from literature: the character Kurtz in Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness. Kurtz is a fascinating creation. He is described as "a voice": this is the most remarkable characteristic of this most remarkable character. The metaphors used to describe Kurtz switch back and forth between those that emphasize the overwhelming presence of this man who speaks so effectively, and those that emphasize his dissolution into his surroundings. In this way, Conrad's narrative is very phenomenological. It may be a work of fiction, but many important philosophical insights about this kind of invasive and dominant voice can be found within Heart of Darkness. The first part of my thesis deals with this novel.

The second part deals with Merleau-Ponty's observations about speaking voice. Included here will be an examination of what Merleau-Ponty calls "authentic speech". This is a special kind of speaking - the speech of geniuses who introduce new ways

of thinking about and seeing the world into our discourse.

The third part is concerned with the metaphysical (or perhaps "post-metaphysical") and ontological implications of saying that voice "projects a world". It is necessary to provide an understanding of just what kind of "thing" this is, "the world", that is projected in voice. I try to avoid a "metaphysics of presence" as well as an anthropocentric ontology that would deviate into a naive form of idealism. Merleau-Ponty's methodology, sometimes called "gestalt phenomenology" helps me out here. It is properly post-metaphysical, that is, it does not make any substantive claims, once and for all, about what there is - but it does bring out all the relevant and compelling aspects of the speaking voice that interest me.

Section IChapter 1Conrad as Phenomenologist

Joseph Conrad's work displays a keen, almost philosophical, attentiveness to language. In the novel Heart of Darkness, Conrad creates the character Marlow who tests the limits of language in trying to relate the strange things that he has experienced while travelling on a river in Africa. Marlow remarks that it "seems to me I am trying to tell you a dream - making a vain attempt" (Conrad, 321). This difficulty arises for Marlow because what he experiences is enigmatic and paradoxical. Right at the beginning of the work the narrator, who tells the story of Marlow telling his story, remarks that Marlow decides to relate one of his "inconclusive experiences" (Conrad, 302). Marlow wants to tell the story, but he does not know how. How do you tell a story that must bridge two worlds across an abyss? How do you convey the extreme absurdity of petit-bourgeois European bureaucrats going about their day-to-day business in an inhospitable jungle? Heart of Darkness is the paradigm novel of European colonialism. The colonial setting establishes a fundamental tension that the narrative must deal with.

Conrad, in setting up the story in this way, is willing to consider that experiences can be ambiguous and polysemic: he is willing to let the reader be confronted with indeterminacy. Much of this ambiguity derives from the colonial meeting of the two cultures, and the power imbalances that result.

The multi-faceted and paradoxical nature of experience is often the concern of phenomenologists. Phenomenology, since it is a descriptive rather than an explanatory enterprise, does not have to explain or analyze away contradictions in experience. Its exponents do not have to choose sides when confronted with two opposed positions. Merleau-Ponty is one phenomenologist willing to embrace the multi-faceted nature of human experience. He says "ambiguity is of the essence of human existence, and everything we live or think has always several meanings" (1962: 169). In this way, Conrad can also be seen as a phenomenologist. His treatment of voice in Heart of Darkness is receptive to the idea that any phenomenon can have several, often contradictory, aspects.

In particular, this chapter is concerned with a specific ambiguity in the phenomenon of voice. This ambiguity is the simultaneous presence and absence of the speaker in voice. To investigate this phenomenon, I will point out some things that Conrad has to say in Heart of Darkness about the human voice, and especially about the remarkable character Kurtz who is presented as a voice. The first section of the chapter deals with how Kurtz is present in voice. The second deals with Kurtz's absence in voice. This may seem like an untenable contradiction, but Conrad is willing to explore this phenomenon, contradictory or not, and often, even in the same paragraph, gives indication of Kurtz's presence and absence.

I am including this investigation into Heart of Darkness in

my thesis because I am thankful to Joseph Conrad's novel for having suggested this area of research to me. His unforgettable depiction of Kurtz as a voice convinced me that speaking is a very powerful and interesting activity. Anything that powerful and interesting should not be neglected by philosophy. In particular, the indeterminate interplay of presence and absence in Kurtz's use of voice, as depicted by Conrad, is a motif that runs throughout the rest of this work. I view Heart of Darkness, therefore, as an invaluable resource for helping me get clear about what happens, phenomenologically, when people speak.

#### Kurtz is present in voice

Marlow is a man looking for something firm and dependable to believe in. He is on his first trip into Africa and is struck at every turn by the strangeness and absurdity of the things he experiences. He thinks that the only reason someone would put himself or herself at such danger so far away from home is an "idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretense but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea - something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to" (Conrad, 301). He longs for something real and true by which he can orient himself. On his way into the jungle, he sometimes sees things that make him feel he "belonged to a world of straitforward facts," but then, "the feeling would not last long. Something would turn up to scare it away" (Conrad, 308). He has to deal with incompetent bureaucrats, murderous and feverish colonists, and the ever-present absurd idea that the Company is in Africa for some grand

purpose, some lofty moral ideal.

Marlow brings with him a presupposed distinction between inner and surface truth. The surface truth for him is often a welcome distraction. Travelling up the river, he has to be careful not to sink the steamer. He remarks that consequently "[w]hen you have to attend to things of that sort, to the mere incidents of the surface, the reality - the reality, I tell you - fades. The inner truth is hidden - luckily, luckily" (Conrad, 328). When he begins to hear of this remarkable man, Kurtz, whom he will find at the end of the trading route, a man of whom everybody speaks with a strange sense of awe, Marlow hopes that he will find something real: that Kurtz will reveal to him some profound truths. When there are indications that Kurtz may already be dead, Marlow complains that "I couldn't have been more disgusted if I had traveled all this way for the sole purpose of talking with Mr. Kurtz" (Conrad, 341). Marlow does not just want to meet him, he places all of his hopes on being able to listen to him. His fear is that "'Now I will never hear him.' The man presented himself as a voice" (341). Kurtz's notoriety comes from his voice.

The point was in his being a gifted creature, and that of all his gifts the one that stood out preeminently, that carried with it a sense of real presence, was his ability to talk, his words - the gift of expression, the bewildering, the illuminating, the most exalted and the most contemptible, the pulsating stream of light, or the deceitful flow from the heart of an impenetrable darkness (Conrad, 341).

The "sense of real presence" comes from Kurtz's eloquence. This

voice comes to be Marlow's point of orientation - the unquestionable ground for which he is searching even from the beginning of his descent into the heart of darkness. Marlow finds in this voice an authentic sense of reality, of truth. Because of his voice, Kurtz distinguishes himself from all of the other Company men: the absurd brick-maker who makes no bricks, the manager who holds onto his position just by virtue of staying healthy, and the incompetent pilgrims who occupy themselves with petty intrigues against each other. These others are impostors who do not belong in such an inhospitable environment. Kurtz is the real thing.

Kurtz's dominant presence organizes the natives to do his bidding. His speech has "the power to charm or frighten rudimentary souls into an aggravated witch-dance in his honour" (Conrad, 344). The metaphors that Conrad uses to describe Kurtz's dominance frequently are oral. Marlow says that "I saw him open his mouth wide - it gave him a weirdly voracious aspect, as though he had wanted to swallow all the air, all the earth, all the men before him" (Conrad, 353). Even the inhospitable jungle is subject to his speech, which is to say, when Kurtz speaks, the whole world listens, such is his ambition and such is the power of his eloquence. Speaking seems like such a simple act to exert such influence, but out in the jungle "there was nothing either above or below him ... he had kicked the very earth to pieces" (Conrad, 359). He seizes his surroundings by declaring "'my ivory, my station, my river, my -' everything

belonged to him" (Conrad, 342). The natural setting becomes identified with that voice "the pulsating stream of light ... from the heart of an impenetrable darkness" (341). He imposes order on what is unordered, casts light into the darkness.

His speech has a profound claim on those around him. He can alter the way others perceive the world. The young devoted Russian claims "he made me see things - things" (349). All who know him agree that he is a universal genius: a poet, a painter, journalist, leader, but above all a speaker. Marlow takes Kurtz's voice as evidence of the existence of a soul.

They were common everyday words - the familiar, vague sounds exchanged on every waking day of life. But what of that? They had behind them, to my mind, the terrific suggestiveness of words heard in dreams, of phrases spoken in nightmares. Soul! If anybody had ever struggled with a soul, I am the man (Conrad, 359).

Marlow attributes to Kurtz the highest of cultural achievements, the best that human beings can offer, and this is undeniable substantial evidence of there being something real behind the voice. This is where Marlow's loyalty to that voice lies: in the presence that such a voice indicates. The sense that there is a soul as pure as Kurtz's provides a certainty in the midst of so much uncertainty and danger. Compare Kurtz with the manager whom Marlow describes as a "chattering idiot" (317). This chatter is evidence of a void, an emptiness. The manager is an absurd character - the opposite of Kurtz. Marlow speculates of the manager that "perhaps there was nothing within him" (316). The manager is heard to say "Men who come out here should have no

entrails" (316) providing explanation for his own health, the only reason for his position of authority. The incoherent chatter of this man suggests only an absence: no soul, nothing to inspire loyalty or confidence. The personality of the manager as well as so much else that Marlow experiences makes him feel uneasy. Marlow needs "[a]n idea at the back of it" (301), an inner truth, and this is Kurtz's voice as evidence of a deeper presence.

In the end Marlow takes himself to be the custodian of Kurtz's memory. He comes out of the jungle hearing that voice, even though the man is gone. His strongest impressions are of that voice. "It rang deep to the very last" (Conrad, 361).

A voice like Kurtz's demands that one listen to it. It changes you and alters the way you approach the world. From then on the world is different - it exerts its dominance over how you perceive it. This authentic voice is at once destructive and creative, original and originary. How could Marlow not conclude that Kurtz is more than just a voice? The presence is undeniable: he hears it everywhere, in the wind as dusk descends on Brussels, among the bureaucrats on his way up the river, in his own head as he leaves the jungle.

And yet ... nothing is ever so simple in Heart of Darkness. Marlow is deeply ambivalent about what he sees and hears of Kurtz and the jungle - more ambivalent than I have so far indicated. Kurtz's mystique goes farther than the colonizer's dominance he exerts over all those with whom he comes in contact. It turns

out that he is as much controlled as he is in control. He may expand the minds of those around him, but the jungle, the heart of darkness "whispered to him things about himself which he did not know" (351). The discourse does not just run one way, with Kurtz speaking and the world listening.

Kurtz is absent in voice

The first, most conspicuous, piece of evidence suggesting Kurtz's absence is the narrative structure of the work. Even Marlow's voice is absent. His is only a quasi-narration. The true narrator tells the story of Marlow telling his story. Marlow's narration is enclosed within quotation marks. When Marlow relates what Kurtz says to him, Kurtz's remarks in that remarkable voice are stuck between double quotation marks. Kurtz speaks to the reader third-hand. Even so, when other characters speak of Kurtz, if they quote Kurtz, then such remarks are four removes from the reader. That voice passes through the prism of three characters. At that distance, however, such characters as the brick-maker and the manager rarely quote Kurtz. They merely describe him. His voice is not heard, but the idea of the man emerges as someone mythical and legendary. Kurtz is no more than a vestige or a trace of an absence for the bulk of the work. He only appears in the flesh in Marlow's quasi-narrative in the last fifth of the story.

Conrad seems to have deliberately constructed the plot and the narration in this manner to bring out this enigma. The most remarkable voice in the work, the one that carries with it "a

sense of real presence" (Conrad, 341), is in fact conspicuously absent to the reader.

Furthermore, Marlow's descriptions of the presence of this voice, and of the man behind the voice - his assertion that in Kurtz he is struggling with a soul - also include descriptions that signify absence rather than presence. Marlow says Kurtz was "hollow at the core" (Conrad, 351). Elsewhere, he describes Kurtz as "that Shadow - this wandering and tormented thing" (Conrad, 359) as though he cannot decide whether there is something substantial or insubstantial behind this voice. He is also described on his death bed as a "shade" and a "hollow sham" (Conrad, 361). Much of this descriptiveness can be attributed to the fact that Marlow has to watch Kurtz die. He witnesses his wasting away.

An argument can perhaps be made that Kurtz made an attempt earlier in his stay in the jungle to assert his dominance over the wilderness, but in the end the wilderness wins and claims the indomitable Kurtz for its own: the once great man ends up in a muddy hole on the forest floor. Such an argument would assert that Kurtz's presence is no longer felt so strongly now that he is beaten in this struggle for dominance - the struggle between Kurtz's "volume of tone" and the whispers of the forest. However, it cannot be denied that Kurtz is already in the advanced stages of his illness when he and Marlow finally meet, and even then, Kurtz inspires in Marlow a strange, though ambiguous, loyalty. Kurtz's presence and absence are almost

simultaneous.

Often in the same paragraph this ambiguity emerges. Marlow points out that the

wilderness had patted him on the head, and, behold, it was like a ball - an ivory ball; it had caressed him, and - lo! - he had withered; it had taken him, loved him, embraced him, got into his veins, consumed his flesh, and sealed his soul to its own by the inconceivable ceremonies of some devilish initiation (Conrad, 342).

Further down the paragraph, Marlow tells his listeners "[y]ou should have heard him say, 'My ivory.' Oh yes, I heard him. 'My Intended, my ivory, my station, my river, my -' everything belonged to him" (342). In addition, the remark that the wilderness "consumed his flesh" carries echoes of Kurtz opening his mouth wide to speak, giving him "a weirdly voracious aspect, as though he had wanted to swallow all the air, all the earth" (Conrad, 353). Who is consumed in this discourse? Who listens to whom? Kurtz is such an undeniable presence that "there was nothing on earth to prevent him killing whom he jolly well pleased", and yet he would "forget himself amongst these people - forget himself - you know" (Conrad, 350).

Speech is perhaps the most inter-subjective of all human capacities. In speaking we allow others the opportunity to think along with us, opening up our supposedly private subjective space. In speech we can also dominate those who listen to us, or, alternatively, we can create larger unities where we share common inter-subjective ground. Conrad brings out these two seemingly contradictory aspects of vocal phenomena in his

treatment of Kurtz's relationship with the natives.

Marlow's attention is often directed away from the pure fact of Kurtz's voice towards an appreciation of what Kurtz has created in the jungle, towards what Kurtz has done with his voice. This is not surprising, since voices would be ineffective if they only drew attention to themselves. However, a further thing happens when Marlow's attention is redirected: Kurtz disappears into this larger unity. In his mind's eye, Marlow

seemed to see Kurtz for the first time. It was a distinct glimpse: the dugout, four paddling savages, and the lone white man turning his back suddenly on the headquarters, on relief, on thoughts of home - perhaps; setting his face towards the depths of the wilderness, towards the empty and desolate station (Conrad, 326).

Just as Kurtz emerges out of the jungle to present himself to his superiors, he immediately turns around and disappears to be once again with his people. While keeping watch over the ailing Kurtz, Marlow wakes up and notices that Kurtz is gone. He finds him feverishly trying to join the gathering of natives around the fire who are lamenting the fact that Kurtz is being taken away from them. Marlow has to forcibly remove Kurtz and bring him back to the hut, telling him "You'll be lost ... utterly lost" (Conrad, 359). Kurtz's wish is to become lost, to disappear into their midst.

At the moment of his death, Kurtz cries out twice, pronouncing the frightening judgement "'The horror! The horror!'" (363). Marlow speculates that

there was something wanting in him - some small matter which, when the pressing need arose,

could not be found under his magnificent eloquence. Whether he knew of this deficiency himself, I can't say. I think the knowledge came to him at last - only at the very last ... he was hollow at the core (Conrad, 351).

His eloquence really signifies nothing. He is deficient, lacking, hollow. This is the meaning of his judgment: it is fear of darkness, of absence. It is a shudder at the thought that there was nothing really there but voice. "His was an impenetrable darkness. I looked at him as you peer down at a man who is lying at the bottom of a precipice where the sun never shines" (Conrad, 362) Marlow says, while Kurtz lies dying. While Marlow takes this speech, this judgment of "the horror", to be a summation of Kurtz's own life as it passes before his eyes, it becomes more than just a personal judgement. This "vibrating note of revolt" is ultimately a "contempt for the evanescence of all things" (Conrad, 364). Kurtz's judgment goes from being just a summation of his own absence to being about "all things". Marlow hears this judgment and it affects him profoundly. He takes the judgment with him out of the jungle and continues to measure all that he sees by it. He wants to ask Kurtz's Intended why she does not hear Kurtz's words "repeating ... in a whisper that seemed to swell menacingly like the first whisper of a rising wind" (Conrad, 370). She is surrounded by an unreal atmosphere. She could not possibly understand Kurtz's pronouncement - this frightened gesture at the absence of his soul, at the absence of "soul" in general. To understand, she would have to confront the full ambiguity and absurdity of the

jungle setting where Kurtz died.

### The voice

"The voice was gone. What else had been there?" (Conrad, 363). Kurtz's magnificent voice, it seems, is not evidence of anything but itself. At best the evidence is inconclusive - and so is Marlow's experience. Kurtz is a voice, "very little more than a voice" (342). Conrad, however, attends often to some very specific characteristics or aspects of the phenomenon of this voice. He calls it "a vibrating note of revolt" (364) and has Marlow say that "the volume of the tone ... amazed me" (353). This is a voice that effectively puts sound into play. It is loud and vibrant, a lyrical voice. Edward Said, in his study "Conrad and Nietzsche" (1977) says that both Conrad and Nietzsche, when dealing with inconclusive experiences, appeal past ordinary language to "a lyrical domain that words cannot penetrate" (71). Kurtz creates new vocal gestures by putting sound into play, by ejaculating in fright "the horror!". Said says that this is Kurtz's "distinction at the end: to have judged, identified, named the horror even if that horror is less a thing than a thing said" (70). Kurtz is trying to describe a frightening sense of absence. It cannot be a "thing" because there is no-thing there. But Kurtz has essentially created this absence, made it present, as it were, by naming it in speech. Kurtz's voice is an authentic, originating voice. A creative faculty that can suggest even a soul within his vacant core: an inner reality beyond the impressive surface of his voice.

Chapter 2Kurtz's Philosophical Suggestiveness

Heart of Darkness can be read as a phenomenological study of voice. As I have shown above, Conrad ambiguously describes Kurtz as both present and absent in voice. These two valences alternate throughout the whole work, sometimes quite rapidly. Conrad depicts Kurtz's undeniable substantiality and then his hollowness often in the same paragraph. The purpose of this chapter is to show what it means for a voice to present itself and then make itself absent. Kurtz's presence in voice is suggestive of the invasive nature of speech. Kurtz's absence in voice is indicative of the way in which the actual sounds put into play by voice are forgotten in order to take these sounds as "meaning" something. In the latter aspect of this interplay, meaning takes over, a world is projected: it is brought to the attention of the listener, while the speaker and the actual sound of the voice disappear into the background.

To fully draw out the philosophical implications of Conrad's depiction of Kurtz, I will consider a few of the ways philosophers have understood the phenomenon of speaking. First, I look at Merleau-Ponty, who understands speech as gestural. After that comes Nietzsche, who sees speaking as a manifestation of the "Will to Power". From there I move on to Derrida who claims that speech is always already writing. After Derrida, I consider an example that suggests Derrida's understanding of

speech is more adequate than Nietzsche's remarks on the matter. I end with a cursory investigation of the reasons why speech is able to project a world. This final section deals with the differences between the sensory modalities and also with the control that embodied subjects have over the sounds they emit.

#### The sound of Kurtz's voice

Conrad often emphasizes the lyrical quality of Kurtz's voice. Kurtz voices a startled exclamation of horror at the "impenetrable darkness" (Conrad, 362) of his being, while laying on his death bed. Here Kurtz is at the extremity of his language, confronting something strange and unspeakable. At this extreme, his voice is reduced down to the violence of its bare sounding. He is making noises, he is gesturing at something that is not there - at an absence, at darkness; but his noises are taken to mean something, an enigmatic truth.

When Marlow goes back to Kurtz's hometown, he finds out that "Kurtz had been essentially a great musician" (Conrad, 365). This is not surprising, since Marlow describes his voice as a "vibrating note of revolt" (364). This goes beyond the signifying capacity of speaking to the actual sound that the voice makes in speech or in song. Kurtz speaks in notes and tones, not just in words. He has made the sounds his own.

Merleau-Ponty says that the sounds emitted by the body in speech are gestural - at bottom, words are gestures just like any other signifying movement of the body. Speaking is just another signifying capacity of the body in which the body moves in a

certain way in a shared context, and then those moves are taken to "mean" something. This "meaning" something is two-step activity. First of all, the gesture has to attract the attention of those for whom it means something. In this way, Kurtz's vibrating note of revolt, the impressive volume of his voice, attracts attention to itself. A gesture that goes unnoticed is not a gesture at all: it cannot mean anything. Secondly, however, for a gesture to mean something, after drawing attention to itself, it must direct attention elsewhere. When someone points, for instance, the pointing must be noticed for it to be regarded as significant, but then the pointing must be understood to be stating something - "what you seek is over there" it says. The pointing is not about itself, it is about the world. If the pointing just attracted attention to itself and did not efface itself in this statement about the world, then it would not be understood as a gesture. It might be seen as pathological: a nervous tic, or a disorder of some sort.

#### Nietzsche's "gleichmachen"

A signifying gesture, spoken or otherwise, then, brings an understanding of, or an attentiveness towards, something that is other than the gesture itself. This "otherness" is actually quite radical. The spoken word "apple" is radically unlike the apple itself. Nietzsche says some suggestive things about this phenomenon. When we do this, when we equate things with other radically different things, and accept them as somehow the same, Nietzsche says that we are acting out the "Will to Power". He

characterizes the Will to Power as an operation of "gleichmachen" or "making the same" where we create sameness among things that are in fact radically different. This is done, in part, in order to exert dominance over our environment. Our survival, especially under hostile circumstances, depends on being able to recognize similarities among things in our environment, decipher trends and anticipate threats. However, this does not really get at what is going on when Kurtz passes judgment on the hollowness of his being, on the absence of his soul, which is taken by Marlow to mean the absence of soul in general.

Nietzsche's Will to Power, as I have characterized it here, makes different things the same, but what Kurtz is gesturing at when he pronounces "The horror! The horror!" cannot really be construed as a "thing". If anything, it is the absence or non-existence of a thing. As Said suggests, "that horror is less a thing than a thing said" (1977: 70). But by speaking about it, and calling attention to it with that lyrical voice of his, Kurtz essentially gives it a name. What was previously absent, or was actually not in existence, becomes present in voice. In speaking, Kurtz makes present an absence. This is the creative power of denomination at work. By speaking, Kurtz does not just make two radically different things the same, he actually creates this thing, this idea of "the horror".

#### Derrida's "differance"

Though not totally inconsistent with some of what Nietzsche says about the Will to Power, what is going on here with the

interplay of present and absent is suggestive of some of Derrida's ideas. Derrida says that speaking can be understood as always already writing. Derrida's sense of "writing" is not just that of the act of assembling letters on a page, it is a metaphor for a more general kind of activity: the operation of "differance" or of a "trace", or of any number of other terms he uses. "Differance" represents the play of differing and deferring between the sign and the signifier. The sign stands for the signified in this interplay, but what is signified is not present. However, in "standing for" the signified, the sign makes it present - present to the understanding of those confronted by the sign, vocally, graphically or otherwise. This is a strange creative power: the making present of what is absent. This act is accomplished even though the sign is radically different from what it signifies. As well, the sign makes "present" what is absent not just in the sense of "present" as "being there" but also in the sense of "present" as "occurring right now". When this "making present" has succeeded, the sign effectively disappears. What is important is what the sign means, the actual vocal or graphic fact of the sign, its shape or sound, is forgotten - it is effaced in favour of this presence that has been established. So Derrida's understanding of writing is that it is an act of making present what is absent and effacing that absence. This is what Kurtz does with his judgment "The horror! The horror!". He is essentially drawing attention to a fearful absence, the darkness at the core of his being,

which makes this darkness present. Derrida would say that it is the work of "differance" that allows him to do this. The play of differance is a necessary condition for the presence of things made present.

As I have shown above while suggesting the gestural quality of speech, the everyday use of voice also participates in this interplay of presence and absence. Speaking is always about something. This "something" of which the voice is speaking is made present, while the voice itself is effaced. Voice invades your consciousness: you listen to it, so it is present; but in listening to what it is speaking about, your attention is directed away from the presence of the voice towards the presence of the things in the world of which it is speaking. In this act of being "directed away", the fact of the voice itself, its vibrating note, is forgotten or effaced - it becomes absent. Voice is simultaneously present and absent if it is to work effectively. A voice that you cannot hear, that does not demand that you recognize its presence, is ineffective. Similarly, a voice that calls attention to itself, and yet does not direct the attention of its listeners away to the things of the world, is a mere distraction.

### Denomination

In writing Heart of Darkness Conrad is very suggestive of this interplay between presence and absence. He switches back and forth between metaphors of each in his descriptions of Kurtz. As pointed out above, this is a quasi-phenomenological study of

voice. It goes beyond being merely suggestive or allegorical, though it is a work of fiction and not a philosophical study. It gets right at the heart of what I am doing in this investigation. It shows, if read according to my interpretation, that speaking projects a world. Speaking is not just an act of linking up unlike things and making them alike. It is a creative capacity. It can make present what is absent.

To understand better the creative capacity of denomination, perhaps an example is in order. This example is inelegant, but effective: it is about cellulite. Some marketing genius sometime during the past twenty years decided to call the fat on women's thighs the name "cellulite". The term sounded sufficiently "scientific" and technical to convince millions of women that there is indeed this thing called "cellulite". In fact, cellulite fat is no different from any other fat found anywhere else on the human body, but by giving the fat in this area a new technical-sounding name, this marketing genius, in effect, created cellulite. Many were convinced that since this type of bodily phenomenon had a different name, then it must be different from other fat. This opened a marketing opportunity for the marketing genius who began to sell "cellulite creams", "cellulite wraps" and other completely ineffective products that preyed on the poor body image of millions of consumers. The only way to get rid of fat, aside from liposuction, is through diet and exercise. Everybody knows this, but the new word "cellulite" allowed many to believe that this was not fat, and so could be

eliminated by other means. Nietzsche asks

What is originality? To see something that has no name as yet and hence cannot be mentioned although it stares us all in the face. The way men usually are, it takes a name to make something visible for them. Those with originality have for the most part also assigned names (quoted in Said, 70).

For Nietzsche, the denominative power consists in a weak sense of "making present". Naming something brings about an acquaintance with something that has been over-looked, even though it may have stared us in the face all along. This thing named was already, in a sense, present. The thing named was already something, but something ignored. However, the cellulite example suggests an even stronger sense of how denomination "makes present". This example shows that an act of denomination can actually create the thing that it names. Cellulite never existed before it was named. Some may say, perhaps, that cellulite does not exist even now, since it is no different from every other portion of fat on the human body. Were millions of consumers dealing with a chimera, then? Cellulite was present in their experience, and this name made it so.

This is not to say that by saying the word "cellulite" the marketing genius made something appear on the thighs of millions of women. That would be absurd. But by picking out a certain phenomenon from the vast field of experience and giving that phenomenon a name, the marketing genius brought it to the attention of many people. He made it present, whereas before, the fat on women's thighs would have been overlooked or not

understood in this way. As evidence of the creative power of denomination, I submit the wealth of the cosmetics companies.

By creating the name "cellulite" the marketing genius essentially projected a world in which such a thing exists. Speaking projects a world. You may ask, however: why speech? It is not clear that this marketing genius spoke the word "cellulite". For instance it may have been written in an ad when first used. If what I say is true about speech projecting a world, it may be the case that all other signifying activities do the same thing. Speaking is just one among many. Speaking may be just another way of gesturing. As well, I am not denying that other activities like writing, sign language, body language, painting, and dance may project a world. However, I am focusing on speaking.

But I also believe that speaking is a more effective way of doing this, of projecting a world. This is for two reasons which will be explored in later chapters. First, is the invasive character of sound. In speech, the speaker puts sound into play, effectively forcing the listener to listen. It is much more difficult, for instance, to force someone to read something. With the medium of speech, you just speak to them, and the world you project in speech is forced on those listening, which often means "those in your immediate proximity" because sound is invasive. It is no mere coincidence that the Nazi propaganda machine used massive public speeches to indoctrinate the German people, though they also used other media, like posters and

graffiti. This is because of certain, almost formal, qualities of sound that other sensory phenomena do not have or do not have to the same degree. Sound is very effectively invasive. Couple this with the second point: that sound can be manipulated very subtly and controlled to express a very wide range of desired messages. Moreover, these messages can be readily understood by almost everyone within a shared speech community. Compare this with the sense of taste. A few very highly trained tasters can detect a wide range of cues from wine, but with speech, almost everybody has a sensitivity to verbal cues similar to the sensitivity that wine tasters have for wine. We could imagine a world in which we communicated by taste in the same way we communicate through speaking to each other, but this would be a world totally unlike our own. One reason is that the human body does not have an organ or a set of organs that can manipulate and transmit smells or tastes. There is no doubt that if tasted, we taste a certain way, and if smelled, we do not lack an odour. However, we have less control over these bodily phenomena. We can manipulate sounds according to our will and transmit the messages we want. It is much more difficult to will our odour or our taste in anything more than a uniform manner. I will investigate the above points more thoroughly in the following chapters.

These two qualities of speech, the invasive character of sound, and the unlimited signifying potential of spoken sounds, make speaking a very effective way of projecting a world. And,

to sum up, Conrad's depiction of Kurtz in Heart of Darkness, allows the reader to see how it is possible that speaking is creative in this way.

Section IIChapter 3Sound and Speech as Invasive

The human voice brings sound into play. It uses the power of sound to convey meaning. Therefore, in order to understand voice in a phenomenological manner, it is important to approach the phenomenon of sound in its invasive aspect.

Human perceptive activity takes place in an integrated whole. We do not switch back and forth between our senses consulting each in turn. All are functioning simultaneously. It may then be a mistake to analyze sound out of this holistic experience. However, it is no mistake in the methodology of phenomenology to attend to the specific qualities of experience that interest the investigator, provided that one keeps in mind the necessary "global character of experience" (Ihde, 1976: 21). In this chapter, I hope to bring into relief some qualities of sound and voice, listening and hearing, by attending to these phenomena, but not with the intention of forgetting the other human capacities of perception and expression. In particular I want to show how sound is invasive, dominant, and seductive.

The first step in this process will be to elucidate some qualities of hearing and sound that distinguish this receptive activity from the other four "externally" receptive senses that contribute to the global character of our experience. The second step will be to introduce the general methodology of "gestalt phenomenology" which will help me to understand some of the more

confusing and contradictory aspects of vocal phenomena.

Don Ihde's book Listening and Voice: A Phenomenology of Sound utilizes gestalt phenomenology. (I will say more about this method later in the chapter). The book is, in part, a thorough phenomenological study of auditory qualities: the qualities that I am interested in elucidating in this chapter. Ihde's contribution to this area of thought is therefore helpful to me. Much of his work is about the invasive character of sound. He notes that "sound penetrates my awareness" (1976: 81). This seems like a simple insight. All of the things we experience enter into our awareness in some way, whether we see, hear, smell, taste, or touch the phenomenon.

However, each sensory modality has its own character. Sound, I contend, is particularly invasive: this is part of its character. It penetrates our awareness in a way that sight does not, for instance. For something to be seen, it has to first be in my visual field. The field of sound, however, is less circumscribed. Sound emitted from behind my back enters my awareness without being framed by my attentive gaze. If I am disturbed by something within my visual field, I can turn away and no longer look at it. But when I hear something that I do not want to hear, it is much more difficult to escape. I can attempt to stop up my ears, but this rarely works. Avoiding something I do not want to hear requires more resources than avoiding something I do not want to see. In this way, we are prey to sounds more than we are prey to sights. In my study,

sitting at my desk, I have almost total control over what I have to look at, but disturbing and distracting sounds often enter into this controlled environment from outside the house, from my neighbours upstairs and from my housemates in other rooms.

The situation is the same with taste. I taste only what goes into my mouth, and more often than not, what goes into my mouth is totally within the bounds of my control. It is, however, very difficult to escape or avoid a taste once the tasting has begun. I can spit out whatever causes the bad taste, but even then it is often the case that I go on tasting whatever it was that caused this reaction. However, it is rare that we are not aware of what the taste will be beforehand. In this way, we can exercise our discretion preemptively and avoid any bad tastes before we taste them. This is not so to the same extent with sound. It is true that I can avoid visiting friends who have a newborn baby if I find the cries of a child grating, but in my everyday interaction with my environment, any number of unanticipated sounds can enter into my awareness against my will. This is a phenomenon commonly known as "noise pollution". We witness the great lengths to which people often go in order to exercise control over their auditory environment. Some will change their whole way of life, move out of the city and into the country to find tranquillity, when it is comparatively so simple to exercise a similar control over our visual and gustatory environments. If you don't like the look of something, look away. If you don't like the taste of something, don't put it in

your mouth.

Our sense of smell is in this way similar to hearing. Smells can easily enter into our awareness against our will. As with sound, smells can emanate from any angle. The field of olfactory phenomena is not as circumscribed as our visual field, not as focused. We can adopt the terminology of focus and fringe to help us out here. The focus is the phenomenon that is within our most attentive awareness, as when I look closely at something or when I distinctly smell bread baking in the oven, and the fringe involves all of those other phenomena that comprise the field. When we want to look at something, we can choose to attend to it. With smell, the focus of what we smell wafts in and out. We may smell it for a second, and then it goes away only to come back again. Even if we make a determined effort to smell something, taking in great breaths of air over top of the container that holds what we want to smell, it sometimes happens that we only get a hint of the odour. The sense of smell is evanescent. This is because the olfactory field is dominated by fringe phenomena that have only the possibility of entering into our focus. There are moments when we can say that we do not really smell anything. Our visual field, it seems, is always present, even when we close our eyes we see a black space, but there is more choice in what we focus on. With odours, we often have no choice. It is easy to pinch our noses or breathe through our mouths to avoid smell, but if a smell is overpowering, we often have to leave the area. The difference with sound is that

our auditory field is less evanescent. We almost always hear something and it takes a great deal of habituation to get used to distracting noises.

Tactile qualia can be forced on us against our wishes, but usually only at close quarters. The field of touch is limited to the space taken up by our own bodies, but sometimes we can feel certain actions from a distance. A fan across the room can move the air so that I feel a breeze. A focused awareness of a breeze is difficult to avoid without changing one's location. Someone can turn on a heater and I will eventually feel a general sense of warmth. Our thermoreceptivity is sensitive to changes in temperature that may be effected at a distance. However, in this instance, we feel the room, the air around us, heating up or cooling down. It is still occurring at close quarters. Whereas, when someone you know yells your name from across the street, the sound causes its effects from a distance.

Sounds can penetrate into our awareness with their sources at a distance, so can smells and sights. However, smells are evanescent and sights are easily avoided. For this reason, some of our technology is designed to use auditory phenomena to catch our attention. The most efficient way for a telephone to signify that someone is on the line ready to speak to us is for it to make a loud ringing noise. Imagine a telephone that hailed us with the use of a light that turned on. For this technology to be useful, we would always have to have the light in our visual field. Or imagine a telephone that emitted a certain smell when

someone was calling us. Even in close quarters, we may not notice the smell.

It is possible that blind and deaf people could use touch phones where the message is transmitted in a series of pressure variations as though it were a tactile morse code. To summon someone to use the touch phone, a fan could be turned on so that a breeze is felt. However, for this to work, a series of fans would have to be installed in every room. This network would be doing the job that, under normal circumstances, a single ringing phone could do. Sound is the most effective means of capturing someone's attention at a distance. Auditory phenomena are more penetrating and inescapable than any other sense-specific phenomena. This is to say that sounds make a claim on us.

#### From Sound to Speech

It may be objected that sound is invasive only when it is loud. The ability of sound to invade our awareness would then be dependent upon the volume of the sound created and not upon any "formal" quality that sound possesses and that other sensory modalities do not possess to the same degree, as I have claimed above. There is something to this objection. Sound is invasive only to the extent that it can be heard. And, as I have said above, the "evanescence" of odours is also dependent upon volume. A smell does not go away, and cannot be avoided, if it is particularly strong. In fact, such a smell is just as invasive as a sound, and pervasive for a longer period of time. You keep on smelling a strong smell, whereas it is often the case that

loud sounds that claim your attention only punctuate the silence - though not always. However, it must be noticed that people have more control over sounds they emit than over their odours. If we were differently constructed, this may not be the case: we have a series of organs that allow us to control the modulation and interplay of phonetic gestures. We do not have a similar set of organs that allow us to similarly control the scents we have about our body. Other animals have such a ability and are able to communicate very subtle messages by odour. We may apply certain perfumes to our bodies to convey certain general messages about us, but the message bearing capacity of our bodily odours do not go much beyond these broad strokes.

Similarly, there are certain sights that we often encounter which we describe as invasive and seductive. We say "I could not take my eyes off her (or him)". This may be the visual equivalent of sonorous volume. Bright light can be construed as demanding our attention. Light with a high "quantity" of brightness cannot be ignored, even if it is recognized as "something to be avoided". Similarly, some colours are described as "loud", as dominating our visual environment. However, as is the case with odour, we do not have the same degree of control over the visual messages we transmit. The actor conveys much feeling by his or her body language. The dancer communicates to the audience by means of her or his movement. These messages still, nonetheless, only convey very general messages no matter how undeniably powerful they may be. Imagine a dancer trying to

dance the ontological argument or the Gettysburg address. It is significant that you can speak about dancing, but it is comparatively more difficult to dance about speaking.

There is one notable exception here, however: sign language. Anything that can be conveyed in speech can be conveyed in sign language, except for, tonality, perhaps; though signing can take on a particular rhythm and flavour that may be the visual or tactile equivalent of tonality. We can imagine a world in which everybody communicated in this way: where the majority of people had the ability to sign in a way similar to our society in which the majority of people can speak and hear. Much would be different in such a society with communications technology and the way day to day interactions proceed. There would be many differences, but it does not stretch the imagination beyond the bounds of coherence. One difference would be that we would not be able to seize each other's attention the way we can when sound is put into play in speech. When someone walks by without seeing us, we can just speak their name sufficiently loud, and they will be aware of our presence. In a sign-language world, we would have to purposefully enter into their visual field, and make sure they notice us by means of the requisite gestures. This goes back to an earlier point: while visual signals, in this instance, can bear the same amount of meaning as spoken signals, visual signals are not as effectively invasive. The visual field is more circumscribed than the acoustic field, and you have more control over what you look at than over what you hear (because of

eye-lids, and the ability to turn your head). All of these factors contribute to the ability of spoken sound to make a claim on those to whom you speak.

However, spoken sound also exercises a further claim that goes beyond just the fact that it is a bare sound. The sound of a sentence spoken in a language that we understand is particularly difficult to ignore. It is difficult to keep ourselves from eavesdropping in on a conversation that is going on in proximity to us. At a cocktail party with many chattering voices, we find it hard to speak unless the voices we hear slip into the background and become just chatter. Or we wait our turn for an appropriate moment of silence in order to speak. This is not just proper manners. We find we cannot speak when someone else is speaking. Speech takes up and holds our attention. Merleau-Ponty describes this phenomenon, saying that when we listen to an orator

the words fully occupy our mind and exactly fulfil our expectations, and we feel the necessity of the speech. Although we are unable to predict its course, we are possessed by it. The end of the speech or text will be the lifting of a spell (1962: 180).

Not only does sound enter into our awareness, but we are especially attuned to the sound of a significant human voice. Merleau-Ponty's observations are part of an argument where he asserts that words bear their own meaning, that they are in fact their own meaning. He eliminates the detour to a thought, or a concept, as the semantic element of speech. The word, or sentence, for Merleau-Ponty, is not just an empty receptacle

filled with a semantic element towards which it refers. Instead, the spoken word accomplishes thought itself. For this reason, he concludes that when we listen to speech, we follow along in the thought of the speaker. His or her thoughts are our thoughts. There is a "closeness" between speaker and listener that is apparent if the phenomena is attended to, but is ill-understood by those who posit a further level of retreat from the word to a wholly subjective thought or concept. If a thought gives meaning to our words, then our detour through thoughts is a step back into unconnected egos. It should be sufficient to point out that we do communicate, and, indeed we do sometimes misunderstand each other, but misunderstanding is only possible if true understanding is possible.

When I listen to a speaker "he (or she) fills the space between us and by it I am auditorily immersed and penetrated as sound 'physically' invades my own body" (Ihde, 1976: 79). Through the power of sound utilized in speech, larger unities develop. This is the sense in which true "inter-subjectivity" is possible. To be inter-subjective does not mean that we agree on things implicitly or explicitly or that we constantly rub up against one another in some sort of community, but that we actually think along together: that we actually in-vade each other's consciousnesses. This is accomplished by the human body in its signifying capacity and the remarkable claim that the sound of the human voice has on us. This is the curious efficacy of Kurtz's voice investigated in the last chapter. Marlow is

loyal to that voice. Ihde remarks that "hearing and obeying are often united in root terms" (1976: 81). The Latin "obaudire" is meant as "a listening" and is the root of the English "obey". Kurtz can command loyalty to his voice because, in listening to it, an inter-subjective matrix is established. His thought, the sound of his voice, dominates Marlow's consciousness even after he dies. This is what makes it so remarkable: the end of speech is, as Merleau-Ponty calls it "the lifting of a spell", but with Kurtz the spell is never lifted, even in the absence of his voice. Kurtz's will becomes Marlow's in that inter-subjective equation.

#### Merleau-Ponty and Gestalt Phenomenology

To take a closer look at some of the apparent paradoxes surrounding vocal phenomena, I will employ the technique that Ihde calls "Gestalt Phenomenology". The term comes from a critical essay of his called "Variation and Boundary: A Conflict within Ricoeur's Phenomenology" (1986). This way of doing phenomenology is thoroughly developed by Merleau-Ponty and is used to great effect in his philosophy of language.

Gestalt phenomenology is described in distinction from a method of phenomenology developed by Husserl and used by Ricoeur in his work The Symbolism of Evil. The Husserlian method consists of a number of reductions enacted on the phenomena in question. It eventually results in a "sense-atom constructionism" (Ihde, 1986: 163) that is not altogether unlike models used in empiricist theories of perception where complex

visual impressions are reduced or analyzed down to their component simple parts: for example, pure colour sense-atoms. Ihde says that this is how Ricoeur goes about investigating myths. To put it quite briefly, myths, the more complex phenomena, are constructed out of symbols, which are functionally atomic. The method of gestalt phenomenology, on the other hand, would take myths to be multi-stable figures with a complex and integrated background or field. Symbols that appear within these myths could be brought into relief in the investigation, attended to, but only against the background of the myth as a whole. The myth itself has also to be understood only against the background of a cultural hegemony. In this way, phenomena are investigated through variation - they are looked at as though they were figures in a drawing that is meant to bring out different aspects or gestalts. The point of the investigation is to understand "the interplay of multiple figure/grounds with all the variations which become possible upon that interaction" (Ihde, 1986: 161).

It is easy, then, to grasp how the apparent paradoxes surrounding vocal phenomena can be handled by this method. If we take the gestalt shift as an analogy, in the same drawing (Wittgenstein's famous duck/rabbit, for instance) a duck can be seen as not a duck, but instead, as a rabbit. Using this method, one can draw out clearly how some aspect of human experience is polysemic. Merleau-Ponty is a master at doing this.

Gestalt phenomenology allows Merleau-Ponty to make strange

claims like "there are no conventional signs" (1962: 188) and then further down the same page: "there is no natural sign" (1962: 188). It leads one to wonder that if signs are neither natural nor conventional, then what are they? Merleau-Ponty then suggests that it "is no more natural, and no less conventional, to shout in anger or to kiss in love than to call a table 'a table'" (1962: 189). He draws out the alternating aspects of the naturalness and conventionality of signs by immersing linguistic activity into the integrated whole of human signifying ability. Humans give meaning in many ways. One of the most basic is through gesture. Merleau-Ponty shows vocal phenomena to be an extension of the human organism's ability to move and have those moves mean something. He even slips into calling "speech" "verbal gesticulation". Meaningful gesture results from an acquaintance with the natural environment. Merleau-Ponty gives the example of the pre-historic human who squints in order to see into the distance. This squinting causes a furrowing of the brow, which is then taken to signify that the person with the furrowed brow is deep in thought. The sign signifying perceptual curiosity - looking into the distance - is taken up to mean intellectual curiosity - being deep in thought. If speech is just a more fine-tuned form of gesturing, then speech must be natural or a result of the natural environment.

However, this unstable gestalt does not get at the radical arbitrariness of the signs in human language. Any verbal gesture can stand for a word, but with the example of the furrowed brow,

there is some rational explanation in terms of the natural world for the emergence of this gesture. There is no similar "natural" explanation for the particular characteristic sounds of different languages. Is it more natural for Germans to speak in guttural tones than it is for English speakers to sound as if they are spitting when they speak? In this light, language and speech patterns appear purely conventional. But this gestalt is also unstable, because language could only have evolved as a response to the natural world - what would the alternative be? - it would be hard to conceive language as invented: as though agreed upon in a committee. And so on it goes, because this figure is multi-stable, polysemic, and ambiguous - linguistic signs are both natural and conventional.

David Appelbaum, in his study entitled Voice, attempts to reclaim the actual acoustic dimension of vocal phenomena for serious philosophical study. He claims that this dimension has been neglected, and in fact, erased, in the way we understand and describe speaking and listening in the accounts given of these acts throughout the history of philosophy. He calls this "a hiddenness surrounding voice" (Appelbaum, 1990: ix) and the "twofold concealment" (1990: x). In speaking, we see ourselves as speaking words, not sounds. Words are the bearers of meaning. Similarly, in listening, we listen for words, and neglect sonority, the actual corporeal vibration put into play by the body. To reclaim this territory for philosophy, he investigates vocal phenomena that supposedly, according to the tradition, do

not bear meaning. He, therefore, has a chapter entitled "The Cough" and another entitled "Babble".

Appelbaum makes the mistake of lumping Merleau-Ponty into the group of philosophers who disregard the acoustic efficacy of voice, the effacers of sonority. He misinterprets Merleau-Ponty's method, what Ihde calls "Gestalt phenomenology", as wishy-washy floundering, an inability to settle on any ontological priority. He says

Wallowing in the primeval muck of the feelings, sung voice is incapable of clarifying its position in the war of opposites. Each opposite clings with equal strength. Voice is thereby deprived at the beginning of knowing itself. Self-recognition never belongs to voice. What amounts to the same thing, voice must remain stupid and stupefied. Which is to say, mute. Merleau-Ponty conjures anew the spectre of a mutism (Appelbaum, 1990: 88).

This business of shifting between opposites and alternatives is a result of Merleau-Ponty's approach. His approach is radically unlike that of Aristotle, Condillac, Locke or any of the other theorists who have tried their hand at investigating voice. His deep respect for the sonorous, vibrant body of voice derives from his willingness to examine all aspects of the phenomenon. But this examination must take place in context, as part of a multi-stable gestalt that does not disregard the other significant aspects of phenomena. In this way, he is not being forgetful of the voice of voice. The characteristic interplay of vocal sounds spoken in a language "do not represent so many arbitrary conventions for the expression of one and the same idea, but several ways for the human body to sing the world's praises, and

in the last resort to live it" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 187). Appelbaum seems to want pure acoustic voice to come out on top without any taint of thought, meaning, reference, or even word. He wants to replace the present ontological priority of non-vocal semantic-bearers with pure corporeal voice. But Merleau-Ponty has no interest in establishing ontological priority. The radical multi-stability of the phenomena he investigates leaves no room for any metaphysical grounding of one prior aspect over another.

By using this gestalt method, then, Merleau-Ponty investigates the presence/absence of voice: the theme so prominent in Conrad's Heart of Darkness. When spoken to, our minds are occupied by words. This is one of the elements of the twofold concealment of voice, according to Appelbaum. We hear the words, not the voice. This gestalt is unstable, however, and the form of the statement uttered by the orator becomes just as important as the content. "We find here beneath the conceptual meaning of words, an existential meaning which is not only rendered by them, but which inhabits them, and is inseparable from them" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 182). The gestalt method reveals to us, as Conrad's work also shows, that in voice we have a solid existential presence - Kurtz's speech ringing out from the jungle - but also, in the same phenomenon, an aspect of absence - the horror. The very element that captures our attention, the sound of voice, in the end is not heard. We listen away. Marlow recognizes that Kurtz's voice makes him a

remarkable man, but eventually this remarkable man ends up in a shallow grave, his voice, but a memory.

Chapter 4Authentic Speech and Sedimentation

Merleau-Ponty believes that there is a "taking up of other's thought through speech" (1962: 179). As I have shown in the last chapter, this "taking up" is acted out by the penetrating claim exerted by sound on our awareness and by the further claim exerted by the particular sounds of the human voice in speech.

We think along with the speaker while listening, according to Merleau-Ponty, because spoken words themselves have meanings. They are not just empty containers filled by thoughts, as though thoughts are the real bearers of meaning. What we would call "thoughts", then, must occur simultaneously with words while they are spoken. Thoughts are words when they are spoken. However, in our everyday dealings, we do not usually speak thoughtfully. In a footnote, Merleau-Ponty makes this distinction, saying

There is, of course, every reason to distinguish between an authentic speech, which formulates for the first time, and second-order expression, speech about speech, which makes up the general run of empirical language. Only the first is identical with thought (1962: 178).

The distinction can perhaps be understood in terms of the phenomenon of cliché. When we tell someone to "let sleeping dogs lie" for instance, we do not approach the situation with any originality: we are engaging in second-order expression. In using this saying, as advice perhaps, we deal in an established currency of meaning - all of the thinking has been done for us by whoever originally framed such a situation in these terms. We

use this cliché when the situation seems apt. These sorts of sayings can be quite wise. They have stood the test of time. Authentic speech, however, formulates for the first time.

In this chapter, I would like to investigate this phenomenon of "authentic speech". To do this, I will make explicit three aspects of this phenomenon which are alluded to by Merleau-Ponty and other authors. I will then investigate Merleau-Ponty's metaphor of "sedimentation" and how authentic instances of expression can become part of a tradition.

These authentic utterances are the most important acts of expression. The future of discourse works in the terms established and inaugurated by authentic speech. A first-order act of speech, the "new sense-giving intention" operates by

donning already available meanings, the outcome of previous acts of expression. The available meanings suddenly link up in accordance with an unknown law, and once and for all a fresh cultural entity has taken on an existence (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 183).

This description has an air of mystery to it. This "unknown law", if discovered, could provide a formula for genius, or tyranny. Authentic speech controls and commands the direction of further discourse - of the way humans will continue to interact with each other. This is "mind-control" through speech and cultural sedimentation.

Elsewhere in Merleau-Ponty's corpus of work, he describes this type of speech. In one of his sketches of a course to be given at the Collège de France, he confronts "The Problem of Speech" (1953-4). In a section that is generally allusive to

Proust's work A la recherche du temps perdu, Merleau-Ponty asserts that

The writer's speech ... imposes a private world upon him as something evident. But in doing so it only reactivates the original operation of language with the deliberate aim of acquiring and putting into circulation not just the statistical and common aspects of the world, but its very manner of touching and inserting itself into the individual's experience. It cannot therefore be content with the established and current significations ... This new speech takes shape in the writer unnoticed, during years of apparently idle living ... - until one day he yields to the weight of that way of speaking which has gradually been built up in him and he starts to say how he became a writer, creating a work from the story of the birth of that work (1970: 24-5).

What is significant in this description of the genesis of Proust's novel is the sense that the writer "yields to the weight" of the way he has been living and speaking, and this, as it were, breaks out into writing. The notion of yielding to the weight of "that way of speaking" contains echoes of the "unknown law" that Merleau-Ponty suggests in the earlier "The Body as Expression and Speech" chapter of Phenomenology of Perception. Both notions are somewhat mysterious. This "way of speaking" has been evident to the writer all along. He deals in the common currency of his own expressive activity, but the currency is not common to everyone else: the writer is in "a private world" until his way of speaking gets put on paper and is exposed to the public. The writer's speech can then become sedimentary in this apt medium for sedimentation, and then be taken up as common currency.

There are at least three gestalts investigated by Merleau-Ponty in relation to authentic speech. There is the inaugural aspect in which a new way of speaking and thinking is set forth and taken up by those in the common culture. This gives the phenomenon a sense of newness, of being unprecedented. The act of authentic speech also, however, has to be situated firmly in the current context. First-order speech puts into circulation "not just the statistical and common aspects of the world" (Merleau-Ponty, 1970: 24). This means that it is new, but also, in a way statistical and common. This is the second gestalt. The third is a simultaneous reversion back to origins. "The writer's speech ... reactivates the original operation of language" (ibid.: 24).

Having dealt with the first aspect - the inaugurating function of authentic speech - I will now move to the second aspect. Authentic speech must have an element of the common. It has to be able to touch the hearer with a familiar aspect. Merleau-Ponty says "vocabulary and syntax must be 'already known' to me" (1962: 183). This is a condition of authentic speech: for it to be significant, it must be spoken in a language familiar to the hearer, even though what is spoken is unprecedented; otherwise, this authentic speech would just be incoherent sound entering into my awareness. It would be curious, or a nuisance, rather than thoughtful. Frank Kermode, the literary theorist, says

the absolutely New is simply unintelligible,  
even as novelty ... novelty of itself

implies the existence of what is not novel, a past ... newness is a phenomenon that affects the whole of the past; nothing on its own can be new (1966: 116-117).

For the authentic speaker to truly be heard and understood, he or she must speak in a cultural situation with a history shared by his or her speakers.

Georges Gusdorf, the author of Speaking, acknowledges that authentic speakers, these agents of change, must have one foot in the past and one in the future. He says that the great writer is someone who "creates an original style with the words common to everyone" (1965: 59). In speech, it is necessary first for the words to be heard, which requires that they first be common, before they can be understood to be uncommon. New paradigms always owe a debt to paradigms that come before.

The third unstable gestalt brought out in Merleau-Ponty's investigation of authentic speech is the notion that authentic speakers step back into an original situation at the same time that they inaugurate a new way of speaking. This activity is more extreme than just using common words to deliver an original style. The word "original" has at least two senses. To be "original" in the first sense means that you have discovered new territory, that you have been the first to do something. This is the inaugural "original". The second sense of "original" means "having to do with an origin or origins". It is a step back into the past. Gusdorf's version of authentic speech, he calls "the plan of genius, thanks to which the most commonly used words mysteriously rediscover their original integrity" (1965: 74).

Instead of discovering new integrity, they rediscover what had belonged to them all along, but was forgotten. Gusdorf emphasizes the sense of awe and mystery surrounding this activity. It harkens back to an earlier understanding of language in our cultural heritage, a use that many people would perhaps regard as superstitious. The early Hebrews of the Old Testament attached great taboo to pronouncing the name of their god. Merleau-Ponty says that "for pre-scientific thinking, naming an object is causing it to exist or changing it" (1962: 178). For the early Hebrews, then, pronouncing the name of their god would be a blasphemous and dangerous inversion of the creator-created relationship. It would be an act full of arrogance and hubris to say the name of god, an act which would include the presumption that you have created him. Such was the power attributed to denomination.

Merleau-Ponty includes among the agents of authentic "first-hand speech ... the writer and philosopher who reawaken primordial experience anterior to all traditions" (1962: 179). This is a very strongly-worded description of the movement back to origins enacted by the authentic speaker. To get an understanding of this originary movement, it must be understood that this aspect of authentic speech is tied up inextricably with the other aspects. Although first-order speech requires a grounding in the common parlance of the day, there is still the unmistakable sense that something new is happening, the sense that the first readers of Ulysses felt or the feelings of those

who heard Martin Luther King speak. In these situations, the world begins again. All of the old details no longer apply. Authentic speakers are "all who transform a certain kind of silence into speech" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 184). The origin to which all of these authors are referring, Merleau-Ponty's "primordial experience", is what comes before speech: silence.

The silence that comes before should not be understood temporally. Humans are born into a world of speech. We are surrounded from the first moment by voice. Even in the womb we hear the vocal vibrations of our mothers. Instead of a temporally prior silence, this primordial silence should be understood as surrounding us at every moment, even as sounds penetrate into our awareness. In the auditory field, what I hear is situated by the unspoken. Ihde states that "what was not said has been said in a community with a history" (1976: 166). The majority of our discourse, taken out of context, would probably make no sense. For example, try picking up a book you have never read and choosing a page and sentence at random, or trying introducing yourself into a conversation already in progress. The degree of our understanding in such situations increases the more we read or hear, the more we are involved in the silent context which situates what is said. "The beginning of man is in the midst of word, but word lies in the midst of silence" (Ihde, 1976: 186). The originary act, the act that moves back to this silence and confronts it anew is "the action which breaks this silence. The spoken word" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 184).

### Sedimentation

It is one thing for words to take on new meanings in authentic speech, but it is another thing for these meanings to be retained. Another aspect of the interplay between speakers and hearers allows this to happen, according to Merleau-Ponty.

Authenticity in speech is clearly disruptive. Above, I have investigated these more disruptive aspects - the movement away from common meanings towards original and originary aspects. Authentic speech is, in a way, destructive. It brings with it a sense of wonder - the wonder of being told new, dangerous things by a speaker with an ability to captivate an audience. Marlow is quite aware of this feeling while in the presence of Kurtz.

However, for an insurrection to become a revolution, there must be a significant seizure of power that can be extended over time. For Merleau-Ponty, the fruits of insurrection seized by authentic speech are retained by settling into sedimentation. The reader of Heart of Darkness does not get to witness the sedimentation of Kurtz's speech, except possibly in Marlow's testament to his loyalty to that remarkable voice. This "sedimentation" is a metaphor, and unabashedly so: Merleau-Ponty is here searching for the best way to express what he sees in the phenomenon.

Authentic speech, which puts up a new sense, has to settle in for it to become common parlance - to make the move from being first-order speech into being taken up as second-order speech, the general run of empirical discourse. Merleau-Ponty draws out

the ability of speech to sediment by distinguishing it from other human ways of signifying. Speech "alone of all expressive processes ... is able to settle into a sediment and constitute an acquisition for use in human relationships" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 190). Part of the reason for this privileged status is the notable fact that speech can be recorded on paper. In the transition to the written medium, however, speech loses the claim made on a listener through the efficacy of sound, but as we have seen above, according to Merleau-Ponty, the writer owes the genesis of his or her written work to a way of speaking that builds up through years of living in a private world taken as evident: sound is efficacious here. Speech comes first. This speech can sediment in written form and eventually convince a public into taking the writer's heretofore private world as evident.

In contrast to speech, pure bodily gesture, he says, can be "transmitted only by direct imitation" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 190). However, he forgets the sedimentation that can be enacted by film reproduction of gestural behaviour. For example, it may be that the gesturing of Charlie Chaplin and similar silent film actors changed the way that the public expressed themselves in body language, and thus changed the way we interact with each other and the world.

Perhaps a better distinction is between speech and music. Music does not sediment as well as speech because "every composer starts his task at the beginning" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 190).

Music can be written down, but when the composer begins work on a new composition, he or she starts with nothing. The writer, when beginning, has to deal with words - each of which contain echoes of a tradition. Even the most authentic of speech is firmly grounded in the common culture. As we saw above, the great writer is someone who "creates an original style with the words common to everyone" (Gusdorf, 1965: 59). The commonality of even authentic speech is one of the manifold multi-stable aspects of vocal phenomena investigated by Merleau-Ponty.

The instituting consciousness and sedimentation

"We live in a world where speech is an institution" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 184). Merleau-Ponty makes a distinction between institution and constitution. The human ability to cause the sedimentation of speech and perhaps other forms of expression comes from our instituting consciousness. Much of our phenomenological research leads us to believe that we have a constituting consciousness, a consciousness of which "there are only the objects which it has itself constituted" (Merleau-Ponty, 1970: 39). This is, in part, the phenomenological understanding of intentionality. The problem, however, with this conception of consciousness is that "there is nothing in the objects capable of throwing consciousness back toward other perspectives" (ibid.: 39). The interaction between objects is limited. The constituting consciousness cannot "think along" with other consciousnesses from other perspectives: it cannot consider itself as it was in the past, and it cannot consider other

"present" consciousnesses. The other's "existence only means the negation of itself; it does not know that they behold it, it only knows that it is beheld" (ibid.: 40). For Merleau-Ponty, this will not do as a description of the phenomenon. It is clear that there is more interaction and stability between myself and the "other". He, therefore, suggests that

If the subject were taken not as a constituting but an instituting subject, it might be understood that the subject does not exist instantaneously and that the other person does not exist simply as a negative of myself (ibid.: 40).

The introduction of the category of an instituting consciousness opens up the possibility of a genuine "inter-subjectivity". The "instituting subject could coexist with another" (ibid.: 40). In speech, which is an institution, the speaker and listener can think along together.

As we have seen, it is my contention that the possibility of there existing an instituting consciousness relies on the power of the human voice. Particularly, this power comes from the ability of voice to put sound into play. Sound penetrates and surrounds our awareness. The human capacity for vocal gesticulation can manipulate this sound so that it can produce significant and meaningful symbols, which exercise a further claim on our awareness. As Ihde suggests, the "surrounding, penetrating quality of sound maximizes larger unities than individuals as such" (1976: 78). This is consistent with Merleau-Ponty's estimation that

the instituted subject exists between others and myself, between me and myself, like a hinge,

the consequence and guarantee of our belonging to a common world (1970: 40).

The instituted subject is one that speaks and is spoken to - whose most remarkable acts of voice are sedimented into the tradition.

Merleau-Ponty's wish, at the beginning of the chapter on "The Body as Expression and Speech" is to "leave behind us, once and for all, the traditional subject-object dichotomy" (1962: 174). In his description of the various multi-stable aspects of speech, and in his investigation of authentic speech, sedimentation and the later innovation of the idea of an instituting consciousness, his thought certainly arrives at this point - where the categories of subject and object recede in importance into the background, and a larger inter-subjective unity emerges.

Against Realism: Projecting a World

I am trying to describe how speaking projects a world. Merleau-Ponty suggests that the "spoken word is a gesture, and its meaning, a world" (1962: 184). Another author, Corey Anton in his "On Speaking: A Phenomenological Recovering of a Forgotten Sense" (1997), claims that "speech provides Others, not only opportunities to thematize to my speaking, but also opportunities to listen from it and hence to think a common world" (185). Phenomenologists find it necessary to invoke "the world" when trying to understand speaking. "Sure," some may say, "speaking is done within the context of the world, but does speech not rather 'provide', 'mean' or 'project' sentences, or something similarly linguistic?" This is to say that speech is about language and the world itself is indifferent to human linguistic structures. In this chapter I will deal with this "realistic" view of things and show how it is inadequate.

My argument will proceed in two phases. First, I will consider a "naive" realist position in which the world is depicted as a totality that is present to us. To put this depiction of "the world" into doubt, I make use of an argument by Donald Davidson in which he questions the sense in which we can say that "experience" is organized by language. This Davidsonian argument suggests to me that nouns like "experience" and "the world" mislead us into thinking that they represent one uniform

thing with which we are confronted at every turn - whereas, in reality, they represent pluralities of separate things that are never apprehended simultaneously in space and time. This first phase of the argument will show that we cannot speak seriously about things like "the world" if they are understood in this manner: as present or "given" to our consciousness. We can, however, consider middle-sized objects to be so present. For example, when someone says "the cat is on the mat" and we want to know whether this is true, we do not consult "experience" or "the world" (this is the naive realist assumption), instead, we look at the cat itself and where the cat is. This leads into the second part of my argument. The Davidsonian considerations leave me with something like a nominalist position. To me, this is still realism, and therefore inadequate. When I say that speaking projects a world, I want to assert something stronger than nominalism - namely that things or individuals do not exist outside of language. Speaking allows us to apprehend things and differentiate them from the background of our engagement with the world. These experiences are thoroughly linguistic.

I will also try to understand why phenomenologists find it necessary to invoke "the world" or "a world" while investigating speech. Indeed, I find it necessary myself to bring about talk of "the world" in my own investigation of speech. For this reason, I will clarify the sense in which I use the word "the world". Obviously, I will not use it in any realist sense, since I will try to put those uses into doubt. This word, "world",

used in the realist sense, will hopefully not speak sincerely to us after this treatment. However, I find it necessary to use this word in another particular sense. This is after all, my language, and I cannot just toss away words, because then I may not be able to say anything. I will therefore come to use the term "the world" in a reinvigorated sense that is more in keeping with the phenomenology of this investigation.

#### The intentional structure of speech

Elsewhere in this work, I have described the simultaneous presence-absence of voice in speech. Voice is present in its penetrating aspect: the sound of speech makes a claim on those listening, forcing them to listen, or to deal with that sound by "blocking it out". For those who listen, voice then makes itself absent by redirecting attention away from the sound towards what the sounds mean. This meaning is "other than", different from, the sounds themselves. In this way, speech is intentional: it is "about something". Speaking is always speaking of X. This "X" is constituted by what I say when I speak, the meaning of the sounds emitted that go beyond the bare fact of those sounds, and consequently allow the voice to efface itself.

When I say "the cat is on the mat", the sounds arise from my body: "thuh kat iz-on thuh mat". If there is anybody there to hear these sounds, this listener attends to them as they enter into his or her awareness. Then the listener attends away from the sounds to the meaning. The meaning, the act of speech itself, is about the cat being on the mat. What does the voice

project then, as it lapses into absence: a sentence? If we want to understand what speaking is "about", this gets us no further, for we would still have to ask what a sentence is "about". Speaking is a way of involving ourselves in the world (whatever this word may mean). When I speak, I do not intend to say a sentence, this is just a way of understanding what is going on in speech. I speak about the world, whether or not a sentence intervenes. For now, just consider "the world" to be this "other" about which I speak.

In what follows, I will consider three senses of "the world" - first, the "given" world<1> of naive realism, second, when the first conception does not stand up to scrutiny, "the world<2>" as a short-hand for the set of all middle-sized objects, and third, when nominalism is shown to be inadequate, the world<3> as a phenomenologically multi-stable plenum. (Please notice that when I delineate the three senses of this word, I do not mean to speak of three different worlds. All three senses attempt to refer to the same phenomenon. Think of them rather as three attempts at describing the same phenomenon - this "other" to which our attention is directed when someone speaks.)

### Naive realism

The listener attends to what the speaker says about the world. It remains to be seen what this "about" itself means. Is a sentence like "the cat is on the mat" an interpretation of a state of affairs already in the world<1>? The claim that "speaking projects a world<3>" seems to be implying a stronger

act than just an act of interpretation. The question is whether a world<1> is "given" to us, the speakers. If this were so, then speaking would just be a reaction to the world<1>. We would be trying to mirror, in assertoric speech, what states of affairs obtain in this world<1> that is given to us at any particular time. My contention is that this depiction is inadequate. To understand why, we must make a foray into realism.

Is not the world<1> prior to what we say about it? Does not the cat sitting on the mat make true what I say about the cat sitting on the mat, and also, perhaps, bring about this observation in so far as I am attentive to this world<1> which is given to me? In this view, speech does not create anything or project anything. If what I say is true, then my speech merely reflects the world<1>. The world<1> "gives itself" to the speaker prior to this act of reflection. The world<1> is the way it is no matter what we say about it, so the story goes. This is an understanding of the world<1> as a picture, or a judge of the truth of what I say. So I say, "the cat is on the mat". (I use this example for no reason other than it is a simple assertoric sentence and I want to illustrate, in the simplest terms, the dynamic between language and this understanding of "the world".) To assess the truth of this statement, I look at the world<1>. The cat is, indeed, on the mat. The world<1> declares that what I say is true.

We could say that this realistic view of the world holds that a sentence is true if and only if it corresponds to

experience. Our experience says the cat is on the mat, so "the cat on the mat" is true. With respect to "experience", Donald Davidson, in his "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme" (1973) says that

The idea is then that something is a language ... if it stands in a certain relation (predicting, organizing, facing or fitting) to experience (nature, reality, sensory promptings). The problem is to say what the relation is, and to be clearer about the entities related (13).

The same may be said about the relation between language and "the world". Davidson is concerned with refuting the idea that language organizes experience, or nature, or the world<1>. More importantly, in this article Davidson also wants to gain a clearer understanding of just what this thing called "experience" is. Similarly, I am concerned with finding out just what this thing called "the world" is, because it is my contention that speaking projects a world<3>. Davidson's argument is helpful because he shows how "the world<1>" and "experience" are similar. He says

We cannot attach a clear meaning to the notion of organizing a single object (the world, nature etc.) unless that object is understood to contain or consist in other objects. Someone who sets out to organize a closet arranges the things in it. If you are told not to organize the shoes and shirts, but the closet itself, you would be bewildered ... How about the other kind of object, experience? Can we think of a language organizing it? ... The notion of organization applies only to pluralities (14).

I would say, can we think of language as reflecting experience? "Experience" is a noun that signifies a whole wide array of things that we would call "experiences". These, if taken in

their totality, would comprise experience, such that there is nothing beyond these many experiences in total that we can call "experience" itself. If we are talking about truth, then, and the way in which a sentence has to reflect experience in order to be true, we would not consult all of experience to see whether "the cat is on the mat" is true. We would just consult that part of experience in which the cat is supposed to be on the mat. "Experience" in general, is a misleading unity of many parts. Similarly, what we would call "the world<1>" as something "given" prior to language and reflected by language, is also a unity of many parts. The world<2> is comprised of the cat sitting on the mat, the snow in its whiteness, the otter swimming in the river, and so on. We find that what we call "the world<1>" cannot be understood as substantive or "given" at all. Language is prior to "the world<1>" because "the world<2>" is just a word used to unify all of these diverse phenomena. (The senses of "world" change here because the first sense of "world" is not as adequate as the second). There is nothing that is "the world<1>" that is beyond all of these things. If we made an exhaustive list of everything obtaining at a certain time, it would be adequate for the purposes of consultation to see whether what we say is true. There would not be something further at the bottom of the list called "the world<1>" which we would always need to consult.

The problem and the answer I am proposing can perhaps be understood if we switched to a different sensory modality. Up until now in this chapter, I have presupposed a visual

metaphorics. Instead, think about touch. What is it that you feel or that you touch at any given moment? Do we say that we are touching the world<1>? When you wake up in the morning do you feel the world<1> entering into your consciousness through the sense of touch. No one seriously talks this way. When we wake in the morning, we feel the blankets and the mattress, not the world<1>. Right now, I feel the keyboard beneath my fingers. When operating under a visual model, it is comparatively easier to advance the thesis that "the world<1>" or "experience" impinges on my consciousness at any given moment. This is because, when we see, we most often see a bunch of things, a large totality, whereas when we feel, we feel one thing at a time. Even though we see a bunch of things, we do not see everything. Therefore, it makes no sense to say that the world<1> in its full presence is impinging on my consciousness at any given time. I am confronted with a series of experiences and objects, not with experience itself, or with the world<2> that is comprised of these objects.

Davidson subscribes to the Tarskian conception of truth: for example, "the cat is on the mat" is true if and only if the cat is on the mat. This conception of truth makes no use of notions of reference to the world<1> or states of affairs that are said to make sentences true. Of course, there is the implicit assumption that what makes the sentence "the cat is on the mat" true is the actual cat sitting on the mat. We cannot say then, that this cat sitting on the mat is happening "in the

world<1>" rather than "in language", because it would do nothing further to explain or clarify why "the cat is on the mat" is true. In this understanding of things, the Tarskian-Davidsonian conception of truth, it is incorrect to make use of the nouns "world" or "experience" and expect them to signify something unified, present or given. It is, however, correct to use other nouns like "cat" or "mat". It is a sufficient explanation to say that "the cat is on the mat" is true if and only if the cat is on the mat. The cat on the mat, metaphysically speaking, is taken to be a singular unit. It is only pluralities like "world" and "experience" that should not be taken to be present. The cat sitting on the mat, on the other hand, is present for our consultation. The cat sitting on the mat makes true what we say about the cat sitting on the mat. We have not totally escaped realism yet.

Compare Davidson's account of experience with what Derrida has to say about it:

As for the concept of experience, it is most unwieldy ... it belongs to the history of metaphysics and we can only use it under erasure. "Experience" has always designated the relationship with a presence (Derrida, 1974: 60).

What Davidson has done in the above treatment of "experience" is move towards a deconstruction of presence. However, he deals only with pluralities denoted by words that lead you to believe they are just one thing. Concepts like "experience", "world<1>", and "nature" are fit for deflation. These are particularly large targets for this kind of treatment. For Derrida, however, the

metaphysics of presence is everywhere in language. We will not be able to understand how speaking projects a world<sup><3></sup> until realism is totally deflated. For Davidson, the actual living cat is still prior, in this way, to language. What we say about the cat has to match what the actual cat does for our sentence to be true. This means that the realistic assumption remains, that what we say about these things in "the world<sup><2></sup>" does not have any effect on them, even though we can no longer speak seriously about "the world<sup><1></sup>" in the first sense.

#### Nominalist realism

When we say "the world" then, are we using it as a shorthand for the set of all middle-sized objects? "The world<sup><2></sup>", in this sense, could be comprised of a list of all things like cats, sea-horses and tractors, and what such things are doing at the time at which you make an assertion. This would become a form of nominalism. I am not advancing some form of nominalism. I want to go further than that. Ian Hacking, in his "Working in a New World" (1993) says

Nominalist programs, however various, have a hard core. There are individuals in the world, but over and above the individuals, there are not any sets, kinds, universals, classes. Universals can exist in things, in re, but there are none prior to things, ante rem. Thanks to nature's ways, the things in nature distinguish themselves into various kinds, but there are not kinds over and above the distinctions found in things (277).

The nominalist realist position about the sense of "the world" holds that snow is an individual. The cat sitting on the mat is an individual. These things exist independently of what we say

about them. This is the sense in which nominalism is still a realism. However, since I want to say that speaking projects a world<3>, I cannot countenance a view that has a world<2> already in place, a world<2> that is not susceptible to the action of speech.

Therefore, nominalists hold that there are individuals. It must be understood, however, that what allows us to understand individuals as individuals is the fact that these individuals have been differentiated, somehow, from other individuals. For us, individuals would not exist if we could not tell them apart from others. Even this statement, however, that we could not tell "them" apart from other individuals, could not be spoken without first some differentiation. "Them" is a word. Words allow us to demarcate similarities and differences. These similarities and differences would often not even be noticed without words marking them out. It is, therefore, difficult to assert that these differences and similarities exist prelinguistically.

To understand something as a "this" and even to begin to call it a "this" requires that we notice how it stands out from the rest. But even for there to be a "rest" requires that there be differences among "them". It is language that often allows us to notice this difference.

There is a phenomenon in baseball in which the batter drops his or her hands a couple of inches and then brings them back up to the previous level before following through with the swing.

This action, in baseball parlance, is known as a "hitch". Batting instructors are concerned with helping players develop the most fluid motion possible when they are swinging because then their swing will be more reliable. The best hitters usually have the most uninterrupted bat-motion. For this reason, coaches need to indicate to players when they have a hitch in their swing. To the uninitiated, most swings are probably quite similar. Someone who is not familiar with baseball will not notice, when swinging a bat, whether he or she has a hitch. If it is pointed out to them that this motion is known as "a hitch", then the baseball neophyte will be able to feel the hitch, otherwise he or she will not notice that anything is wrong or out of the ordinary with the swing. It takes a subtle and practised eye to notice problems in a batter's swing. Having the hitch pointed out to you by being told that this motion is a "hitch" allows you to identify the problem in your swing. I cannot imagine how this can be done without language. The coach could say "you are doing this thing with your swing", and avoid giving it a definite name, but calling it a "thing" you still identify it through language. The hitch in the swing does not exist for the newcomer to baseball until the word is spoken to him or her and its usage is circumscribed, even though he or she enacts "it". This part of the motion does not exist until it is differentiated from the rest of the motion by the use of a word. This word also serves to unify any particular hitch-motion with all similar hitch-motions which occur at other instances. This

is what denomination does: it differentiates things out from the vast plenum of possible experiences, and it simultaneously unifies them with other experiences deemed, perhaps newly, to be similar. It would be difficult to state that hitches in swings existed long before anyone thought of naming them, long before, in fact, the game of baseball existed which made it necessary to point out this aspect of the phenomenon. What would these existent motions be? They would not be hitches, because they only become hitches when they are named "hitches". Would they then be phenomena without names? But "phenomenon" is a name of sorts - a linguistic way of differentiating an experience out from the rest.

The point here is that it is difficult, or even impossible to assess the existence of things that have not been brought to our attention through language. Otherwise, we would have to claim that any number of things exist already that we have never even considered to have existed before. It is difficult to confront this negative possibility. It verges on the incoherent. For instance, perhaps I choose to name the split second before a batter's swing a "froad". Does this mean that froads have existed for all time, but no one has been able to notice them before, even though a "froad" would be a moment when nothing really happens, no-thing rather than a thing? It is more sensible to say that, hypothetically, if all baseball announcers took to calling that split second before the swing a "froad", and it became part of the culture of the game, then it came into

existence when I first named it above. Words are able to create things that never existed before.

Understood this way, speaking about things is not, or not just, an act of Nietzschean "gleichmachen": of making things that are completely different the same. Speaking as "gleichmachen" is the process of equating sounds or signs with actual things existing in the world<2>. Sounds and objects belong to two different categories of beings, it is said. My contention is that we cannot understand "things" as "things" without first speaking about them, that is, they are not "things" or any-thing at all without being called a "thing" or being made to bear a name. (I use the word "thing" here, and in most cases above, to mean "individual" in the nominalist sense. The difference is that the nominalists hold that individuals exist before we speak about them, and I hold that the act of speaking allows individuals to emerge as individuals.)

Imagine a child looking into a pen populated by many different animals. The child is very young and does not know all of their names. She probably notices that there are differences between the animals even before she knows the names. There is no doubt that we have a pre-linguistic sense of the differences between parts of what we experience. But these differences are fleeting and unstable. Language allows these differences to hold. So the child points to a goat and says "what's that?". She notices that it is a "that". "That" is a word, no doubt, but a word brought on by a pre-linguistic sense of difference. She

also realizes, however, that this sense of difference requires a linguistic basis: she asks for its name. There is a word that makes the goat different from the sheep.

In a way, denomination is tied to a nominalist ontology. The names we give create general kinds among individuals. These individuals are usually understood to stand out as separate from each other. Furthermore, the creation of general kinds allows differentiation among different kinds. But, where does our understanding of individuals as individuals come from? The nominalist says "there are individuals" before we even speak of them. I think the nominalist attributes too much stability to what we experience. The things we see, hear, feel, taste, touch, do not become differentiated and unified into stable entities until we use language.

Thus, the little girl may point to another goat that looks different, in some way, from the other animals and say "what's that?" perhaps expecting the second goat to have a different name than the first goat. Her mother may tell her that that too is a goat. This is not surprising, but perhaps the child thought the second goat was different enough to have a different name, that it is perhaps a "quoaat". When her mother tells her that it is just another goat, she is also implying that "quoaats" do not exist - that this other thing that the child thought the second goat was, did not exist. In saying the words "that is a goat" the mother is projecting a world<3> in which there are goats and in which there are no things called "quoaats". If the mother

wanted to play a game or joke with her child she may say, when asked, "that is a quoaat". In this instance, she would be projecting a world<3> in which quoaats exist. The curious thing about the human voice is that this world is projected into the consciousness of the child. Spoken sound, in its penetrating aspect, makes a claim on the child, causing her to listen, but not listen to the voice, but to listen away from the voice and to the world<3>. In this second case, the mother's voice causes the child to attend to a world<3> in which there are "quoaats".

The nominalist-realist understanding of "world<2>" as the set of all individuals, as I have suggested above, therefore has to give way to this other understanding of "world<3>". Individuals cannot be understood as existing until they have been differentiated. Differentiation is often effected by spoken gestures. This new sense of "world<3>" involves the claim that the world<3> is "other", because in voice, one's attention is directed away from the bare sounds of the voice. It is necessary to posit something as the destination of this directedness. This, I have suggested, is the world<3>. If it is not "given", as naive realism asserts, and if it is not a short-hand for a set of objects or individuals which are "given", as nominalist realism claims, then what is this "world<3>"?

#### The "world" as multi-stable gestalt

To say that speaking projects a world<3>, or that it is "creative" of a world<3>, is not to claim that speech has a magical power to cause things to appear out of nowhere, as though

in a puff of smoke. I am trying here to avoid being that absurd. So it would be difficult to contend that nothing exists until there is speech. However, in our pre-linguistic engagement with these "things" that exist, where is it that these things do their existing? Do they exist in "the world<1>", or in our "experience"? As we saw above, even realistically-minded philosophers have a hard time understanding what this pre-linguistic world<1> is, or even what our experience is. Instead of being engaged in the world<1>, do we not deal with people, trees, automobiles, rocks, ovens, and so on? When I wake up in the morning, I sense these things, I do not sense "the world<1>". I cannot even imagine what "the world<1>" would look like in its totality. Similarly, instead of being confronted every day with "experience" do I not have several smaller successive experiences of things and events? The whole of experience beyond this succession cannot even be conceived. When it is said that we consult experience to assess whether what we say is true, it is implied that "experience" is a full presence constantly impinging on our senses. Derrida would say that "experience" in its full presence is forever deferred - this notion of "experience" is never experienced. We instead have several experiences. We see that the cat is on the mat, hear a bird chirping, someone speaks to us, and so on. The full character of experience is never glimpsed. If it were, it would be eternal and instantaneous.

Our consciousness is, however, never without experiences. We are constantly engaged in living in the world<3>. But

underneath our attentive gaze, or to our discerning ears, we pick out certain features from the background. It is easy to see how one might construe "experience" as being a totality which we deal with daily. We are surrounded by phenomena, but this plenum is multi-stable. It shifts and moves with aspects that come into being and pass away. We act and are acted upon. Phenomena are temporal entities, but experience experienced as a totality in its full presence would have to be outside of time.

When people speak to us, our attention is directed to this shifting, multi-stable world<3>. It is populated by presences and absences. The voice disappears in order to draw attention away from it to the world<3>. In this act of drawing attention, in speaking about the world<3> or projecting a world<3>, speech creates new aspects and stabilities. It brings phenomena to our attention. Speech picks out and differentiates focus phenomena from the background. It gives things their thingness. Saying "that is a quoad" to the child brings the different looking goat into focus from the background of other goats and other animals in the pen and suggests that this is a different kind of thing from the other goats. Prior to this speech act, this kind does not exist. It languishes in the background as a mere possibility. This "background" should not be thought of as "the world<1>" in its full presence. This is the mistaken naive realist assumption. When I say voice projects "a world<3>" the word "world" should not be understood in this realist sense. While picking out or differentiating phenomena, voice is creating

these multi-stable states in our experiences. In a sense, there is something "there" before we begin to speak of it, but there is also very much that is "not there". Our world<3> will not contain the hitch of a swing until we speak about it. We will not be able to see it. We create the hitch in the batter's swing by speaking about it and bringing this phenomenon into focus, differentiating it from the background of the multi-stable gestalt that is our "experience". A multi-stable gestalt cannot be understood as a "presence" in the way that naive realists take "experience" to be present. This stability is populated just as thickly by absences. Every phenomenon has its hidden aspects. Every sentence is spoken in an unspoken context. The silences which surround our words often "say" more than the words themselves.

The "world<1>" then, is forever deferred. We always just get language. There are cats sitting on mats and goats in pens. These are just words, but what we see are not words, but the goats themselves, the cat and the mat. It is easy to forget, however, that what we see is often dependent upon the language that we use, the words we speak, and the names we have given "things". It is just as easy to forget that our voice can also be understood as manipulating sounds and not words. All phenomena are thoroughly linguistic, and all words are thoroughly phenomenal. Neither language, nor what language is about can exist separately. Each is mutually implicated in the other. We cannot get at the world<1> behind the words that we use because

this world<3> is created by communicating about it. At the same time, speaking could not exist without a world<3>, an "other", to speak about. We would just be making sounds, but speaking is not just sonorous, it is signifying. Speech projects a world<3> by signifying. It makes itself absent right at the moment when it makes itself present in the consciousness of the listener.

Chapter 6Post-metaphysics of Projecting a World

In this chapter, I consider the ontological and metaphysical implications of asserting that speech "projects a world". I want to avoid a naive "metaphysics of presence" or an anthropocentric ontology. To understand how speech "projects a world" when it acts invasively, I need to give a fuller account of just what this "thing" is which is called, more or less sincerely, a "world" (in this chapter I will be using the word "world" in the third sense of the previous chapter, unless otherwise indicated). To do this, it has to be clarified just who the participants are in this act of projecting a world. Obviously the world will be involved, but perhaps it is less obvious who is speaking when a world is projected. To find the speaker (or speakers), I employ the ideology of gestalt phenomenology and bring it to bear on what Merleau-Ponty calls "authentic speech". I investigate this type of speech because it is the most unambiguous instance of projecting a world. In the end, I find that the speaker that you hear in authentic speech is determined by the aspect of the gestalt to which you are attending. Conrad's Heart of Darkness will be shown to bring this clearly into relief. Understanding the authentic speaker in this way, as a multi-stable gestalt, allows me to avoid a metaphysics of presence and an anthropocentric ontology.

What Merleau-Ponty calls "authentic speech" is the most

clear case of how speech projects a world. Most of the normal run of empirical discourse is not ground-breaking. Everyday speech works within the confines of meanings already established by prior acts of speech. The meanings of the words that are used in these sedimentary instances of speech are not changed or challenged. This speech is more in tune with an act of "accepting" a world than of projecting a world. This type of discourse is probably responsible for the realist assumption that I considered in the previous chapter: that "the world<1>" is the way it is no matter what we say about it, and so the proper use of speech is to reflect the states of affairs found already in the world<1>. However, if words differentiate "things" in our "experience" (the words in quotes no longer speak entirely sincerely to us), then the differentiations made by accepted, second-order discourse were founded by acts of speech long ago in the history of the speech community. These originary acts of speech now lie under layers of sedimentation. What was once original becomes old hat. It becomes common sense. This sedimentary, commonsensical speech has an air of truth-intending to it. It states "this is how things are". This truth-intending goes unchallenged if no one speaks authentically. It is all-too-easy to regard the "world" as pre-linguistically present if we retain all of the old sedimentary ways of speaking and never introduce anything new. When we hear authentic speech, we witness a world being projected. Something new arises. Everything is cast in different terms. Strictly speaking,

second-order discourse, talk about the weather, gossip about the neighbours, also projects a world, but it is a world with which we are familiar, and this familiarity leads us to believe that the world is present the way it is, always has been and always will be.

This realism is no longer viable when we come under the sway of an authentic speaker, of a Kurtz, for instance. The young Russian in the story claims "this man has enlarged my mind" (Conrad, 348) and that "He made me see things - things" (349). Kurtz decorates his camp with human heads, and there is nothing but veneration for him as a result. A similar act outside of this setting would bring him a murder conviction. All of the old categories no longer apply. Kurtz's authentic speech casts everything in new terms: he founds a new moral order. What goes on in the heart of darkness is worlds away from the earnest gentility of Europe.

Who or what speaks, then, of the world? Does this bring me to some sort of anthropocentric ontology? The speaker and the world are separated. The speaker acts on, projects, this world, which is something Other. This view is too naive, and I will do my best to avoid it. It contains within it an assumption of the metaphysics of presence. Even though the world cannot be construed as unambiguously present - its status depends on what speakers say about it - nonetheless, the burden of presence shifts, in this naive view, to the speaker. The speaking subject is responsible for all worldly metaphysics: his or her speech

brings about and differentiates what will be recognized in the world as the world; but the speaking subject himself or herself is then somehow unconditioned. The speaking subject is that which conditions the conditioned world. The speaker, in this view, is the new metaphysical Archimedean point. However, if the authentic speaker is also the thinker (Merleau-Ponty suggests that only authentic speech is identical with thought (1962: 178)) then this new Archimedean point is actually quite old. There is a whole history of this way of thinking, from Descartes on through various forms of Idealism. The thinker conditions the world, or, what we call "the world" is really just a bunch of ideas. My view of things does not collapse into some form of Idealism.

Merleau-Ponty questions Cartesianism by claiming that Descartes' cogito is really just a "spoken cogito" (1962: 402). The supposedly unquestionable subject is a way of speaking, just like anything else in the "world". He suggests that

this is merely a verbal cogito, for I have grasped my thought and my existence only through the medium of language ... This certainty which we enjoy of reaching, beyond expression, a truth separable from it and of which expression is merely the garment and and contingent manifestation, has been implanted in us precisely by language (1962: 400-401).

Language implants this idea of a separable truth, a meaning beyond the physical fact of sounds in the air or marks on a page, by means of its self-effacing nature. It creates its own "oblivion", directing our attention toward these seemingly

transcendent realities. The reader becomes convinced of the reality of his or her own thought and of his or her own existence while reading the Meditations. Further down in the chapter on "The Cogito", Merleau-Ponty stresses that this "spoken cogito" is instituted by Descartes because he has glimpsed his existence. There is a "tacit cogito" implied in everything he does. But this tacit cogito does not have the status of a conditioning unconditioned that is implied by the "spoken cogito" of the Meditations. The tacit cogito presupposes the act of living in the world in which one glimpses one's existence. One cannot employ the method of doubt about the existence of everything in order to "prove" the existence of the tacit cogito. It is, after all, tacit: you would not want to go about proving it anyway. The world and the subject's self-understanding are integrated in each other.

If speaking, by projecting a world, is what conditions the world, and the Cartesian subject is also understood as something spoken, and therefore not unconditioned, then where do we find our understanding of what there is? The answer is that we don't find it at all. The ontology should be properly post-metaphysical. The metaphysical understanding of things is originally just a result of language. Since there seem to be meanings that go beyond the physical fact of spoken speech, beyond the sounds uttered into the air, this leads listeners to believe that there is a meaningful "realm" beyond the physical. Idealism (and Platonism for that matter) then take this realm-

beyond as the only thing we can honestly regard as real. This is the sense in which Merleau-Ponty says that the unquestionable thinking cogito is just a spoken cogito. We come to an understanding of this "thing" through language, and the way language works by effacing itself in favour of seemingly extra-linguistic meanings convinces us that there is something beyond the physical.

The key to our post-metaphysics will be the notion (metaphor, analogy?) of "gestalt" and its play of multi-stable aspects. Patrick Burke, in his "The Flesh as Urpraesentierbarkeit in the Interrogative: The Absence of a Question in Derrida" (1997) says that in this Merleau-Pontian notion of ontological gestalt

a condition is taken up by and transformed by what it conditions, such that the whole in which it functions as a condition is greater than if they were isolated, caught up as they are now in certain intertwined dimensions of variation and participation which make up the flesh of the whole (62).

The world and the speaker should be understood as an integrated dialectic in which each conditions the other. There is no privileged, unconditioned point in this dialectic. Burke speaks about "the whole", but this is not to be understood as a dimensionless whole that can be analyzed into its constituent parts. At any given moment in the interplay of aspects, any part of the whole can disappear, be effaced, or fade into the background as some other aspect emerges. Merleau-Ponty, in The Visible and the Invisible says that thinking about ontology is "a

thought traveling in a circle where the condition and the conditioned ... are in a reciprocal, if not symmetrical relationship" (1968: 35). With respect to the speaker and the world, then, who conditions and what is conditioned depend entirely upon the aspect of the whole to which we attend at any given moment.

In my investigation of authentic speech, I identified three aspects of this phenomenon brought to our attention by Merleau-Ponty in the "Body as Expression and Speech" chapter of Phenomenology of Perception. The first aspect deals with how authentic speakers found a new sense - how a new, original, way of looking at things is born in speech. The second aspect is how this inaugural act of speech curiously requires the use of words and phrases that are already familiar to those who hear the authentic speaker. The third and most unlikely aspect that emerges is one in which the authentic speaker returns to an original, primordial, state by speaking authentically. Merleau-Ponty characterizes this primordial state as a state of silence: as though the authentic speaker assumes the mythic mantle of the "one who first spoke" and breaks the silence that surrounds speech. I will deal with each of these aspects in turn in order to answer my question and assess who or what is actually speaking when a world is projected.

#### First Aspect: Founding a New Sense

Who speaks when an authentic speaker takes the stage and casts everything in a new light? There is very little doubt that

it is the authentic speaker himself or herself who is speaking. We ascribe to the author his or her ideas. They might become hailed as a genius if these ideas are sufficiently compelling and original. The authentic speaker tells the crowd, those listening, something they have never heard before, but even though these words are unprecedented, used in this way, they are taken to be true. This is an entirely different sort of truth-intending than sedimentary speech. What we would call "common sense", which is the equivalent of sedimentary speech, does not need to convince us. It is the most natural thing to accept the common wisdom about things. If anything, it takes unnatural will-power to make ourselves unconvinced of common sense. To this day, we still say that the sun rises and sets, and we see the sun rising and setting. If we really think about it, we realize that this is not the case, but this sedimentary way of speaking determines our experience pre-reflectively.

Authentic speech, however, must convince us. This is where voice in its penetrating aspect becomes very useful. The speaker's ideas are injected into our awareness. If the speaking is successful, it touches off a revolution in our way of thinking. The world appears different. "Things" we did not notice before attract our attention. We attribute this new way of thinking almost entirely to the agency of that speaker who has persuaded us. For instance, we become convinced of our existence: that it is not the work of a profound deceiver, because Descartes has said "cogito ergo sum". We say that

Descartes has proven this and have no problem ascribing this way of speaking to the man himself, Descartes the speaker. Therefore, in this first aspect where we witness the projecting of a world - a world, in fact, that is entirely new to us, or even the opposite of what we have always assumed or perceived - we hear the voice of a speaking subject, and no one else. When we hail someone as a genius, this is the aspect to which we attend.

Second Aspect: Using old words

The inaugural gesture of the authentic speaker must be understood. Anything absolutely new would be incomprehensible. Absolute novelty is absolutely foreign. For the authentic speaker to be understood, he or she must use words that are common to the community in which this voice is used. The listeners must have some kind of access to what the speaker is saying. Therefore, even though authentic speech is revolutionary, there is an undeniable conservative element to this phenomenon. There must be some precedent with which those listening are familiar, even though what the speaker says may be unprecedented.

It is for this reason that Merleau-Ponty stresses the affective value of words. There is a certain texture to the way words sound, to the relations that they conjure up, that allow them to take on new meanings even though these words may have been used for a very long time. The affective value of words can be seen in the creation of metaphors. Metaphors are suggestive:

they lead us along pathways we have never before followed, yet they are grounded in usages that may be as old as the speech community itself. Therefore, in this aspect we hear the voice of the community. In authentic speech we hear the voice of tradition.

It is almost a necessary condition of metaphor, and the affective context of words, that they be familiar. Rhetorical language then stretches these accepted, traditional, forms and puts them to new uses, but even in these new uses they still call forth the former way that they were understood. For example, when Descartes calls the most certain form of reasoning "clear and distinct perception", he is using something with which we are familiar to explain something else that is harder to understand. We know what it is like to perceive something clearly and distinctly, however we do not know precisely what is going on when we reason. So, successful reasoning is like seeing something very clearly, so clearly, in fact, that you could not doubt it. The explanatory burden here falls upon the traditional uses of the words, on our acquaintance with being able to see, and on the familiarity that such a tradition bestows. Familiarity can be very persuasive, and to be familiar, words need to have a place within the history of sedimentation of a speaking people. Who speaks here? The historical voice of the community rings forth in this aspect of the authentic use of language.

Third Aspect: The Return to Primordial Silence

Every authentic use of voice begins the world anew. For a brief moment, it makes the world return to a time when what existed was not introduced, arranged, and differentiated by acts of voice. In this primordial realm, "things" stand forth from the rest before we have a chance to give them a name. This is a "world" that is still nonetheless multi-stable: it does not present itself in its entirety as a "given", but a world that, before speech, could possibly be understood to be able to bear an infinite number of interpretive and creative pronunciations about it. When it comes down to it, there is nothing that groups of human beings could not possibly believe in, given the appropriate conditions. The proliferation of present-day "conspiracy" theories is an example of this. In such a way of thinking, the absence of evidence to corroborate your theory is the most compelling evidence of all. If there is no evidence, then the conspiracy must be huge and powerful enough to cover up all of the evidence. The more the evidence is lacking, the bigger and more powerful the conspiracy. When it comes down to it, conspiracy theorists have no reason to believe in their theories other than the idea of a conspiracy itself.

The phenomenon of authentic speech, in this aspect, suggests this "infinite believability" thesis. The silence of the "world" comes before what we say about it. Anything can be said about the world, and be taken up as "true", because the world itself remains conspicuously silent. "Things" stand forth in this silence, suggestively perhaps, but not permanently, because then

they fall back into the background as others emerge in time. And often the only thing that needs to be done to bring others to recognize this "standing forth" of things is to speak of them. Breaking the silence is a profound act. Thought follows from it. For instance, it just needed to be asserted that "the CIA killed Kennedy" and a whole cottage industry was formed. Over time, such a pronouncement has the weight of history on its side, the truth-intending of sedimentation. Sedimentation breeds familiarity, and familiarity can be very persuasive. Conspiracy theories have become part of the landscape of our culture, even if there is nothing to them. An assertion puts this process in motion, and in the assertion, the world bears silently what is said about it. The world does not dispute what is believed about it.

Is it possible to hear the silence? We have an intimation of this silence when we hear the authentic speaker. We wonder what the truth is, out there, in the "world", when we hear something very persuasive that is at odds with what we have hitherto experienced, with our sedimentary ways of making sense of things. With this feeling of wonder, we realize that the world is saying nothing definite to contradict this suggestive voice we hear, and this "saying nothing" is broken by the voice. The speech we hear projects a world, we notice it being projected before us, into us, but behind this projection, if we listen closely, we hear the calm, original, silence that preceded all speech. In this aspect of authentic speech, the world speaks,

even if in the end it says nothing itself to guide our understanding of it.

Therefore, when asked about who or what speaks when we hear an authentic voice, or any voice at all, it matters which aspect of that voice we are attending to. We may hear the voice of the speaker, the collective historical voice of his or her community, or perhaps the ambiguous whisper of the world. Merleau-Ponty would be satisfied with such a conclusion, not only because it follows from his own observations, but because, metaphysically speaking, polysemia reigns. If we want to know whether, when we speak, we are free agents or products of a causal matrix, we can interrogate either side of the argument and realize the truth in each.

### Kurtz

Conrad, in Heart of Darkness, depicts these three aspects of authentic speech. The inconclusiveness of the narration and of the story itself allow the reader to regard Kurtz as, alternatively, speaking for himself, as a medium for the speech of the community of natives that have embraced him, or as being spoken-to by the jungle, the "world", that surrounds him.

In the first aspect, Marlow claims that Kurtz is a remarkable man for the simple reason that "He had something to say. He said it" (363). This is a very pithy summation of what the authentic speaker does: he or she merely speaks. It seems like a simple act, after all, it is just a speaker speaking, and almost everybody can speak. The difference here, however, is

that Kurtz "had something to say". The daily run of normal speech has nothing to say, nothing new, nothing that has not been said before more eloquently. Second-order speech asserts with every word "I agree with what has been said before". But to be authentic, you need something to say, something new and compelling, and then you have to say it. It sounds simple, but it takes courage to put forth a new way of seeing things, especially in situations where there is hostility towards heterodoxy (which means in almost any situation). The point here is that Kurtz speaks, and no one else. He is responsible for the new order that has been established in the jungle. Kurtz is remarkable because he speaks, because he uses his own voice. In this aspect, everything flows from Kurtz - he gobbles up the world when he opens up his mouth.

In the second aspect, we hear the speech of the community, of the natives. Kurtz is seduced by the drums echoing in the wilderness, by the dances that they perform in his honour. Before Marlow notices that he is gone, Kurtz sets out in his delirium to rejoin them and perhaps to die among them. The young Russian tells Marlow that Kurtz would "forget himself amongst these people - forget himself - you know" (350). Marlow first hears Kurtz's voice coming from a crowd of natives standing around him in a "compact body" (352). It is as though Kurtz's ego has dissolved to become one with the tribe. When Kurtz speaks in these instances, Marlow hears the voice of the tribe. This is not the sort of dominance we witnessed in the previous

aspect - the dominance exerted by Kurtz's voice - but instead the voice as a representative of other interests. It is Kurtz's love and his identification with his people, his forgetfulness of his identity, that brings him to speak. It is not an assertion of his soul in speech, but an intimation of his absence. He is little more than a voice, but whose voice?

In the third aspect, we hear the voice of the wilderness speaking to and speaking through Kurtz. If we attend closely to Conrad's study, we can hear the silence of the world, the silence that Merleau-Ponty suggests is broken by authentic acts of speech. Marlow observes about Kurtz that

the wilderness had found him out early, and had taken on him a terrible vengeance for the fantastic invasion. I think it has whispered to him things about himself which he did not know, things of which he had no conception till he took counsel with this great solitude ... It echoed loudly within him because he was hollow at the core (351).

The words that I find it necessary to attend to in this passage are "whispered", "solitude" and "echoed loudly". Kurtz hears the whispers of the wilderness, his surrounding "world", and these whispers speak of a great solitude with which he takes counsel. Then, the soft but menacing whispers echo loudly within him. The speech that he hears is speech about himself. He learns things he did not know before about himself from this speech. He is hollow at the core. Kurtz as a speaker, the compelling presence we witness in the first aspect, has disappeared completely here.

It echoes loudly and he hears. Kurtz's authentic act of speech as he lies dying - The horror! The horror! - is brought

on by the secrets whispered to him. Marlow suggests that Kurtz understands the sense of these secrets "only at the very last" (351). It is a declaration of his emptiness. He understands this emptiness by finding counsel in the solitude of the wilderness, the silence of the world. He understands that the world remains silent, complicit in its silence, whenever he acts out his will upon it in speech. The world will bear whatever he says about it. The lesson is, however, that he has no claim to the truth. Vincent Pecora in his "Heart of Darkness and the Phenomenology of Voice" (1985) suggests that his final realization is that truth

appears to be no more than an illusion supported by the exigencies of power. Kurtz learns that, like a god, he can manufacture value anew, that he can almost single-handedly establish his own moral order. Kurtz's horror is a multi-dimensional product of this lesson - it is the terror of his weightless status in a morally unordered world, of the final absence he feels within (1007).

The silence of the world whispering to him, and how it echoes about within, makes him realize that all along he had no soul. Having a soul would guarantee some kind of truth, but this is too much to expect. There was only his voice, and the impunity with which he could act in use of this voice. This voice, however, effaces itself when confronted with the more beguiling tones of the whispering wilderness. He hears the silence of the world speaking to him behind his own creative pronouncements.

Thus, we see that Conrad has within his story (perhaps metaphorically, but present nonetheless) the same three aspects of authentic voice investigated above. If this is how speech

projects a world, and in this speech we can possibly hear three different voices, then this ontology cannot be construed as taking part in the metaphysics of presence. We have no unambiguous world confronted by a separate and self-subsistent speaking subject. Speaking may project a world, but this does not mean that the world is the exclusive product of the consciousness of a subject, as though this were warmed-over idealism. Instead, there is integration among all possible aspects - integration into a gestalt. Subject and object dissolve into one another. They are abstract "moments" of one integrated "whole", but this "whole" is populated conspicuously by absences and instabilities that, if attended to, undermine our ability to assert its total presence.

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