

**Voice and silence:
aspects of Derrida's critique of
phonocentrism**

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Certificate

I certify that this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not being submitted as part of my candidature for any other degree.

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I would like to thank my supervisor Martin Harrison, my parents, and Peter Lowe, without whom this work would not have been possible.

Abstract

This thesis examines aspects of the critique, undertaken by Jacques Derrida, of phonocentrism in western thought. Its initial focus is Derrida's early work on the phenomenologist Edmund Husserl and the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. Both thinkers, Derrida argues, demonstrate their commitment to metaphysics through their reliance on a notion of (silent) voice intimately aligned to intellection. In Derrida's reading, Saussure and Husserl reduce to varying degrees sounded voice and writing, considering them irreducibly exterior to the unity of inner voice and thought. The thesis next argues *vis-à-vis* this critique that Derrida himself reduces voice to silence, and mobilises, as a key facet of his program, a trope of silent inscription. Guided by a range of critiques of Derrida, the thesis asserts that the early Derrida remains, in this aspect of his work, intra-metaphysical. Against Derrida, the thesis posits a sonorous voice incommensurable with the silent voice which is both the object and outcome of Derrida's polemic against phonocentrism. The thesis also notes the complicity of metaphors of vision with the phonocentric bent in Western thought. In closing, the thesis speculatively asserts, again by adducing a number of critiques of Derridean thought, that Derrida (1) arguably relies for his anti-phonocentric critique on the ocularcentrism which he contends is concomitant with phonocentrism in western thought and (2) aporetically recognises the inadequacy of the trope of silence as a response to the aggrandisement of the *phonè* in metaphysics.

Figures

Figures 1-4

From Emil Behnke, *The mechanism of the human voice*, London: J Curwen and Sons Ltd., 1880.

Figure 5

From Mark C Taylor, *Altarity*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.

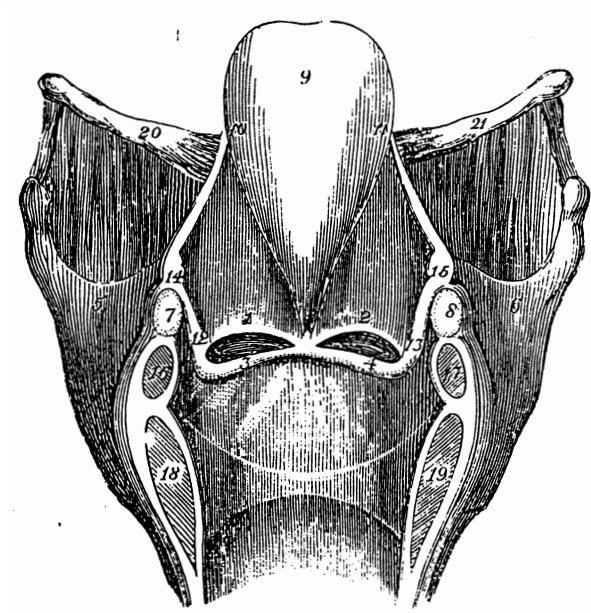


PLATE XII.

VIEW OF THE VOICEBOX, OR LARYNX, WHICH HAS BEEN CUT OPEN FROM BEHIND.

- 1, 2. POKRET LIGAMENTS (FALSE VOCAL CORDS).
- 3, 4. VOCAL LIGAMENTS (VOCAL CORDS).
- 5, 6. SHIELD (THYROID) CARTILAGE.
- 7, 8. CARTILAGES OF SANTORINI.
- 9. LID (EPIGLOTTIS).
- 14, 10 & 15, 11. FOLDS OF MUCOUS MEMBRANE (ARYTENO-EPI-
GLOTTIC FOLDS).
- 12, 13. WEDGES (CUNEIFORM CARTILAGES).
- 14, 15. CARTILAGES OF WRISBERG.
- 16, 17. PYRAMID MUSCLE (ARYTENOIDEUS TRANSVERSUS).
- 18, 19. RING (CRICOID) CARTILAGE.
- 20, 21. TONGUE (HYOID) BONE.

Figure 1

O mathematicians, shed light on error such as this! The spirit has no voice, because where there is voice, there is body.

Leonardo Da Vinci

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Preface

The voice, Jacques Derrida contends, is consciousness itself. It is complicit with the notions of being, temporal presence and conscious interiority which found western thought. And since Derrida's intention, as the deconstructive philosopher *par excellence*, is to question presence, and the privileging of voice which subtends ontology, the theme of the voice will organise Derrida's early polemical trajectory. In *Speech and Phenomena* and *Of Grammatology* Derrida will engage in a systematic deconstruction of the metaphysical conflation of voice and thought which he believes to be the *principium* of onto-theology. In the former text, Derrida deconstructs Husserl's notion of mute voice; in the latter, he turns his attention to, amongst others, Saussure. For Husserl and Saussure it is not in the sounded voice, with its ineffaceable connection to physical, embodied sonority, where an affinity with intellection will be found, but in the utterly silent *s'entendre parler*, the hearing-oneself-speak. And as Derrida's expositions unfold, it becomes clear that the critique of voice, or as Derrida puts it, the "neutralisation" of the *phonè*, relies on his key notion—*différance*—in its various tropes as writing (*écriture*), spacing, the *strace*, and the gram.

This thesis unfolds in three parts. Chapters One and Two attempt a close reading of Derrida's interpretation of phonocentrism in *Speech and Phenomena* and *Of Grammatology vis-à-vis* Husserl and Saussure respectively. Tracing the contours of Derrida's polemic on these thinkers lays the groundwork for a return to Derrida himself: it ultimately becomes possible to juxtapose Derrida's own arguments around phonocentrism with the paradoxical yield of his critique. The deconstructive confrontation with voice is itself arguably aporetic: there is an utter elision of aurality, including that of the sounded voice, in Derrida's early work. The paradigmatic instance of this effacement is the neologism at the wellspring of the Derridean project. The difference between difference and *différance*—the orthographic innovation which swaps an a for an e—can only be seen, and cannot be heard. *Différance* relies on a trope of mute inscription.

In one sense, this suppression of voice is entirely appropriate. Since Derrida wants to abrogate the phenomenological and structuralist privileging of the *phonè*, his cardinal neographism serves as a salient instance of the textual *practice* of anti-phonocentrism. It literally defers voice, irrevocably. On the other hand the assiduity

of Derrida's approach ends, not unproblematically, in silence. Against his own arguments that differance (as spacing) introduces the "body" and the "world" into the silence of ratiocination, Derrida himself renders voice aphonic, bifurcating the "body" of speech, its physical, "worldly" sonority, from its relationship to noesis. In the view of a number of the critiques adduced here, he reproduces the founding dichotomy between the sensible voice and the pure, transparent intelligibility of the silent *phonè* in western thought. Ultimately, his own critique falls back within the horizon of a philosophical axiology that sets a mute voice, and the silent letter, at the solipsistic centre of an intra-philosophical program. Chapter Three traces this problem, and attempts to explore the possibility of a 'deconstructed' yet sonorous voice, as theorised by various thinkers including the phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

This thesis arises from a desire to think through the immensely enigmatic medium that is strangely fractured between, and co-implicated with, body and thought, alterity and identity, other and self—a question which ultimately goes begging in early Derrideanism, as voice fades away into an intractable aphonia. A more comprehensive attempt to confront sounded voice and its relation to corporeality, intellection and intersubjectivity—or indeed its relation to technologies of recording, reproduction and simulation—would be the subject of another work, undoubtedly less focused on the byzantine argumentation of the early Derrida. Nevertheless, I hope the question of embodied voice and, perhaps, the possibility of dialogue, reverberates in the margins of the final chapter, in which I attempt, possibly against the odds, to prise open Derridean solipsism. I have concluded really where I had desired to begin: at the point at which the question of the voice can be heard.

Chapter One

Voice and the blink of an eye: Derrida's confrontation with Husserl

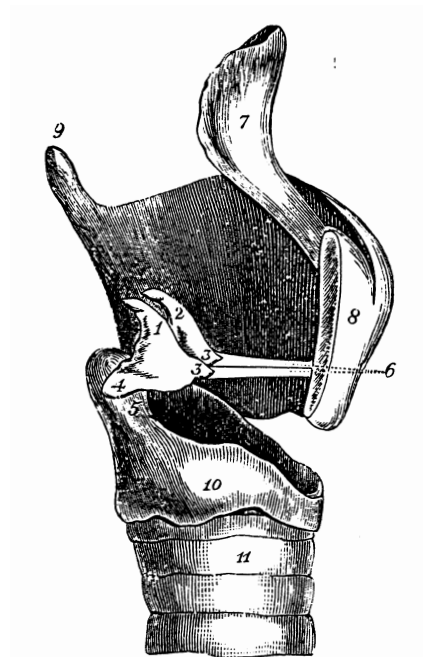


PLATE VII.

SIDE VIEW OF THE VOICEBOX, OR LARYNX, SHOWING THE INTERIOR OF IT. THE RIGHT PLATE BEING REMOVED.

- 1, 2. PYRAMIDS (ARYTENOID CARTILAGES).
- 3, 3. FRONT PROJECTIONS OF THE PYRAMIDS.
- 4. LEVER OF THE RIGHT PYRAMID.
- 5. UPPER BORDER OF THE RING.
- 6, 3, 3. VOCAL LIGAMENTS.
- 7. LID.
- 8. SHIELD.
- 9. LEFT UPPER HORN OF THE SHIELD.
- 10. RING.
- 11. WINDPIPE.

Figure 2

Auto-affection is no doubt the possibility for what is called subjectivity...for its basis involves the unity of sound...and phonè.¹

If we recall now that the pure inwardness of auto-affection supposed the purely temporal nature of the 'expressive' process, we see that the theme of...'hearing oneself speak' is radically contradicted by 'time' itself. 'Time' cannot be 'absolute subjectivity' precisely because it cannot be conceived on the basis of a present and the self-presence of a present being.²

¹ Jacques Derrida, *Speech and phenomena and other essays on Husserl's theory of signs*, trans. David B Allison, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973, 79 (hereafter *SP*). I have rendered the term *phone*, which appears with various diacritical marks in English translations of Derrida, as *phonè* throughout.

² *SP*, 86.

1.1 Phenomenology as phonocentrism

Speech and Phenomena represents Derrida's earliest major critique of phonocentrism, the focus of which is primarily Edmund Husserl's *Logical Investigations*.³ In the *Investigations*, Derrida contends, Husserl seeks to ground "absolute subjectivity" in the "phenomenological voice", the condition understood as "hearing-oneself-speak", the internal soliloquy of thought in the realm of "solitary mental life".⁴ For Husserl, the apperception of the monadic, inner voice is a supernal moment in the subject's self-relation. In the act of silent "expression", "intuitive fulfilment" takes place as the "evidence" of the immediate presentation of objects to phenomenological intentionality.⁵ Meaning is revealed in a profoundly affective present instant of interiority, as mute speech is conflated with intellection. This schema, Derrida contends, underpins the metaphysical tradition which posits the ideality of consciousness, and founds the phenomenological concept of subjectivity as "transcendental ego".⁶

³ Edmund Husserl, *Logical investigations*, trans. J Findlay, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970 (hereafter *LI*). Derrida's *Edmund Husserl's origin of geometry: an introduction* appeared in the French five years before *Speech and phenomena*, which was originally published in 1967, but the former was not specifically a systematic critique of phonocentrism. In *Speech and phenomena*, Derrida also draws extensively on Husserl's *The phenomenology of internal time consciousness*, trans. James S Churchill, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964 (hereafter *ITC*); and on Husserl's *Ideas*, trans. W R Boyce Gibson, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1969 (hereafter *Ideas*).

⁴ 'Solitary mental life' (or 'isolated mental life') is the sphere of immediate self-present consciousness—the realm of 'sense', of primordial lived experience, in which phenomenological intentionality is grounded. The 'phenomenological voice' is defined by Derrida's translator in its distinction from real sound heard in the world: "Only in speech does the signifier seem to be completely 'reduced' to its signified content; the spoken word is a strangely diaphanous and transparent medium for meaning. Because it animates a purely formal signifier (the 'sensory contour' of the phoneme, *not the actually uttered sound complex itself*), the silent speech stands as a pure phenomenon—what Derrida terms 'the phenomenological voice'." *SP*, xxxix-xl, note 5 (emphasis added). The concept of 'absolute subjectivity' requires the reduction of the relativity of subject and object. Steffan Carlshamre elucidates this concept thus: "...[T]he philosophical idea of self-consciousness is tied to the possibility of immediate knowledge of myself. Without this possibility I-as-object and I-as-subject would fall apart...the notion of the phonic privilege [is] the foundation of the modern form of metaphysics of presence: the theory that wants to put an end to the relativity of subject and object by invoking an absolute subject that is its own immediate object." See Steffan Carlshamre, *Language and time: an attempt to arrest the thought of Jacques Derrida*, PhD Dissertation, Goteborg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 1986, 126-7. We will see below that this absolute subject is the mutely self-affecting monad.

⁵ The role of expression *vis-à-vis* the silent voice of consciousness is developed in 1.2, below. See on intuition and evidence *SP*, xxxiii.

⁶ Derrida's translator in *SP* defines the former's concept of transcendental ego in respect of the critique of Husserl thus: "The notion of transcendental consciousness...is...the immediate self-presence of this waking life, the realm of what is primordially 'my own'. By contrast, the concepts of empirical, worldly, corporeal, etc., are precisely what stands opposed to this realm of self-present oneness; they constitute the sphere of otherness, the mediated, what is different from self-present, conscious life." *SP*, xxxiii. This realm of "ownness", then, is the sphere of the immediate apperception of the phenomenological voice which *a priori* excludes and reduces all exteriority, everything which is outside the immediate self-presence of noesis. Derrida remarks *vis-à-vis*

Phonocentrism, for Derrida, coincides with logocentrism in Occidental thought—the metaphysical investment in the alpha and omega of the *logos* and the concomitant ontological commitment to voice as the paradigm of self-presence. Derrida writes:

logocentrism...is also a phonocentrism: absolute proximity of voice and being, of voice and the meaning of being, of voice and the ideality of meaning...[.]...What is said of sound in general is a fortiori valid for the phonè by which, by virtue of hearing (understanding)-oneself-speak—an indissociable system—the subject affects itself and is related to itself in the element of ideality...phonocentrism merges with the historical determination of the meaning of being in general as presence...(presence of the thing to the sight as eidos, presence as substance/essence/existence [ousia], temporal presence as point [stigmè] of the now or of the moment [nun], the self presence of the cogito...and so forth).⁷

Indeed the question of the ontological "excellence" of the voice suffuses the entirety of the early Derridean program and is tied up, for Derrida, with the very roots of onto-theology. Since Derrida's avowed project is to problematise and ultimately disestablish the concept of presence by questioning the epistemological and ontological "privilege of the voice", the critique of Husserl's early twentieth century *locus classicus* of phonocentric thought becomes the cornerstone of the Derridean "philosophical architecture".⁸ And the privilege of the voice is itself in turn based on the idealising of a particular sensuous substance: sound. As Derrida has noted, the phenomenological voice is heard and understood (*je m'entende*) in the interior monologue by the auto-affecting subject; it is the unity of sound, *phonè* and *logos* which elevates the inner voice to onto-theological status. Hearing and understanding, the presentation of meaning to consciousness, coincide. For sound is theorised as the most ideal of all phenomenological entities: it relinquishes all materiality as it is interiorised and apprehended immediately, as *silent phonè*, by the 'hearing' subject.

Derrida draws on G W F Hegel in *Speech and Phenomena* to explicate the onto-

"ownness" that in the phenomenological account of voice "...[T]he subject can hear or speak to himself and be affected by the signifier he produces, without passing through an external detour, the sphere of what is not 'his own.' " *SP*, 78.

⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Of grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974, 11-12 (hereafter *OG*).

⁸ So says Derrida in *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981, 5 (hereafter *Positions*).

theological notion of sound which subtends, also, the Husserlian account of monadic voice as "expression". He writes:

Where does the complicity between sound and ideality, or rather, between voice and ideality come from? (Hegel was more attentive to this than any other philosopher...[as] we will examine elsewhere.)⁹ When I speak, it belongs to the phenomenological essence of this operation that I hear myself [je m'entende] at the same time that I speak. The signifier, animated by my breath and by the meaning-intention (in Husserl's language, the expression animated by Bedeutungsintention), is in absolute proximity to me. The living act, the life-giving act...which animates the body of the signifier and transforms it into a meaningful expression, the soul of language, seems not to separate itself from itself, from its own self-presence...It can show the ideal object or ideal Bedeutung connected to it without venturing outside ideality, outside the interiority of self-present life.¹⁰

In the Hegelian account the various sensory modalities are compared to demonstrate the complicity between sound, subjective interiority and ideality. Idealisation in philosophy, according to Derrida, depends on the "simultaneous confirmation of objectivity and interiority".¹¹ An ideal object maintains its "identity with itself" and the "integrity" of its objecthood even as it relinquishes sensuous exteriority.¹² At the same time, it is able to be subjectively interiorised, to be fully presented to mind. These two facets of ideality, which are mutually self confirming, comprise the criteria by which a hierarchical taxonomy of the senses, and of sensory "objects" can be established.¹³ Smell and touch are excluded from ideality and as such are "non-theoretical": touch has merely to do with the materiality and sensuousness of the object, a spatiality and opacity which cannot be interiorised. In smell, the objectivity of the object is vitiated by its particulate dissipation into air; and taste involves the decimation of the object through intussusception. Sight is considered by Hegel to be theoretical, but is somewhat less than ideal: while the objectivity of the object is preserved in vision, the interiorisation of the visually apprehended object is

⁹ See *The pit and the pyramid*, in Margins of philosophy, trans. Alan Bass, Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1982, 93 (hereafter MP).

¹⁰ SP, 77-8.

¹¹ *The pit and the pyramid* in MP, 93, note 21.

¹² See *The pit and the pyramid* in MP, 93, note 21.

¹³ See on this point *The pit and the pyramid* in MP, 93, note 21.

imperfect, insofar as only line and colour can be interiorised. The spatiality and sensuous materiality of the object remain stubbornly opaque. Hearing, however, is the most ideal of senses insofar as the objectivity of the object is both preserved, and simultaneously susceptible to plenary interiorisation. Hegel writes:

*Hearing, which, like sight, is one of the theoretical senses is still more ideal than sight. For the peaceful and undesiring contemplation of [spatial] works of art lets them remain in peace and independence...and there is no wish to consume or destroy them; yet what it apprehends is not something posited ideally but on the contrary something persisting in its visible existence. The ear, on the contrary, without itself turning to a practical relation to objects, listens to the result of the inner vibration of the body through which what comes before us is no longer the peaceful and material shape but the first and more ideal breath of the soul.*¹⁴

For Husserl, according to Derrida, this "breath of...soul" is voice: "The substance of expression...which best seems to preserve ideality and living presence...is living speech, the spirituality of the breath as *phonè*."¹⁵ For Husserl, this *phonè*, it is important to note, is not the physically sounding voice, but the silent voice of solipsistic soliloquy, of sound fully interiorised in its mute intimacy with thought. As Derrida writes: "It is not in the sonorous substance, or in the physical voice, in the body of speech in the world, that [Husserl] will recognise an original affinity with the logos in general, but in the voice phenomenologically taken, speech in its transcendental flesh, in the breath."¹⁶

Further, the ideality of voice, in Derrida's reading, in turn depends on a notion of time which preserves at its core a present, 'living', punctual now. Derrida holds that the keystone of Husserl's work on inner voice consists in the complicity between the thematic of expressive monological voice, and being as temporal presence—the temporal presence of the now-point. The presentation of immediate meaning to consciousness in Husserlian expression presupposes the 'identity' of an 'uncontaminated',

¹⁴ G W F Hegel, *Aesthetics*, trans. T M Knox, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975, 890 (hereafter *Aesthetics*).

¹⁵ *SP*, 10. This is also the case in Hegel: "The human voice can apprehend itself as the sounding of the soul itself, as the sound which the inner life has in its own nature for the expression of itself, an expression which it regulates directly." *Aesthetics*, 922.

¹⁶ *SP*, 16.

paradigmatic moment of pure "auto-affection".¹⁷ This, Derrida argues, is the "apodeitic" instant in which ideal meaning is presented to mind in the unmediated unity of thought and inner voice—the living presence of consciousness.¹⁸ In *Speech and Phenomena*, Derrida will trace the consonance, indeed the inextricability, of the themes of voice and time in order to deliver his definitive deconstructive blow to Husserlian phenomenology.¹⁹

But Husserlian phonologocentrism, and all other variations on this particular intra-metaphysical theme, are also interwoven with a concomitant ocularcentrism: the "presence of the thing to the sight as *eidos*."²⁰ Metaphors of vision, and correlatively, motifs of light and shadow, underpin, for Derrida, the entire history of metaphysics. As Derrida writes: "The metaphor of darkness and light [is the] founding metaphor of Western philosophy as metaphysics...the entire history of our philosophy is a photology, the name given to a history of, or treatise on, light."²¹ He contends further:

¹⁷ Derrida's translator in *Writing and difference* notes the Heideggerian derivation of the term 'auto-affection' and writes: "...[T]he concept of auto-affection is concerned with time as the self-generating infinite series of *present* moments." This concept underpins "Derrida's important analysis of speech as that which makes truth *present*." *Writing and difference*, trans. Alan Bass, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978, 323, note 25 (hereafter *WD*). Derrida's translator in *SP* confirms that Derrida uses auto-affection "in the Heideggerian sense." *SP*, xli. Heidegger himself writes: "Time as pure self-affection is that finite, pure intuition which sustains and makes possible the pure concept (the understanding) as that which is essentially at the service of intuition." *Kant and the problem of metaphysics*, trans. James S Churchill, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1962, 195 (hereafter *KPM*).

¹⁸ The apodeitic (or apodictic) instant is the plenary moment of phenomenological evidence. Apodictic evidence is "The highest principle of phenomenology...the presentation or bringing forth of objects to immediate and self-present intuition." *SP*, xxxiii.

¹⁹ It is notable that Husserl instances the phenomenological apperception of time in terms, almost exclusively, of sound perception. Throughout the *ITC*, the perception of sound (often a 'melody' or 'tone') is repeatedly deployed as the paradigm, the phenomenological evidence, of the presence of time consciousness. Derrida does not, however, focus on this point. See Steffan Carlshamre, *Language and time*, 110 on this point.

²⁰ It is important to note here the etymology of the Greek term '*eidos*' vis-à-vis the ocularcentric bent in metaphysics. The term is complicit also with '*theoria*' and the Latin '*contemplatio*'. Heidegger, for example, remarks: "*Thea*...is the outward look, the aspect, in which something shows itself, the outward appearance in which it offers itself. Plato names this aspect in which what presences shows what it is, *eidos*. To have seen this aspect...is to know. The second root word in *theorein*, *horao*, means: to look at something attentively, to look it over, to view it closely. The Romans translate...*theoria* by *contemplatio*." *The question concerning technology and other essays*, trans. William Lovitt, New York: Harper and Row, 1977, 163-165. Martin Jay adverts to this visual connotation, suggesting that Husserl's notion of 'eidetic intuition' owes a "debt to the visual notion of *eidos*." *Downcast Eyes: The denigration of vision in twentieth century French thought*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, 500 (hereafter *Downcast eyes*).

²¹ *Force and signification* in *WD*, 27. Notably, the sun is the metaphorical source of such a "photology": it provides for both philosophical *elucidation*, the light of ratiocination, and the darkness, shadow or bedazzlement of sight out of which sight and light arise. See on this point *White mythology: metaphor in the text of philosophy*, in *MP*, 207-271. Derrida contends here that "The tenor of the dominant metaphor [of philosophy] will return always to th[e] major signified of ontology: the circle of the heliotrope." *White mythology*, *MP*, 266.

"Starting with its first words, metaphysics associates sight with knowledge."²² And Husserl's reliance on the pure *form* of the present instant as the source point for temporal presence corresponds, in Derrida's estimation, with an occidental "photology" which relies on the visionary motif of the "look". Derrida posits a necessary interconnection between form and *eidos*—the instantaneity of a present now (the *form* of the "living present") and the visualist motif of the (*eidetic*) gaze. He writes:

*All the concepts by which eidos and morphe could be translated and determined refer back to the theme of presence in general. Form is presence itself...That...phenomenology is the thought of being as form...is nothing less than necessary; the fact that Husserl determines the living present...as the ultimate, universal and absolute 'form' of transcendental experience...is the final indication of this...Although the privilege of theoria is not...as simple as has sometimes been claimed...the metaphysical domination of the concept of form cannot fail to effectuate a certain subjection to the look. This subjection would always be a subjection of sense to seeing, of sense to the sense of sight...a putting on view.*²³

Indeed, for the lineage of Greek thought, apodicticity turns on metaphors of vision and form. As Hans Blumenberg points out: "What *logoi* referred back to was a sight with form [*gestalthafter Anblick*], i.e., *eidos*. Even etymologically 'knowledge' [*Wissen*] and 'essence' [*Wesen*] (as *eidos*) are extremely closely related to 'seeing' [*Sehen*]."²⁴

In Husserl's *Investigations*, the unity of the temporal present in which *phonè* and

²² *The principle of reason: the university in the eyes of its pupils*, *Diacritics*, Vol 13, # 3, 1983, 4.

²³ *Form and Meaning* in *SP*, 108-109. In *The pit and the pyramid*, Derrida develops further the relationship he finds above between presence and visualist motifs. Here there is an interplay between 'invisibility' (of the *logos* "which hears itself speak") and visibility (the "theoretical authority of vision") as the bases of the teleology of the *logos*, perhaps analogous to the interplay between the polarities of shadow and light which, for Derrida, underpins metaphysics: "In metaphysics, it has been possible for the sign to become the object of a *theory*, for the sign to be considered or to be regarded...on the basis of that which is to be seen in intuition, to wit, being-present: a theory of the sign on the basis of being-present, but also...*in sight* of being-present, in sight of presence, being-in-sight-of marking as much a certain theoretical authority of vision as it does the agency of a final goal, the *telos* of re-appropriation, the coordination of the theory of the sign and the light of *parousia*. Which is also, as logic, a coordination with the invisible ideality of a *logos* which hears-itself-speak, a *logos* which is as close as possible to itself in the unity of concept and consciousness." *MP*, 72-73. Derrida's translator notes, by reference to a footnote in the translation of the essay *Differance* in the same volume, the etymological resonance of *theoria*, an accomplice of the *eidos*: "the Greek origin of 'theory'...literally means 'to look at', 'to see.' " *ibid.*, 5, note 3. And in the essay *Tympan*, Derrida further adverts to the plexus of vision and hearing-oneself-speak, referring to the "circular complicity of eye and ear." *MP*, xiii.

²⁴ Hans Blumenberg, *Light as a metaphor for truth*, in ed. David Michael Levin, *Modernity and the hegemony of vision*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, 46.

logos are conjoined is metaphorised visually as "*im selben Augenblick*"—'in that very moment', 'in the blink of an eye'—a specular instantaneity. The *Augenblick* is itself a trope of the visually connoted moment of presence intrinsic to Western onto-theology. Notably, the term also appears in Heidegger, in the later sections of Part Two of *Being and Time*. Heidegger's translators have rendered *Augenblick* as either "moment", or "moment of vision". They suggest, however, that the translation to "moment" is inadequate: in many passages "Heidegger has in mind a more literal meaning— 'a glance of the eye'. In such passages it seems more appropriate to translate [*Augenblick*] as a 'moment of vision'."²⁵

The complicity between the *logoi* as *Anblick* (a "view", "sight" or "aspect" with "form"), and the Husserlian (and Heideggerian) *Augenblick*, which inflects the "view" with a visual *instantaneity*, the *form* of a temporal moment of presence, is obvious here.²⁶ This connection will emerge in the argument that slowly evolves below. But first, let us return to Derrida's reading of inner voice and "solitary mental life" in Husserl *vis-à-vis* the "expressive" function, which Husserl isolates from mere, mediated, exterior "indication".

1.2 Indication, expression, repetition

For Husserl, meaning and the *phonè* coincide insofar as the two, unmediated by any externality or exteriority, are fully present to the subject in the immediacy of its inner soliloquy. Husserl's argument for the immediacy of meaning to consciousness and the ideality of the phenomenological voice is conditioned by a radical disjunction he will establish between two irreducible realms, two modalities of language:

²⁵ See Martin Heidegger, *Being and time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, New York: Harper and Row, 1962, 376, note 2. The translators direct our attention to the following passage: "That *Present* which is held in authentic temporality and which thus is *authentic* itself, we call the '*moment of vision*.'" *ibid.*, 387.

²⁶ As Christopher McCann points out, Husserl, in the *Ideas*, was entirely under the sway of visual metaphors: "The key term of the phenomenology of Reason [developed in *Ideas*] is that of evidence or self-evidence. Husserl starts by contrasting assertoric seeing, perceptual awareness of things in the ordinary sense, from apodeitic seeing, a seeing into...the essence of things. He suggests a highest genus evidence under which both assertoric (sight) and apodeitic (insight) seeing would be subsumed. But...the point of these distinctions is, of course, to point the way towards an assimilation of the factual (assertoric) under the essential [apodeitic insight]." Christopher McCann, *Four phenomenological philosophers*, London: Routledge, 1993, 39-40 (hereafter *Four phenomenological philosophers*.) Martin Jay remarks "That Husserl chose to call the eidetic intuition a *Wesenschau* (literally a look into essences) suggests the persistence of ocularcentric premises in his thought." *Downcast eyes*, 266. On *Speech and Phenomena*, he writes, "Derrida criticised Husserl's privileging of the *Augenblick*, the timeless blink of an instant in which the 'scene of ideal objects' appears to consciousness, as complicitous with metaphysics." *ibid.*, 267. Further, Jay writes that what the theory of the *im selben Augenblick* forgot was "the impurity of perception, its intertwining with language." *ibid.*, 500.

"indication" and "expression". "Expression" is the conflation of voice and meaning in the pristine inner life of consciousness. It represents the ideal aspects of language as pure logical meaning, and is untainted by any exteriority, anything outside the sphere of "one's own". "Indication", on the other hand, is 'public', external language, the mediated realm of the sign. Indications, Husserl contends, include both causal and arbitrary relations of language but they lack necessity, are deficient and derivative with respect to expression, and represent the 'impure', 'sensuous', and 'worldly' aspects of language. They are merely associative links by which the mind happens to move from one object to another.²⁷

In Section I of the *First Investigation*, (the "Essential Distinctions") Husserl sets out the discrepancy between indication and expression. The difference between the signifying modalities, it appears, is functional; they are differentiated according to whether they express meaning. While every sign is necessarily a sign for something, not every sign necessarily conveys or expresses meaning: indications do not necessarily 'express' anything at all. And whereas meaning in communicative speech is "always bound up with...an indicative relation", expressions, on the other hand "function *meaningfully* even in *isolated mental life, where they no longer serve to indicate anything*."²⁸ The first step towards the reduction to the silent realm of conscious interiority has been taken post-haste: Husserl has isolated a sphere of solitary cognition where indication has no place and meaning prevails.

Since meaning is self-evident in solitary mental life, moreover, the thinking subject requires nothing external to conscious silence. Hence, the phenomenological operation will delimit all those aspects of communication extrinsic to linguistic self-affection. Husserl sequesters the "non-sense conferring", corporeal traces of language such as facial expression and gesture from the expressive realm. Signs made through the body are said to be "not phenomenally one with the experiences made manifest in them in the consciousness of the man who manifests them, as is the case with speech."²⁹

²⁷ Indications are at first defined as a heterologous mix of conventional and natural signs; signs which indicate something in the way that a "flag [is] the sign of nation", and the "Martian canals are signs of the existence of intelligent beings on Mars"; and *aides-mémoire*, such as "the much-used knot in the handkerchief." *LI*, S 2, 270.

²⁸ *LI*, S 1, 269 (first emphasis added). Derrida comments that in order to isolate a space where expression and meaning are distinct from indication "we have to ferret out the unshaken purity of expression in a language without communication, in speech as monologue, in the completely muted voice of the 'solitary mental life'." *SP*, 22.

²⁹ *LI*, S 5, 275. Indeed, the preservation of the purity of the monologue requires the reduction of all corporeality, spatiality and worldliness from "solitary mental life". Derrida writes: "Everything that escapes the pure spiritual intention, the pure animation by *Geist*...is excluded from meaning (*bedeuten*) and thus from expression. What is excluded is, for example, facial expressions, gestures, the whole of the body and the mundane register, in a word, the whole of the visible and spatial as

Secondly, Husserl separates the 'exterior' *signifying* aspects of language, including the 'body' of speech, from those putatively intrinsic to consciousness: "expression *physically* regarded (the sensible sign, the *articulate sound-complex*, the written sign on paper etc)..." are distinguished by Husserl from the "mental states...generally called the sense or meaning of the expression."³⁰

Further, since expression occurs only in the silent monologue, a key difference between indication and expression is captured in the assertion that *any communication* must be classified as an indication. Indicative status turns on extrinsicality, most often exemplified in a relationship of communicative speech between the indicating subject and an other. Speech, once it is uttered, becomes indication.³¹ And correlatively, expressive meaning need not—in fact, *cannot*—be communicable. Husserl writes: "when we live in the understanding of a word, it expresses something...whether we address it to anyone or not...An expression's meaning...essentially cannot coincide with its feats of intimation."³²

Why cannot expression be intimated to another? First, since it is only in the internal monologue, as I discuss below, that the subject transparently experiences its meaning-laden consciousness at the selfsame present moment in which it 'speaks'. This ontologically felicitous instantaneity obviates the necessity for mediating signs to represent thought/experience at a conceptual, temporal or sensible 'remove' from conscious interiority. The redundancy of the indicative—that is, signifying—relation in expression, the effacement of the abyss separating the meaning and signifier, elevates meaning in expression to the level of intuitive and conceptual immediacy. Indeed signs, which always involve a spatio-temporal discrepancy between signifier and signified, are struck from the unity of expression.³³ Second, meaning cannot be intimated because expression requires the reduction of everything that is 'supplementary' or 'extrinsic' to the pure *cogito*: all sensibility, all corporeality and the world *in toto*. Expression, Derrida writes, "owes nothing to any worldly or empirical existence" insofar as "the

such." SP, 35.

³⁰ LI, S 6, 276 (emphases added).

³¹ On this point see LI, S 7, 277.

³² LI, S 8, 278-279.

³³ Husserl clearly regards the sign as extrinsic to conscious life. He writes: "Shall one say that in soliloquy one speaks to oneself, and employs words as signs, i.e., indications?...I cannot think such a view acceptable." LI, S 8, 279. Hence, according to Derrida, "It is more and more clear that, despite the...distinction between an indicative sign and an expressive sign, only an indication is truly a sign for Husserl." SP, 42.

physical event of language there seems absent."³⁴ Only the "ideal" and "identical" form of the signifier, "animated" by meaning, is required in the expressive self-relation.³⁵ In communication or intimation the "animation" of sensible phenomena (e.g., speech or writing) cannot be "pure and complete" since it "traverse[s], and...lose[s] itself in, the opaqueness of the body."³⁶ While we can experience the physical, mediated manifestations of the communication of the other (the sounds of speech, gestures, the visibility of the body), the other's consciousness is not immediately present to the interlocutor. Communication, intimation or indication are henceforth essentially inexpressive since the sense-giving "act" of expression is never "immediately present" in colloquy.³⁷ It is not possible, in Husserl's account, to have "a primordial intuition of the presence of the other's lived experience":³⁸ we have a merely "analogical appresentation" of the other's "ownness".³⁹ The indicated (spoken or written) relation to the other wrests meaning away from its absolute proximity to mind. Indication and intimation are accordingly bracketed in Husserlian phenomenology: the transcendental subject expresses meaning only when sequestered in solitary meditation.

Yet, if the expressive realm is impervious to the physiognomic and communicable aspects of language, what then precisely is the status of language, of what Husserl calls the "word", in internal soliloquy? Words, despite Husserl's exclusions, are still required to somehow facilitate the immediacy of meaning and the "unity of concept and consciousness" in the monologue. Husserl circumvents the problem of the role of words in inner life by positing that no "actual" words impinge on the pristine intrinsicality of the mind. Rather, words are "imagined", but do not "exist", in the nonmundane sphere of soliloquy. Husserl writes:

For expressions used in soliloquy...we are in general content with imagined rather than with actual words. In imagination a spoken or printed word floats before us, though in reality it has no existence...The imagined verbal sound...does not exist,

³⁴ SP, 41.

³⁵ SP, 41.

³⁶ SP, 38.

³⁷ SP, 38.

³⁸ SP, 40.

³⁹ SP, 39. Husserl writes: "The hearer perceives the speaker as manifesting certain inner experiences...[H]e does not, however, himself experience them, he has not an 'inner' but an 'outer' percept of them...In the former case we have to do with an experienced, in the latter case with a presumed being to which no truth corresponds at all." LI, S 7, 278.

*only its imaginative presentation does so...The word's non-existence neither disturbs nor interests us, since it leaves the word's expressive function unaffected.*⁴⁰

Expression, then, is not indication for this reason: because the imagination obviates the "actual" word, and all the extrinsicality, contingency and empiricity associated with signification, from monological consciousness. As Derrida writes: "The reduction to the monologue is really a putting of empirical worldly existence between brackets. In 'solitary mental life' we no longer use *real*...words, but only...*imagined* words."⁴¹ Whereas, Derrida says, in the "phenomenon of perception", the apperception of the word still makes reference to its "existence", "this is no longer the case in the...imagination",⁴² where the "existence" of the word is "neutralised". In soliloquy, henceforth, there exists not the word, but "only the imagination of the word, which is absolutely certain and self-present insofar as it is lived."⁴³ In monological consciousness "expression is *full*" and the imagination shows meanings that are "ideal (and thus non-existent) and certain (for they are presented to intuition)."⁴⁴ There is no need for indication, for signification, in the ineffaceable certitude of inner life, since meaning is immediately present in the "imaginative presentation" of the word: inner life is accordingly "living consciousness."⁴⁵ It is at this point that Derrida's deconstructive operation begins. Let us briefly trace this polemic.⁴⁶

First, insofar as it is 'nonreal'—free of inessential empirical particulars and concerned only with self-present consciousness—the imagination of the word and the meaning which it shows are for Husserl purely formal and ideal. The notion of ideality and its links to repetition become critical to Derrida's polemic here. For Husserlian phenomenology, the ideality of the "imaginative presentation" of the word consists in

⁴⁰ LI, S 8, 279-80 (emphasis added). For Husserl the verbal sound "does not exist", and indeed cannot exist insofar as his reductions proscribe any physically manifest sound from the phenomenological purview. Throughout the *First investigation* Husserl dismisses the "mere sound of words" (LI, S 9, 281), the "mere sound pattern" (LI, S 8, 278), and the "empty 'sound of words'." (LI, S 10, 283).

⁴¹ SP, 43.

⁴² SP, 44.

⁴³ SP, 44.

⁴⁴ SP, 43.

⁴⁵ SP, 43.

⁴⁶ There is not the scope here to trace in detail the complexities of Derrida's arguments, nor do I offer a critique at this point. Rather, I set out the broad contours of his polemic in preparation for the discussion of time and voice which is the ultimate foundation of his confrontation with Husserl.

the possibility of the repetition of the "same", of its formal identity.⁴⁷ Critically, what ensures the possibility of this repetition of ideality for Husserl is the presence of the now: the most ideal form of ideality is the present-now. (The "living present", as discussed above, supplies the form for the correspondence of consciousness and meaning: meaning is presented to mind in a temporal moment of "living" presence.) Since the present-now is an ideal form, it is also *infinitely* repeatable. And insofar as the now is the most ideal of all idealities, the present can retain its formal identity through this *illimitable* repetition, and thus provide the basis for apperception of ideal meaning free of any merely empirical content. Derrida writes on this point:

*The determination of being as ideality is paradoxically one with the determination of being as presence. This occurs...because only a temporality determined on the basis of the living present as its source (the now as 'source-point') can ensure the purity of ideality, that is, openness for infinite repeatability of the same...The present alone is and ever will be...I can empty all empirical content, imagine an absolute overthrow of every conscious experience..I have a strange and unique certitude that this universal form of presence, since it contains no determined being, will not be affected by it.*⁴⁸

According to Derrida, the relationship of ideality ("the absolute possibility of repetition"⁴⁹) to presence turns on the deliverance of presence from empirical worldliness—the emancipation of the present-now from all "real" moments in time. However, Derrida points out that thinking of the now as presence as *transcending* the empirical, indeed as transcending "my empirical existence", also means tacitly acknowledging the absence at the heart of presence—my own disappearance, my own death. Put simply, the infinite repetition of the now-present as ideality disassembles the subject, a temporally dependent, finite entity. Derrida writes: "To think of presence as the universal form of transcendental life is to open myself to the knowledge that in my absence...before my birth and after my death *the present is*."⁵⁰ Since the "possibility" of signification, for Derrida, is this "relationship with death", the metaphysical *suppression* of the sign—exemplified in Husserl's attempt to exclude the sign from expression—is an endeavour to "dissimulate" the consequences of this "death"

⁴⁷ On this point see SP, 52.

⁴⁸ SP, 53-54.

⁴⁹ SP, 54.

⁵⁰ SP, 54.

at work in the heart of the sign. It is, in other words, an effort to restore full presence.⁵¹

Second, Derrida contends that the ideal meaning which Husserl wishes to attribute exclusively to expression as an effect of repetition necessarily calls on representation: "The basic element" of the "structure of repetition", he writes, "can only be representative."⁵² For Derrida, ideality as repetition is never a pure, primordial 'present-ation' of meaning to consciousness as Husserl would have it. Rather, the necessarily "representative" structure of repetition, in Derrida's view, is the nonpresent economy of signification. It follows, in Derrida's account, that if the "imagination of the word" (expression/ideality) is constituted in the same way as indication—that is, through the "representative"/signifying structures of repetition—then the bifurcation of indication and expression, mediation and immediacy, "actual" and "imagined" signification is spurious. The essential argument is contained in this passage:

When in fact I effectively use words...I must from the start operate (within) a structure of repetition [which] can only be representative. A sign is never...an irreplaceable and irreversible empirical particular. A sign which would take place but 'once' would not be a sign; a purely idiomatic sign would not be a sign. A signifier must be formally recognisable in spite of, and through, the diversity of empirical characteristics which may modify it...But it can function...as language only if a formal identity enables it to be issued again and to be recognised. This identity is necessarily ideal. It thus necessarily implies representation: as Vorstellung, the locus of ideality in general, as Vergegenwärtigung, the possibility of reproductive repetition in general [representation], and Repräsentation, [the sign] insofar as each signifying event is a substitute (for the signified as well as for the ideal form of the signifier)...This representative structure is signification itself.⁵³

Ideality (as repetition), representation and signification are inextricably linked. *Vorstellung*, (the locus of "ideality", of the "imaginative presentation"), necessarily implies those aspects of signification which Derrida sets out above: repetition,

⁵¹ On these points see *SP*, 54. Another comment by Derrida helps to elucidate this assertion: "...Writing, the common name for signs which function despite the total absence of the subject because of (beyond) his death [is] involved in the very act of signification in general and, in particular, in what is called 'living' speech." *SP*, 93. Writing, or Derridean difference, as the very possibility of all signification, is discussed below.

⁵² *SP*, 50.

⁵³ *SP*, 50.

representation and the sign. The latter are the elements which, on Derrida's account, Husserl has sought to exclude from the 'presentative' immediacy of consciousness. Yet, insofar as the word is an historically constituted entity, and never a unique presentation to consciousness, the imaginative presentation of the word cannot be singular and idiomatic. Husserl himself, according to Derrida, recognises that a unique word would not be a word; it would be *meaningless*. And it follows that the imagination of the word and its concomitant *meaningfulness* are not purely self-present but *re-presentative*. The "imaginative presentation" of the word is never free from the traces of its *nonpresent* 'present-ation': it involves a relationship between acts, and between signs, between the 'present' use of the word and its "presentation" of ideal meaning to consciousness, and those mental acts in the temporal series that are not present (to consciousness). The word merely repeats and re-presents the nonpresence to consciousness of what is merely re-presented, and never simply or uniquely 'present-ed'.⁵⁴ This, for Derrida is the ineradicable primordially of re-presentation over presentation, the structure of supplementary "substitution" which comprises signification. The positing of re-presentation as antecedent to "*present-ation*" is Derrida's response to a philosophy of "intuition and presence"; a metaphysics which "eliminates signs by making them derivative [and] annuls reproduction and representation by making signs a modification of a simple presence."⁵⁵ Derrida concludes that repetition disestablishes the distinction between the pure presentation-to-mind of the "imagination of the word", and mere representation, the "veridical" or "actual" word: "By reason of the primordially repetitive structure of signs in general...the difference between...the veridical and the imaginary, and simple presence and repetition...wear[s] away."⁵⁶ On Derrida's account of repetition as representation, Husserl's effort to shield the ideality of the fully present monologue from the sign therefore fails: "We thus come—against Husserl's express intention—to make the *Vorstellung* itself, and as such, depend on the possibility of re-presentation (*Vergegenwärtigung*)."⁵⁷

Finally, Derrida advances an argument which links re-presentation as imagination to the empirical world—to "existence". For Husserl, there is a radical heterogeneity between, on the one hand, perception or the primordial *presentation* of

⁵⁴ See on this point SP, xxxv-xxxvi. Derrida's translator notes: "There can be no purely 'ideal' meaning, for at every moment, ideality would have to depend on precisely what is nonpresent, what is only repeated and represented in another presence." SP, xxxvi.

⁵⁵ SP, 51.

⁵⁶ SP, 51.

⁵⁷ SP, 52.

objects to consciousness, and, on the other hand, imagination and memory (recollection).⁵⁸ For Husserl both memory and the image are "re-presentations" (*Vergegenwärtigung*), repetitions of antecedent empirical experiences, reproductions of perception. Imagination for Husserl is in fact a neutralising "modification" of memory, which is itself representational: "[The imagination] is the *neutrality modification* of the 'positing' act of representation [*Vergegenwärtigung*] and therefore of remembering in the widest conceivable sense."⁵⁹ The key point here, in Derrida's reading, is that the imagination is itself connected to the world as a re-presentational modification of antecedent perceptual experience. It is therefore ineluctably "thetic", in that it "posits" an externally existing world. On Derrida's account the imagination is, in phenomenological terms, "positional"—it involves the positing of a "belief" in something veridical, a perceived empirical particular, an "ontical" existent. It therefore undermines the *epoché*—the phenomenological reduction of the ontical, and of the "doxic" character of belief—required by Husserlian philosophy.

The image is hence doubly problematic. First, it is never purely and simply present but "always classified under the general concept of re-presentation", as a "reproduction of a presence"⁶⁰ rather than a "simple presence". Second, on Derrida's reading, despite the "neutrality modification" which is intended to bracket "belief" and the "ontical" character of existence, the image is never simply a "pure neutralisation."⁶¹ Rather, it "modifies a *positional* representation",⁶² a memory, a reproduction of perception. According to Derrida, the imagination thus necessarily "retains a primary reference to...a perception and positing of existence, to belief in general."⁶³ Insofar as this is the case, Derrida argues, the imagination cannot effectively sequester and cancel the empirical existence of the world or the "doxa" of belief. The realm of imagination is fraught with those elements of "existence", the "real" and the "empirical" which Husserl had sought to exclude. The consequences here of repetition/representation for ideality and imagination are profound: in Derrida's estimation, the latter are essentially engaged in the same reproductive movement. He writes: "The power of pure repetition that opens up ideality and the power which

⁵⁸ See on this point *SP*, 44, note 4.

⁵⁹ *Ideas*, S 111, 309.

⁶⁰ *SP*, 55.

⁶¹ *SP*, 55.

⁶² *SP*, 55 (emphasis added).

⁶³ *SP*, 55.

liberates the imaginative reproduction of empirical perception cannot be foreign to each other; nor can their products."⁶⁴

As Derrida would have it, "death" strikes at the heart of the "living present" of ideality; ideality as repetition is signification; and the phenomenological imagination, itself a repetition/representation of a nonpresent prior experience, communicates with the world. The 'palpable' sign, in other words, inveigles its way back into the solipsistic enclosure. The Cartesian subject, uttering away to itself in nonmundane solitude cannot help but use such signs sullied by empirical existence. Husserl's separation of the purely self-evident realm of expression from the mere factuality, contingency and worldliness of indication is apparently fraught.

Husserl, however, has a further card up his sleeve. He has argued that words are merely imagined in solitary inner life for this reason—real signs would be useless (*zwecklos*) there. He writes: "In a monologue words can perform no function of indicating the existence of mental acts, since such indication would there be quite purposeless."⁶⁵ Why so? Because consciousness has insight into itself in a present moment of time—the *Augenblick*: "The [mental] acts in question are themselves experienced by us in that very moment (*im selben Augenblick*)."⁶⁶ According to Derrida, for Husserl, "Language and its representation is added on to a consciousness that is simple and simply present to itself, or in any event to an experience which could reflect its own presence in silence."⁶⁷ Derrida's approach to Husserl, therefore, is centred around a polemic more fundamental than the issue of the positional "neutrality" or otherwise of the imagination: the problem of time as presence *vis-à-vis* the silent, monological voice. Let us explore this connection.

1.3 Sense, expression, voice, *Augenblick*

Whilst the self-authenticating link of *phonè* and meaning lies at the basis of phonocentric metaphysics, the relation of temporality to the Husserlian thesis of self-presence provides the juncture at which Derrida is able to attempt his most systematic dismantling of phonocentrism. In Husserl's *Investigations*, as adverted to above, the

⁶⁴ SP, 55.

⁶⁵ LI, S 8, 280.

⁶⁶ LI, S 8, 280.

⁶⁷ SP, 58.

punctual moment of temporal presence takes the form of the *Augenblick*, literally, the blink or glance of an eye symbolising the instantaneity of the now—the origin or source point of the intuitive immediacy of meaning to the soliloquising subject. And this present instant is intimately connected to voice.

Critically, the intimacy of voice and meaning (as expression) itself depends on what Husserl styles as a experiential or perceptual "pre-expressive", "intentional stratum" of sense. Sense is the pure, plenary moment of originary intuition, of "lived experience", in which the ideal apperception of objects takes place. It is moreover indissociable, says Derrida, from the notion of pure form.⁶⁸ In the Husserlian instant, intentional lived experience, (the "pre-expressive stratum" of sense), animates expression—the expressive stratum with which sense "blends"—and expression in turn raises sense to the level of conceptuality by facilitating its passage into "the ideality of conceptual and universal form."⁶⁹ This universalising process is the "passage to infinity."⁷⁰ And the form that can be *infinitely* repeated as the same, as discussed above, is the present instant in time—the *Augenblick*, the now in which the universalising of sense takes effect.⁷¹ Yet, in order for this passage to the infinite repetition of form to take effect, the ideal form of sense must, according to Husserl, be "stamped" onto some sort of medium, and this medium must meet certain conditions: it must be merely reflective and "unproductive" like a perfect mirror free from empirical distortion. It must pass into "non-existence", vaporise itself, instantaneously. It must not be contaminated by empirical traces, contingency, mere fact (as opposed to essence), or worldliness—it must, in other words be ideal.⁷² This medium is the ether of silent voice in the expressive monologue.⁷³

Since the monological voice is ephemeral, nonsensuous and insubstantial, unlike a

⁶⁸ See on this point *Form and meaning*, SP, 108.

⁶⁹ See on this point SP, 74-75.

⁷⁰ SP, 75.

⁷¹ See on these points SP, 52-53, 59.

⁷² On all these points see *Ideas I*, S 124, 345-350. There is a subtle nexus here between the visual connotation of the *eidos* as pure form, the sense which shows itself in a kind of mirroring, and the notion of ideal voice which expresses the pre-expressive sense monologically. Derrida extends the discussion of this circular complicity of the eye and the ear in *Form and meaning* in SP, 107-128.

⁷³ As Derrida writes: "There is an unfailing complicity here between idealisation and speech [voix]. An ideal object is an object whose showing may be repeated indefinitely...because, freed from all mundane spatiality, it is a pure noema that I can express without having, at least apparently, to pass through the world...The passage to infinity characteristic of the idealisation of objects is one with the historical advent of the *phonè*." SP, 75.

"worldly" graphic or sounded sign, it seems to 'fade away' at the very same instant of its mute articulation. Crucially, this fading out effaces the dislocating effect of mediation between subjective interiority and sign. Since it is interior, spatially coincident with the subject/soliloquist, the conventional distance between subject and sign is closed. Since it exists only at the time of the thought which engenders it, inner speech temporally coincides with thought. It withdraws in the present instant, 'vanishing' as meaning manifests. Insofar, then, as the voice, subjective interiority and thought are phenomenologically one and the same, insofar as they are *spatio-temporally coincident*, phenomenological consciousness becomes the locus of an originary epistemological and ontological surety: the wellspring of self-presence. The "absolute proximity of the signifier to the signified" which allows the "[signifier's] effacement in immediate presence"⁷⁴ conditions the apodictic nature of voice *qua* meaning. Signs, henceforth, "would be foreign to this self-presence, which is the ground of presence in general."⁷⁵ Accordingly: "The voice is the being which is present to itself...as consciousness; the voice is consciousness."⁷⁶ And the Husserlian *Augenblick* is that dimensionless point in time upon which consciousness turns.

Derrida seeks to show the aporetic nature of the Husserlian concept of time as presence *vis-à-vis* the *im selben Augenblick*. For Derrida, Husserl's notion of the absolute proximity of voice, being and meaning is founded on an irresolvable paradox in his theorisation and elaboration of the structure of time—a 'flaw' which reproduces the axioms of the metaphysical concept of time, and which, in Derrida's hands, will purportedly prove devastating for the phenomenological project. Husserl's thesis of immediate auto-affection involves the notion that a singular, isolable, present instant structures the conflation of meaning and voice, and serves as the privileged source-point from which the presence-structure of time consciousness is sequentialised and organised. This schema, Derrida contends elsewhere, is systematic with the "metaphysical concept of time in general."⁷⁷ Metaphysics, according to Derrida, has always conceived of temporality as structured in the fashion of a series of now-points or pure, punctual instants. Moreover this punctuality, Derrida has it, is the ground for presence in occidental thought.⁷⁸ Such presence conditions the possibility of unmediated perception

⁷⁴ *SP*, 80.

⁷⁵ *SP*, 58.

⁷⁶ *SP*, 79-80.

⁷⁷ *QG*, 67.

⁷⁸ Derrida has asserted the absolute interconnection between this conception of time, (which he claims in all its modifications to be the *only* conception of time available in the intellectual history of the west) and being as presence: "The dominance of the now not only is integral to the system of

upon which the incontrovertible self-evidence of voice turns.

Derrida will claim, moreover, that Husserlian time reproduces the unilinear and teleological notion of temporality inherited from the Greek tradition since Aristotle, constituted as (a) a past which was once (the) present, (b) a present constituted in the self-presence of some form of auto-affection (such as the intuitive immediacy of "*im selben Augenblick*") and, (c) a future as the realisation of prospection in a present to come. Derrida contends further that this historico-metaphysical "vulgar" model of time conceives time as a series of quasi-*spatial* instants—spatial, since the idea of a now in the temporal continuum is an analogue of the point on a line.⁷⁹ And it is the phenomenological reduction of (what Derrida will style as) the nonpresent, differential, deferred structure of time to the present "now" which subtends the "metaphysical conceptuality" of time as a series of punctual instants strung together into a linear successivity or "consecutivity."⁸⁰ Indeed, for Derrida, the point and the line form the dyad that underpins the various modulations of the question of time throughout metaphysics from Aristotle onwards.⁸¹

Derrida's interrogation of the Husserlian notion of time is concomitant with an elaborate re-formulation of the problems of time and space, (and correlatively, interiority and exteriority, and expression and indication). In classical conceptions of space and time the two are posited as binary opposites, and this separation is aligned with an unassimilable dichotomy between interiority and exteriority. Time has been considered as belonging to the interiority of consciousness, whereas space has been

the founding contrast established by metaphysics...between *form* (or *eidos* or *idea*) and *matter* as a contrast between act and potency ("the actual now is necessarily something punctual and remains so, a *form that persists through continuous change of matter*") (*Ideas*, 237)); it also assures the tradition that carries over the Greek metaphysics of presence understood as self-consciousness." *SP*, 63. And further: "The concept of time, in all its aspects, belongs to metaphysics and it names the domination of presence." *Ousia and gramme: note on a note from Being and Time*, in *MP*, 63, (hereafter *Ousia*). And again "Time is that which is thought on the basis of Being as presence, and if something—which bears a relation to time, but is not time—is to be thought beyond the determination of Being as presence, it cannot be something that could still be called *time*." *Ousia*, in *MP*, 60. In respect of the persistence of the metaphysical notion of temporality, Derrida writes: "From Parmenides to Husserl, the privilege of the present has never been put into question." *Ousia*, in *MP*, 34.

⁷⁹ Derrida takes the expression "vulgar concept of time" from Heidegger: "I borrow this expression from Heidegger. It designates, at the end of *Being and Time*, a concept of time thought in terms of spatial movement or of the now, and dominating all philosophy from Aristotle's *Physics* to Hegel's *Logic*." *QG*, 72.

⁸⁰ On these points see *QG*, 72 and *Ousia*, in *MP*, 29-67, *passim*. I elaborate on this notion of consecutivity and its links with phonologism *vis-à-vis* Saussure, in Chapter Two, below.

⁸¹ Derrida elaborates the centrality of these concepts of time to metaphysics in, *inter alia*, *OG*, 66-72, and *Ousia*, in *MP*, 29-67, *passim*.

understood as the realm of exteriority or externality to the subject.⁸² This distinction becomes analogous to Husserl's separation of expression from indication in Derrida's reading. While expression is characterised by the temporal dimension of interiority and the unimpeded unity of *phonè* and thought in that dimension, the realm of indication is that of exteriority, characterised, Derrida argues, by spatiality, visibility, and the extraneous, palpable, spatially-distributed signifier. In Husserl, notably, the physically sounded voice also participates in this exteriority and palpability: only the silent voice in the utterly muted realm of "solitary mental life" is equal to the task of expressing pure meaning.

The relation of the spatial, visual signifier to the subject is therefore "radically different" to that of subphonic voice to the subject. The graphic sign, for example, is said to be essentially "worldly" or external, involving a "*spatial*" reference in its very 'phenomenon', in the (nonworldly) sphere of experience in which it is given. The sense of being 'outside', 'in the world', is an essential component of this phenomenon."⁸³ The phenomenological voice produces no such external or physiognomic reference. It is given in absolute proximity to the subject, so that "when I speak, it belongs to the phenomenological essence of this operation that *I hear myself* [je m'entende] *at the same time* that I speak."⁸⁴ It is not necessary that the voice go out "in[to] the world" to have its meaning-endowing effect; it remains within the proximity and interiority of self-presence. The voice "lives" since it is animated by the transcendental consciousness. Derrida writes: "It does not risk death in the body of the signifier that is given over to the world and the visibility of space."⁸⁵ In voice, the absolute proximity of signifier and signified is not sundered as it is "when I see myself write or gesture."⁸⁶

⁸² Examples of the posited relation of time to subjectivity and consciousness in philosophy are manifold. See for example Kant's definition of time: "Time is nothing else than the form of the internal self, that is, of the intuitions of self and of our internal state." The critique of pure reason, trans. J M D Meiklejohn, Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica Great Books series, 1952, 27. Henri Bergson engages in an elaborate critique of the spatial representation of time while according duration absolute equivalence with consciousness. See especially his Duration and simultaneity, trans. Leon Jacobson, New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Co. Inc., 1965, *passim*. Hegel, in his Encyclopaedia, argues that time is a "*pure form of sense or intuition*", the "same principle as the I=I of pure self-consciousness." See Hegel's Philosophy of nature (Encyclopaedia Part 2) trans. AV Miller, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970, Section 258, 35. Heidegger, in *KPM* writes "Time and the I think are no longer opposed to one another as unlike and incomparable: they are the same." *KPM*, 197. Luce Irigaray comments that in philosophy "Time becomes the *interiority* of the subject and space its *exteriority*." Luce Irigaray, An ethics of sexual difference, trans. C. Burke and G. Gill, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993, 7.

⁸³ *SP*, 76 (emphasis added).

⁸⁴ *SP*, 77.

⁸⁵ *SP*, 77-78.

⁸⁶ *SP*, 80.

Subacoustic auto-affection, as we have seen, is therefore the most perfect form of self-relation: its plenitude effaces all externality. Derrida compares the visual and haptic self-relation with the experience of the voice in the head. Looking at oneself, one can only see part of the body from the 'outside', a discontinuous region of the body's surface—the subject, in other words, is the vanishing point of its own specularity. Looking in a mirror, externality once again opens up as the interposition of what is outside the sphere of "one's own" in the circuit of visual auto-affection. Touch, similarly, begins with the surface of the body, which is already at least partially extrinsic, in that it forms the shared boundary with the world. The voice is the sole case where spatiality has vanished, leaving my "ownness" transparent to me. Derrida accordingly interprets the voice/consciousness conflation as the reduction of all spatiality—of the 'exterior' interval or detour which presents as the obstacle to auto-affection:

As pure auto-affection, the operation of hearing oneself speak seems to reduce even the inward surface of one's own body:...it seems capable of dispensing with this exteriority within interiority, this interior space in which our...image of our own body is spread forth. This is why hearing oneself speak [s'entendre parler] is experienced as an absolutely pure auto-affection, occurring in a self-proximity that would...be the absolute reduction of space in general.⁸⁷

Further, this reduction of the spatial in subvocal auto-affection is concomitant with the privileging or elevation of the temporal as the dimension proper to interiority *qua* consciousness:

Why, in fact, is the concept of auto-affection incumbent on us? What constitutes the originality of speech, what distinguishes it from every other element of signification, is that its substance seems to be purely temporal.⁸⁸

Derrida's polemic on "pure" temporality pivots on Husserl's own discussion of the structure of time in *The Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness*. Husserl elaborates here the three primary phases which constitute the temporal continuum: "protention", "retention" and "primal impression". "Protention" is future-oriented and corresponds to expectation or anticipation—the *telos* of which is the fulfilment of

⁸⁷ SP, 79 (emphasis added).

⁸⁸ SP, 83.

anticipation in the future plenitude of a now. "Retention" is for Husserl equivalent to "primary memory" or "primary remembrance". "Primal impression" is the now point, the undivided unity of the present instant "without interior relations" upon which the primordial intuition of meaning—that is, pure perception—turns. Husserl writes: "...perception (impression) would be the phase of consciousness which constitutes the pure now, and memory every other phase of the continuity."⁸⁹

Husserl, however, makes a crucial distinction between two kinds of memory: primary memory or remembrance (i.e., retention), and "recollection" or "secondary remembrance". Primary memory, retention, corresponds to apodictic perception in all its immediacy. It explicitly excludes "representation": "*Primary remembrance is perception. For only in primary remembrance do we see what is past;...not in a representative but in a presentative way...*It is the essence of primary remembrance to bring [a] new and unique moment to primary, direct intuition, just as [this is] the essence of the perception of the now."⁹⁰ Secondary remembrance or recollection, on the other hand, admits of no intuitive immediacy. It becomes the repository of the not-now, the radically other of the now. If let loose in the flux of retention-primary impression, recollection would undermine the presence structure of Husserlian time consciousness by introducing into it nonself-sameness—representation as the irreducible difference between unmediated perception and the *nonpresent* past merely re-presented. As Husserl writes, in recollection, "the past is remembered...presentified but not perceived. It is not the primordially given and intuited past."⁹¹ In secondary remembrance, "th[e] now is not perceived, i.e., self-given, but presentified."⁹² And further, "*Presentification, re-presentation, as the act which does not place an Object itself before us, but just presentifies—is just the opposite of [perception].*"⁹³

The critical difference between primary and secondary memory, (between retention and recollection), becomes, it seems, the barrier behind which Husserl will attempt to shield perception-retention against the dissipative force of recollection. Yet the steadfastness of Husserl's efforts to radically bifurcate primary and secondary memory *vis-à-vis* perception seems to falter. Just a few pages earlier in *Internal Time*

⁸⁹ *ITC*, S 16, 63.

⁹⁰ *ITC*, S 17, 64.

⁹¹ *ITC*, S 14, 58.

⁹² *ITC*, S 17, 63.

⁹³ *ITC*, S 17, 63-64.

Consciousness Husserl had himself contended: "...the *antithesis of perception* is *primary remembrance*...and primary expectation (retention and protention) whereby *perception and non-perception continually pass over into one another*."⁹⁴ Since for Husserl, "perception [is the] self-giving of the actual present",⁹⁵ the interweaving, the "passing over into one another", of perception and non-perception (the present and the not-present) must have profound consequences for the presence-based structure of time in his account: this modification seems to definitively undermine the putative diffraction between retention as perception and recollection as nonperception. Perception (primal impression), as the "now" phase of consciousness, now becomes "just as ideal limit, something abstract which can be nothing for itself".⁹⁶ And, crucially, "...it is also true that even this ideal now is not something *toto caelo* different from the not-now but continually accommodates itself thereto. The *continual transition from perception to primary remembrance conforms to this accommodation*."⁹⁷

Perception—the "now"—must be "accommodated" to its opposite—the "not-now". Yet, admitting the not-now into the *Augenblick* effectively introduces the 'other' (nonperception) into the simple 'identity' of the present instant of perception. Once "primary remembrance" has become nonperception, (the "not-now"), and insinuated itself into the present "now" of perception, the radical dissimilarity between primary remembrance and recollection is rendered untenable. As Derrida writes: "The difference between...primary and secondary memory is not the radical difference Husserl wanted between perception and nonperception."⁹⁸ Rather, recollection must simply be, together with retention, a modification of *nonperception*. Ultimately, 'presence' is always already co-implicated, in this schema, with a primordial nonpresence and nonperception. And if each purportedly present "instant" is constituted in this continuous "phasing" or "*continuum of gradations*"⁹⁹ between retention/recollection (nonpresence), perception (presence) and protention (nonpresence), since they "continually pass over into one another", then time cannot be thought within the horizon of a simple, punctual, self-evident presence. This relation of presence to nonperception and nonpresence, in Derrida's view, "radically destroys any possibility

⁹⁴ *ITC*, S 16, 62.

⁹⁵ *ITC*, S 16, 63.

⁹⁶ *ITC*, S 16, 63.

⁹⁷ *ITC*, S 16, 63 (emphasis added).

⁹⁸ *SP*, 65.

⁹⁹ *ITC*, S 16, 62.

of a simple self-identity."¹⁰⁰ Thus, Derrida writes:

*The presence of the perceived present can appear as such only inasmuch as it is continuously compounded with a nonpresence and nonperception, with primary memory and expectation (retention and protention)...[.]...As soon as we admit this continuity of the now and the not-now, perception and nonperception...we admit the other into the self-identity of the Augenblick; nonpresence and nonevidence are admitted into the blink of an instant. There is a duration to the blink and it closes the eye.*¹⁰¹

This has, according to Derrida, momentous consequences for the Husserlian project. He writes: "The fact that nonpresence and otherness are internal to presence strikes at the very root of the argument for the uselessness of signs in the self-relation."¹⁰² How so? Since the economy of non-presence and otherness described here is Derridean differance, the structure of signification which drives a wedge into the apodictic immediacy of self-affection.

1.4 The outside is the inside

Having decimated the notion of temporal presence, Derrida deploys his heavy anti-metaphysical artillery. He introduces in rapid succession the terms that have become the leitmotifs in his *oeuvre*—differance, spacing and the trace. These terms, which correspond to his radicalised notion of writing (*écriture*)—the differential and deferred economy of signification—become the conceptual nodal points around which Derrida will arrange his dismantling of the "excellence" of inner voice.

Inner voice, as we have seen, is supposed to be fully present to the subject and self-identical with meaning. This presence was the condition for the uselessness of the sign in Husserl's account of the unity of sense, meaning and expression in inner life. Auto-affection putatively does not "borrow from outside of itself in the world or in 'reality' any accessory signifier, any substance foreign to its own spontaneity."¹⁰³ There was no need for the structure of signification in the temporal unity of the moment, insofar as

¹⁰⁰ SP, 66.

¹⁰¹ SP, 64-65.

¹⁰² SP, 66.

¹⁰³ OG, 20.

the signifying or indicative interval is closed in the selfsame presence of the *Augenblick*, a unitary now in which signifier and signified coincide. But on Husserl's own account of time, auto-affection as presence is demonstrably fractured by nonpresence: insofar as the present moment is vitiated by the not-now and the not-yet, its identity (that is, its nondifference) is corrupted by difference. And if there is no pristine moment of presence in which the conflation of sense and expression can take place, difference, in Derrida's account, must also precede the unitary presence of meaning to consciousness. This difference, according to Derrida, introduces into monadic life a 'detour' through nonself-identity, the spatial, the external, the corporeal, and the mundane—the manifold 'exterior' elements which, on Derrida's reading, Husserl sought to exclude from silent ratiocination. This difference is differance. Derrida writes:

Even while repressing difference by assigning it to the exteriority of the signifiers, Husserl could not fail to recognise its work at the origin of sense and presence. Taking auto-affection as the exercise of the voice, auto-affection supposed that a pure difference comes to divide self-presence. In this pure difference is rooted everything we think we can exclude from auto-affection: space, the outside, the world, the body, etc...It was necessary to pass through the transcendental reduction in order to grasp this difference in what is closest to it—which cannot mean grasping it in its identity, its purity, or its origin, for it has none. We come closest to it in the movement of differance.¹⁰⁴

The introduction of the theme of differance at this point in *Speech and Phenomena* opens the lexicographic grab-bag of Derridean neologisms. Together with differance and the gram, spacing and the trace become the prime movers in the work of deconstruction. The trace—differance—is intimately involved in the decimation of the living presence of the monadic subject: it marks the "retentional" moment of nonpresence which insinuates itself as "outside" into the "interiority" of the living present, and vitiates the ideal, instantaneous apperception of sense putatively effected in the "now". The trace, like differance, is also the "arche-" or "protowriting"—the structure of signification—which will precede and dismantle expression *qua* voice, and sense *qua* presence. And the trace, finally, is also a spacing or temporalisation. Derrida

¹⁰⁴ SP, 82. I deal with the concept of differance, in respect of voice, in Chapters Two and Three. On the introduction, via differance, of the excluded exterior, (the 'impurity' of space, body and world) into the monad, Rodolphe Gasché writes: "...the interval of...pure difference, which divides self presence so that it may fold itself into itself, also harbours everything that Husserl hoped to exclude from self presence as a threat to its purity." Rodolphe Gasché, *The tain of the mirror: Derrida and the philosophy of reflection*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986, 194 (hereafter *Tain*).

demonstrates the consonance of these themes in the following passage:

The living present springs forth out of its nonidentity with itself and from the possibility of the retentional trace...This protowriting is at work at the origin of sense. Sense, being temporal in nature, as Husserl recognised, is never simply present; it is always already engaged in the 'movement' of the trace, that is, in the order of 'signification'...Since the trace is the intimate relation of the living present with its outside, the openness upon exteriority in general, upon the sphere of what is not 'one's own', etc., the temporalisation of sense is, from the outset, a 'spacing'.¹⁰⁵

The notion of spacing returns us finally to the question of space and time. As we have seen, time as presence, the 'interiority' of subjectivity, is posited in philosophy as the reduction or exclusion of its outside/other—space. Yet, for Derrida, spacing is "time's becoming-spatial, or space's becoming-temporal";¹⁰⁶ spacing "speaks the articulation of space and time."¹⁰⁷ And insofar as spacing "articulates" space and time, and makes of each the "becoming" of the other, it also articulates an "outside" and an "inside": it is the key that unlocks the table of metaphysical oppositions grounded in the punctual moment of presence.

It follows from the corruption of punctual presence, Derrida has it, that 'present' time must "borrow from outside of itself" for its structure. The purported interiority and identity of the 'present moment' of time, as we have seen, harbours and is hollowed out by non-selfsameness—the other, the not-now—nonpresent-time. Derrida calls this alterity the "dead" time—conventionally, the space—which corrupts the kernel of the "living" present.¹⁰⁸ Henceforth, in Derrida's estimation, the primordial intimacy which obtains between the present moment and the nonpresent confounds the dichotomy between time ('interiority'), and space ('exteriority'): alterity as space, the "openness upon the outside", fissures the identity and interiority of the temporal instant, introducing an "intervallic spacing" into unitary identity.¹⁰⁹ Derrida writes:

¹⁰⁵ SP, 85-86.

¹⁰⁶ SP, 143.

¹⁰⁷ QG, 68 (emphasis added).

¹⁰⁸ See on this point QG, 68.

¹⁰⁹ Rodolphe Gasché shows the relation between space and time in Derrida's schema thus: "The origin of temporality manifests itself as the experience of time though the dead time of space and is, as space, constitutive of time." His description evokes the intimate interlacing which Derrida has the terms play out. Gasché, *Deconstruction as criticism*, in Glyph, #6, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins

As soon as we admit spacing both as 'interval' or difference and as openness upon the outside, there can no longer be any absolute inside, for the 'outside' has insinuated itself into the movement by which the inside of the non-spatial, which is called 'time', appears, is constituted, is 'presented'. Space is 'in' time: it is time's pure leaving itself; it is the 'outside-itself' as the self-relation of time...Externality as space...opens as pure 'outside' 'within' the movement of temporalisation.¹¹⁰

Since space is "in" time, the radical dichotomy of "absolute inside" and "outside" is demonstrably confounded and stricken. And so, says Derrida, is Husserl's distinction between the category of expression (as the *interiority* of the phenomenological voice in its fully reduced temporal "unity of sound and *phonè*"), and the category of indication (as the spatial *exteriority* of the sonorous, graphic, worldly or visible). Just as the "externality" of space and the pure interiority of time can no longer be opposed in a classical dualism—insofar as the two are caught up, chiastically, in each other's possibility—so spacing introduces 'exteriority' as indication into 'interiority' as expression. Spacing, as the difference-within-itself of the "nonmundane" entity draws the "world" and indication into the solipsistic enclosure of ipseity. The "inside" of expression and the "outside" of indication are indissolubly "intertwined". Derrida concludes:

The 'world' is primordially implied in the movement of temporalisation. As a relation between an inside and an outside in general, an existent and a nonexistent in general...temporalisation is at once the very power and limit of phenomenological reduction. Hearing oneself speak is not the inwardness of an inside that is closed in upon itself; it is the irreducible openness in the inside; it is the eye and the world within speech. Phenomenological reduction is a scene, a theatre stage...the inside of expression does not accidentally happen to be

University Press, 1979, 201. And further, Gasché crystallises the conceptual relationship between spacing and the cleaving of the now: "As the movement by which any possible entity is separated within itself, spacing also affects the *now* constitutive of the metaphysical concept of time. It divides the present moment of the now within itself. Insinuating an interval in each present moment because dependent on a movement of retention and protention (since that moment is present only with regard to a past and future) the spacing diastema is also the becoming-space of time, the possibility proper of temporalisation, as well as the becoming-time of space." *Tain*, 202.

¹¹⁰ *SP*, 85-86. This play between space and time in Derrida's account of difference or the trace (insofar as the French term incorporates the dual senses of to 'differ'—to be spatially discrete, and to 'defer'—to be temporally delayed) is homologous with the play of the spacing and temporalising effects of signification: signs differ (they are defined differentially) and they defer (signification slides *ad infinitum* from term to term.) Difference describes the motive force of this spatio-temporal economy of language: it is literally "spacing/temporalising". *SP*, 130.

*affected by the outside of indication. Their intertwining (Verflechtung) is primordial;...their addition comes to make up for a deficiency...a primordial nonself-presence.*¹¹¹

Derrida is definitive here: the "outside" is the "inside". His entire polemic has consisted in sundering the pure inwardness of the solipsistic sphere of expression. The deconstruction of Husserlian ideality, imagination and time consciousness means that the phenomenological thesis, which grounds the certitude of transcendental consciousness in mute, nonmundane, temporal self-presence is untenable. And this deconstruction is effected by a critique that purports to disestablish the radical dichotomy which Husserlianism requires between interiority and exteriority—and, concomitantly, expression and indication, time and space, the essential and the contingent, the transcendental and the worldly, the acorporeal and the corporeal—by introducing the excluded term into the sphere of its superior other, thereby utterly transforming the terms of the dichotomy. "Space, the outside, the world, the body", Derrida asserts, come to vitiate the nonspatial, acorporeal sphere of interiority. The "inside" of living presence is corrupted by the "outside, the openness upon exteriority in general." And the *s'entendre parler*, in Derrida's critique, is no longer solipsistic self-immediacy effected by the ether of silent voice, but rather *"the irreducible openness in the inside;...the eye and the world within speech."*

Here Derrida metaphorises vision in a way very different to Husserl's use of the photological or ocularcentric motif. We noted earlier that there is, according to Derrida, a complicity between the "putting on view", the ocularcentric metaphor which organises the *Augenblick*, and the silent voice.¹¹² The form of living presence as sense, the ultimate form of transcendental experience, Derrida maintained, could not fail to "effectuate a certain subjection to the look."¹¹³ He writes further, of the relation between sense and expression: "Since sense is determined on the basis of a relation with an object, the element of expression consequently must protect, respect and restore the presence of sense, both as the object's being before us, open to view, and as a proximity to the self in interiority."¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ *SP*, 86-87.

¹¹² See page 8, above.

¹¹³ *Form and meaning*, in *SP*, 108; see page 8, above.

¹¹⁴ *SP*, 75.

Certainly then, this "eye and world within speech", the "theatre stage" which Derrida adduces is not the 'eye' of the *eidos* or *theoria*, in which ideal objects are present in absolute proximity to sense, but the eye of representation. Representation is the outside one's "ownness" that, in the phenomenological *epoché*, is reduced to the collusion between the ideality of pure form as perceptual sense given to philosophic 'vision', and speech as silent voice. The eye of the "theatre stage" introduces on the contrary a kind of alterity as self-relation into the "presentative" immediacy of *im selben Augenblick*. The monad figured as a "theatre" space suggests that a 'representative' interval, a spacing, splits the absolute proximity of signifier and signified in solipsistic consciousness: ipseity becomes a kind of necessarily fictive representation, the subject speaking to its nonidentical double at a visible distance. The theatre metaphor, moreover, draws on the irreducibility of repetition—the theatre is the space of the rehearsal, in French, '*repetition*'—the iteration which ineluctably draws the sign and its material contingency into the ideal sphere of the soliloquist. And the eye here finally connotes the very "visibility of space", the spatial diastema in which the physical body of the signifier "risks death", wrenched as it is by a spatio-temporal interval from the animation of life-giving consciousness. Such visibility and spatiality, Derrida says, "could only destroy the self-presence and spiritual animation" of speech. "*They are literally the death of that self-presence.*"¹¹⁵

Indeed, Derrida noted earlier in respect of the ocularcentric immediacy of the *Augenblick* that, "there is a duration to the blink and it closes the [eidetic] eye."¹¹⁶ Just as the blink splits the gaze the instant of "living presence" is divided by non-selfpresence, the thanatic 'cut' that ruptures the moment in which ideal meaning would present itself in a glance to "living" consciousness. Just such a refutation of visual immediacy, another suggestion of the inevitable closure of the eye, concludes *Speech and Phenomena*. Derrida writes: "Contrary to the assurance that Husserl gives us... 'the look' cannot 'abide'."¹¹⁷ Ideal 'vision', in other words, cannot endure and persist in an undivided present of *eidos*, that profoundly Greek "look", the eidetic reduction or "*Wesenschau*" in which the *s'entendre parler* traces its silent circuit.¹¹⁸ Derrideanism

¹¹⁵ *SP*, 35.

¹¹⁶ *SP*, 65.

¹¹⁷ *SP*, 104.

¹¹⁸ Another of Derrida's comments on vision and its relationship to presence help to elucidate this point. In *Ousia*, he contends that "The privilege of the present already marked the *Poem* of Parmenides. To [say] and to [think], were to grasp a present under the heading of that which *endures* and *persists*, near and available, exposed to vision or given by hand." *Ousia*, in *MP*, 32 (emphasis added).

descends like an adumbration upon the dazzling temporal unity of the instantaneous "view". Differance radically dissevers the mutual proximity and circularity of insight, and silent self-affection.

Or does it? Husserl had staked consciousness on the *mute, nonmundane, eidetic Augenblick*, on the exclusion of voice, world, body, and the 'eye' of space and representation from the monologue. The sphere of transcendental consciousness is silent and bright with meaning. Might this mean, then, that Derrida's deconstruction which putatively *closes the eidetic eye*, the eye of the pure form of *eidos*, renders subjectivity somewhat crepuscular yet sonorous? Could this mean that Derrideanism introduces the *mundane, the world, space, the body*, even perhaps *sounding voice* into solipsistic silence as it closes the eye? Does Derridean *écriture* presage a newly possible, post-phenomenological voice? As Derrida would say, it is too soon to tell.

Chapter Two

Voice and the maleficence of writing: Derrida's confrontation with Saussure

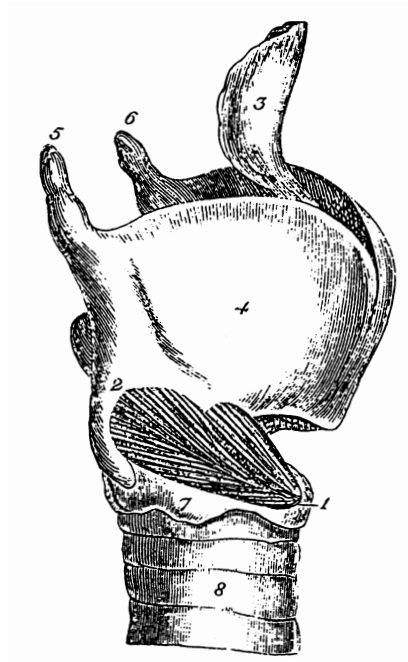


PLATE VIII

SIDE VIEW OF THE VOICEBOX, OR LARYNX.

- 1, 2. RING-SHIELD MUSCLE (CRICO-THYROIDÆUS)
- 3. LID.
- 4. SHIELD.
- 5, 6. UPPER HORNS OF THE SHIELD.
- 7. RING.
- 8. WINDPIPE.

Figure 3

*Although the connection between word and written form is superficial and...artificial...it is nonetheless much easier to grasp than the natural and only authentic connection, which links word and sound.*¹¹⁹

*Language is first, in a sense I shall gradually reveal, writing.*¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ Ferdinand de Saussure, Course in general linguistics, trans. Roy Harris, La Salle: Open Court, 1992, 26 (hereafter, Course).

¹²⁰ OG, 37.

2.1 Linguistics as phonologocentrism

Derrida has argued that the positive re-assertion of a transformed notion of writing is necessary to his project. Western philosophy, in Derrida's estimation, has striven for the reduction, occultation or sublimation of the trace, of Derridean 'writing'—or, to give it its full denotative force as primordial, *arche-writing*.¹²¹ Onto-theology, he maintains, has concomitantly asserted the primacy and ontological preeminence of speech.¹²² A conceptual reversal of this subjugation is therefore a necessary step toward the transformation of metaphysics. As Derrida traces the systematic subordination of writing to speech in metaphysics, and speculatively asserts the former as originary, he contends: "...there is no linguistic sign before writing",¹²³ insofar as "language is first...writing."¹²⁴ For those thinkers whose phonocentrism Derrida deconstructs, writing, according to Derrida, is a malign imposture that seeks to overturn voice's originality and sovereignty from without. For Derrida, this "'usurpation' has always already begun."¹²⁵ Indeed, it is the proximity of the colloquial notion of writing to his deconstructed notion of *écriture* upon which Derrida draws to take to its limits the "usurpation" of speech by writing. Since writing in the "vulgar" sense has always troubled philosophy's desire for presence, its appropriation will be integral to the deconstructive project. Derrida writes:

Arche-writing...I continue to call writing only because it essentially communicates with the vulgar concept of writing....Writing was...destined to signify the most formidable difference. It threatened the desire for living speech from the closest proximity...¹²⁶

¹²¹ In Derrida's own early work, the analogues for the term that has been repressed include, together with writing, protowriting or arche-writing, variously the trace, differance, spacing, the gram or gramme, the supplement, articulation, the interval and the hinge (*brisure*).

¹²² In *OG*, Derrida writes: "The subordination of the trace to the full presence summed up in the logos, the humbling of writing beneath a speech dreaming its plenitude, such are the gestures required by an onto-theology determining the archaeological and eschatological meaning of being as presence..." *OG*, 71.

¹²³ *OG*, 14.

¹²⁴ *OG*, 37. Derrida writes further: "writing in general covers the whole field of linguistic signs", *OG*, 44; and further, "oral language already belongs to writing." *OG*, 55.

¹²⁵ *OG*, 37.

¹²⁶ *OG*, 56.

In *Grammatology* Derrida assembles a pantheon of phonologocentrism, encompassing a heterogeneous group of thinkers ranging wildly from the originators of post-Socratic thought to, relatively speaking, middleweight twentieth century linguists and anthropologists: the group includes, *inter alia*, Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau, Hegel, Levi-Strauss and Saussure. All are subjected to a deconstructive inquisition on the subject of voice. As far back as the *Phaedrus*, Derrida asserts, Plato's denunciation of writing as a perfidious exteriority that comes to violate the interiority of voice/speech, indeed the interiority of soul, founded the conceptual tradition of thinking on speech and writing that persists to the present day.¹²⁷ For Aristotle, according to Derrida, spoken words symbolise mental experience, preserving immediacy to thought; written symbols are in a relationship of mere secondarity to vocal primacy. Writing, therefore, is a mere "technical" and "representative" instrument, a sign of a sign.¹²⁸ Leaping millenia, Rousseau, in Derrida's account, considers writing as an evil that befalls language, a dangerous and derivative supplementarity that sequesters language from its natural bond with the antediluvian communality of speech.¹²⁹ And in Hegel, voice, as discussed above, is again the most ideal of all idealities. Writing corrupts this ideality, but phonetic writing is the least debased of all forms of writing insofar as it preserves a relationship with voice that necessarily adverts to the primacy and interiority of the word.¹³⁰ In the twentieth century, Derrida contends, Levi-Strauss reproduces the anthropological myth of elysian origin in the story of the Nambikwara tribe, whose introduction to writing putatively unleashes the violence and degeneracy of 'culture' into unspoilt, prescribal 'nature'.¹³¹ But it is Ferdinand de Saussure who for Derrida initially occupies a position of "privilege" in this identification parade:¹³² the polemic on Saussure comprises the first half of *Of Grammatology* and will be my major focus here.

Saussurian linguistics, in Derrida's reading, reproduces the logocentric tradition which valorises voice. The genuine and originary relationship in language, is, for Saussure, the nexus between the sense of the word and sound. Saussure writes: "The

¹²⁷ For Derrida on Plato see *OG*, especially 34-39, and *Plato's pharmacy* in *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981, 65-171.

¹²⁸ See on these points *OG*, 11, 29.

¹²⁹ On this point, see the extended discussion of Rousseau in Part II of *OG*, 97-316, and *The linguistic circle of Geneva* in *MP*, 139-153.

¹³⁰ On Hegel, writing and voice, see *The pit and the pyramid* in *MP*, 69-108.

¹³¹ On Levi-Strauss, see Chapter I, Part II of *OG*, 101-140.

¹³² As Derrida remarks; see *OG*, 29.

natural and only authentic connection...links word and sound."¹³³ Notwithstanding, then, Saussure's cardinal insight which introduces difference into linguistics—he showed, against the premises of his concomitant phonologism, that meaning arises only through the differential structure of signification—Saussure seeks paradoxically to enshrine phonic essentialism. Derrida paraphrases Saussure, asserting that

*This natural bond of the signified (concept or sense) to the phonic signifier would condition the natural relationship subordinating writing (visible image) to speech. It is this natural relationship that would have been inverted by the original sin of writing.*¹³⁴

Indeed, this is what Saussure affirms: "The written image...takes over from the sound...[.]...and the natural relation between the two is reversed."¹³⁵ Writing is henceforth conceived by Saussure as "pathological", "tyrannical", a "trap". Attention to writing by linguists is "culpable".¹³⁶ The irreducible exteriority of writing to voice, and the primacy and unity of *phonè* and *logos*, orients the Saussurian project, according to Derrida, within the teleology of logocentric metaphysics. Saussure becomes grist for the deconstructive mill.¹³⁷

There are a number of features of the linguistic system which Saussure describes that correspond particularly with the lineage that I have been tracing here. For

¹³³ Derrida quoting Saussure's *Course*; OG, 35; *Course*, 26. (I have substituted translations from the Open Court version of *Course* cited above for Derrida's citations, which are from *Course in general linguistics*, trans. Wade Baskin, New York, 1959).

¹³⁴ OG, 35.

¹³⁵ OG, 35; *Course*, 26.

¹³⁶ OG, 37-38.

¹³⁷ It is noteworthy here that the issue of writing has also been addressed by Derrida *vis-à-vis* Husserl. In *Edmund Husserl's origin of geometry: an introduction*, Derrida shows that Husserl's notion of the 'objectivity' of ideal meaning or an ideal object (such as, for example, triangularity) implies that it must not merely be subjective or psychological; it cannot merely be 'for me' but must be intersubjectively communicable. It must, in other words, be embodied linguistically. Since the concern of thinking is the realm of objective and ideal meanings, thinking must not be extrinsic to language, it must also be linguistically communicable. And insofar as the subject is a finite entity—i.e., subjects die—the thinking of the object in language must be preserved in a form which will maintain its objectivity *and* communicability. This form is writing. However, Husserl is also concerned by writing insofar as it is merely an extrinsic, sensuous, associative thing. It is, in the terms set out in Chapter One above, merely indicative and therefore also 'alien' to the pure interiority of consciousness. Thus Husserl shares both the putative antipathy to writing of those thinkers set out above, and the recognition of the irreducibility of writing which Derrida develops below *vis-à-vis* Saussure. See *Edmund Husserl's origin of geometry: an introduction*, trans. John P. Leavey, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989 (hereafter, *Husserl's origin of geometry*). My reference here to *Origin* is indebted to Leonard Lawler, *Navigating a passage: Deconstruction as phenomenology*, *Diacritics*, Summer 1983, 3-15. Derrida makes reference to *Husserl's origin of geometry* in SP, 80-81.

Saussure, as for Husserl, in Derrida's reading, sonorous sound is reduced: the "bond" between sense and sound is interior. The Saussurian signifier is the (somewhat visually metaphorised) "*image-acoustique*", the "sound-pattern" or "sound-image" and not the 'objective', empirical, material sound in the world. For Saussure the "physical" thing—the sensuous materiality of the word—and the internal phenomenality of the sound-image, are quite distinct. This bifurcation grounds Saussure's reduction of acoustic, "physiological" sound. As Derrida has it: "The sound-image is what is *heard*: not the sound heard, but the being-heard of the sound. Being-heard is structurally phenomenal and belongs to an order radically dissimilar to that of the real sound in the world."¹³⁸ According to Derrida, phonologism thus participates in a phenomenological reduction, by implication analogous with the Husserlian *epoché*. He writes: "One can only divide this subtle but absolutely decisive heterogeneity [between the "sound heard" and the "being-heard" of the sound] by a phenomenological reduction. The latter is therefore indispensable to all analyses of being-heard, whether they be inspired by linguistic, psychoanalytic, or other preoccupations."¹³⁹ Saussure appears to affirm this point. The sound-image

*is not actually a sound; for sound is something physical. A sound pattern is the hearer's psychological impression of a sound...This sound pattern may be called a 'material' element only in that it is a representation of our sensory impressions.*¹⁴⁰

But there is a further degree of discontinuity, a double opposition operating here. Since a sensory relation abides in the signifier in spite of the reduction to interiority (the sound-image is a representation of a "*sensory impression*"), the signified must be altogether more abstract and ideal. Saussure writes: "The sound pattern may thus be distinguished from the other element associated with it...This other element is generally of a more abstract kind: the concept."¹⁴¹ Saussure, according to Derrida, thus retains the requisite metaphysical discontinuity between on the one hand, materiality, corporeality and the sensate, and on the other, the ideality of meaning in inner life

¹³⁸ *OG*, 63.

¹³⁹ *OG*, 63. Derrida writes further: "It is well known that Saussure distinguishes between the 'sound-image' and the objective sound...He thus gives himself the right to 'reduce', in the phenomenological sense, the sciences of acoustics and physiology at the moment that he institutes the science of language." *ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ *OG*, 63; *Course*, 66. "Psychological impression" is rendered as "psychic imprint" in the translation given in *OG*.

¹⁴¹ *OG*, 63; *Course*, 66.

(the signified).

There is a resonance here also with the Hegelian conceptualisation of sound in language. Hegel, according to Derrida, accords the signified meaning or the concept the status of "soul". This "soul", the *logos*, must however be deposited in language, in a 'corporeal' form.¹⁴² Derrida writes:

*The opposition soul and body, and analogically the opposition of the intelligible and the sensory, condition the difference between the signified and the signifier, between the signifying intention (bedeutun), which is an animating activity, and the inert body of the signifier. This will remain true for Saussure; and also for Husserl.*¹⁴³

Sound, fully interiorised in inner life, nevertheless exhibits an intimate connection with the signified. In *Grammatology* and elsewhere, notably in his essay *The Pit and the Pyramid*, Derrida contends that for Hegel, the "vocal note" or sensuous *phonè* is "lifted" ("*aufgehoben*" or "*relevé*") into the realm of the supramaterial. The sensory substance of sound, once articulated as language, is "sublated" into the sphere of the conceptual where it ultimately finds "a second and higher existence" as a psychic (nonsensuous) ideality: it passes into "intellectual existence", the "existence of the concept".¹⁴⁴ This movement of "sublation", it is implied throughout Derrida's work on phonocentrism, also appears in Husserl and Saussure—in Husserl as the muted voice in "solitary mental life", and in Saussure as the silent "sound-image". The primacy of the voice *qua* language and its intimate link to sense is accordingly preserved in the silence of intuition.

In *Speech and Phenomena*, Derrida adverts further to the connection between Husserlian expression and the Saussurian sound-image. Here, he argues, (if not for the complexity of the structures relating to meaning and expression in Husserl's account of voice), an equivalence could be posited between the Saussurian signifier (the "sound-image") and Husserlian "expression" on the one hand, and Saussure's signified and Husserl's *Bedeutung* (meaning) on the other.¹⁴⁵ Derrida argues elsewhere, moreover,

¹⁴² *The pit and the pyramid*, in *MP*, 82.

¹⁴³ *The pit and the pyramid*, in *MP*, 82.

¹⁴⁴ See *The pit and the pyramid*, in *MP*, 90.

¹⁴⁵ See *SP*, 44-46. Derrida also argues, however, that Saussure's concept of the sound-image remains within a psychologism which holds that the sound-image is a kind of internal *reflection* of an objective reality. He cites Saussure: "The psychological character of our sound-image becomes

that Saussure reduced the exteriority of the signifier by conceiving the sign as a "two sided *psychological* entity",¹⁴⁶ in an analogue of the Husserlian phenomenological reduction of logical language to inner expression-meaning; and further, that Saussure was lead accordingly to posit semiology as a species of the genus *psychology*. Saussure and Husserl, in Derrida's reading, share the concept of language as (the) expression (of a kind of pre-expressive/psychic stratum of meaning).¹⁴⁷ Hence, Derrida contends, both Saussure and Husserl hold that "the voice is consciousness itself."¹⁴⁸

Further, in Saussure's account of language, temporality returns to condition presence. Meaning in phonologism, according to Derrida, is linked to the "vulgar", metaphysical concept of time which organises onto-theology (see Chapter One, above). This notion of time, we have seen, turns on the point of the present "now", and the line, or the linear successivity of nows. In Derrida's reading, this present-now dominated concept of time (which is "intrinsic to the totality of the history of the occident"¹⁴⁹) corresponds to a linearist concept of speech and writing, and is associated with a commitment to phonologism.¹⁵⁰ Saussure conceives of auditory signification as having "certain temporal characteristics" in that "(a) *it occupies a certain temporal space*, and (b) *this space is measured in just one dimension [as a] line*."¹⁵¹ He thus affirms and reproduces the linear, unidimensional model of temporality impugned in Derrida's reading.¹⁵² Derrida writes:

[The] 'vulgar concept of time'...[is] associated with the linearisation of writing and with the linearist concept of speech. This linearism is undoubtedly inseparable from phonologism; it can raise its voice to the same extent that linear writing can seem to submit to it. Saussure's entire theory of the 'linearity of the

apparent when we observe our own speech. Without moving our lips or tongue we can talk to ourselves or recite mentally a selection of verse." *ibid*, 46, quoting *Course*, 66.

¹⁴⁶ Derrida uses the term "psychic" rather than "psychological". The latter term appears in the translation of *Course* which I use here.

¹⁴⁷ On these points see *Positions*, 22-32.

¹⁴⁸ *Positions*, 22.

¹⁴⁹ *OG*, 72.

¹⁵⁰ On these points, see *OG*, 72.

¹⁵¹ *OG*, 72; *Course*, 69-70.

¹⁵² Indeed Derrida implies that Saussure's idea of time communicates with Husserl's doctrine of the apodeitic now-instant (see Chapter One, above), that 'punctum' of presence, which "conserves the homogeneity and fundamental successivity [of the structure of time]." *OG*, 67.

*signifier' could be interpreted from this point of view.*¹⁵³

Derrida's argument can be sketched as follows. Phonologism, linearism and presence are co-originated in the "living present" of the signified. The present-now is the fount of the linear distribution of instants in time, and of the stream of speech and writing. The sign is a 'nodal point' in this chain, just as the present instant is in time. In the temporal flow of speech, the sign communicates with presence insofar as the signified facet is in a relationship of immediate plenitude with intuitive consciousness and invariant meaning. The signified in western philosophy, Derrida contends, has always corresponded to the apodictic presence of the *logos*, the meaning apperceived in the "living present" or now instant; and the distinction and parallelism of the signified and signifying facets of the sign along the line subtend this model.¹⁵⁴ Since the facets of the sign are discontinuous, the immediacy of the relationship of the signified face to meaning is undisturbed by the signifier. The latter can then be discarded as mere contingency, mediation, difference; the inessential other of the pure 'identity' of the concept.¹⁵⁵ Saussure's linear/phonological system—relying on the presence of the signified and the consecutivity of speech and time—reproduces, in Derrida's reading, the "classical ontology" of the sign: it is one of the "deepest adherences of the modern concept of the sign to its own history."¹⁵⁶ What this model disallows is the essential discontinuity, spacing, and difference that, in Derrida's re-conceptualisation of time, vitiate presence.¹⁵⁷

Finally, in developing his argument against Saussurian linearism and phonologocentrism, Derrida mobilises the question of a specific system of writing: the phonetic. In Derrida's account, linearism, phonologism and the phonetic system of writing are inextricably linked in the metaphysical tradition. The irreversible temporality of the spoken voice, a linear unfolding of presence corresponds, Derrida contends, to phonetic writing insofar as the latter is conceived as the transcription of

¹⁵³ QG, 72.

¹⁵⁴ See QG, 72-3. Derrida writes, also, on this point: "The notion of the sign always implies within itself the distinction between the signifier and the signified, even if, as Saussure argues, they are distinguished simply as the two faces of one and the same leaf." QG, 11.

¹⁵⁵ On these points see QG, 13-15 and 72-73 and Positions, 19-20.

¹⁵⁶ QG, 72.

¹⁵⁷ On this point see QG, 86. Derrida writes that "the linearity of language entails [the] vulgar and mundane concept of temporality (homogeneous, dominated by the form of the now and the ideal of continuous movement, straight or circular) which Heidegger shows to be the intrinsic determining concept of all ontology from Aristotle to Hegel." However, he adds, "this linear norm was never able to impose itself absolutely" because of the intervention of "discreteness, difference, spacing."

speech. Such is also the way in which Saussure views the interrelation of speech and script. Saussure writes:

*Auditory signals [signifiers] have available to them only the linearity of time. The elements of such signals are presented one after another: they form a chain. This feature appears immediately when they are represented in writing.*¹⁵⁸

In contrast, in systems understood to be nonphonetic, such as the pictogram or the hieroglyph, the unfolding of meaning is free from subjugation to the sounding of voice in time—disengaged from this presence-based economy. This is one reason for Derrida's apparent recourse to pictorial or graphic language over and against alphabetic-phonetic writing in his anti-phonocentric polemic.¹⁵⁹ Exploring this trajectory will lead us to a consideration of the interplay of the graphic and the phonic in language.

2.2 The phonetic and the nonphonetic

The complicity between phonetic writing and the metaphysical commitment to presence becomes a key element of Derrida's work on writing *vis-à-vis* voice. According to Derrida: "The system of language associated with phonetic-alphabetic writing is that within which logocentric metaphysics, determining the sense of being as presence, has been produced."¹⁶⁰ Writing and voice are concatenated in phonetics: their hierarchisation in an axiology that will perpetually debase and exclude one term—writing—is thereby systematised. Thus: "... logocentrism, this *epoch* of full speech has always placed in parentheses, *suspended*, and suppressed for essential reasons, all free reflection on the origin and status of writing."¹⁶¹

Yet the confrontation with phonetic writing is to some extent double-edged in metaphysics. Since phonetic writing is the only form of script which, in its irreducible element—its alphabetisation—represents the ostensibly phonic 'essence' of language as speech, it becomes the dominant form of writing with which metaphysics concerns itself. Saussure, Derrida contends, reduces the field of linguistics to exclude all

¹⁵⁸ OG, 72; Course, 70. See on the pluridimensionality which Derrida opposes to this unilinear model OG, 85-87; see also Derrida's reference to Roman Jakobson's substitution of the notion of the chord in music for the unilinear model of language, OG, 72.

¹⁵⁹ On this point see OG, 84-85.

¹⁶⁰ OG, 43.

¹⁶¹ OG, 43.

nonphonetic writing from his purview while considering it necessary, somewhat regrettably, to embrace the phonetic.¹⁶² Yet, since *all* writing is also the artifice and maleficence which supervenes upon the fundamentally phonic nature of language, it also threatens to dissever the "natural bond". Writing as "representation", Saussure will posit, is an exterior irreconcilable to the "internal system" of language: its purported "separateness" from language is an index of the distance Saussure wishes to preserve between speech and script. Thus, Saussure can contend that the two are unrelated in essence:

*A language and its written form constitute two separate systems of signs. The sole reason for the existence of the latter is to represent the former...[.]...Writing is in itself not part of the internal system of...language.*¹⁶³

Language, the "object" of linguistic study, will correspond only with speech: "The object of...linguistics is not a combination of the written word and the spoken word. The spoken word alone constitutes [the] object."¹⁶⁴ Writing, however, cannot be entirely jettisoned from Saussure's project insofar as an understanding of its "utility, defects and dangers"¹⁶⁵ will be necessary. As Derrida has it, this necessity is consistent with the metaphysical project—the restoration of the voice to its originary purity against the contaminating force of writing.¹⁶⁶

In his own *oeuvre*, Derrida effects a reversal of this axiology. An inscriptional

¹⁶² Derrida also shows here the complicity of Saussure's reduction of nonphonetic writing with Husserl's approach to the nonphonetic as a "crisis" of intuition. Derrida treats this issue at length in *Husserl's origin of geometry*. See on this point, *OG*, 40.

¹⁶³ *OG*, 31, 33, *Course*, 24.

¹⁶⁴ *OG*, 31; *Course*, 24-25.

¹⁶⁵ *Course*, 24.

¹⁶⁶ Hegel is close to Saussure here: he similarly reduces the nonphonetic, banishing hieroglyphic and pictographic writing from the sphere of conceptual interest. Alphabetic writing is the most "intelligent" writing, since, although its secondarity to voice renders it on the one hand, as Derrida has it, "servile and contemptible", its proximity to voice directly sources vocalic intuition: the inner sounding word. See *OG*, 24; *MP*, 95. In contradistinction to phonetic writing, which "leads the mind from the sensibly concrete image to attend to the more formal structure of the vocal word and its abstract elements [in] the inner realm of mental life", debased, Eastern forms of writing do not have a directly self-sublating nexus with the ideality of inner life. They therefore, Hegel contends, "must be excluded from the History of Philosophy". *MP*, 101. In Derrida's reading in *OG*, the reduction of nonphonetic script also organises Rousseau's thought. While all writing is exterior to the immediacy of voice, nonphonetic script is the most profoundly abstracted and thus debased of linguistic modalities. Nonphonetic writings are by necessity irredeemably alien from voice, and the paradigm here is algebraic writing which has "broken with living origin, with all living present." *OG*, 303. As "faithful servant of speech", phonetic writing, in effacing itself before the presence of voice, in minimising the loss of immediacy wrought by all inscription, is, on the other hand "preferred to writings used by other societies." *OG*, 301.

motif is deployed to undermine and render untenable the Occidental aggrandisement of the *phonè*. Yet Derrida is careful to maintain that he is neither seeking to unproblematically valorise script over speech, nor to subjugate speech to script. Nor, Derrida maintains, is he seeking to subordinate phonetic to nonphonetic writing. Writing is a term that handily accounts, *inter alia*, for a broader cultural rise of the "graphie".¹⁶⁷ The once insuperable word, Derrida contends, is undergoing a profound cultural transformation in the paradigm shift from the dominance of speech to various tropes of writing: the ascendancy of the scriptive or textual in the Derridean *oeuvre* may also apparently be read as co-extant with this transformation. In *Grammatology* Derrida's cites twentieth century innovations such as cinematography, choreography, and the cybernetic program as modernist manifestations exemplary of this development.¹⁶⁸ And pictographic and ideographic systems anticipate, for Derrida, this movement toward a *grammatology*.

The 'bracketing', in metaphysics, of forms of writing other than those which are alphabetic/phonetic opens Derrida's own interest in the latter. For Derrida, there is a largely unacknowledged complicity in the 'origin' of linguistic systems, which the western linguistic tradition effaces, viewing the development of alphabetic writing as the teleology of the transcription of the word/voice. Saussurian phonologism debases nonphonetic writing (as do Hegel and Rousseau) considering it, Derrida asserts, as "evil itself".¹⁶⁹ Derrida's counter-manoeuvre is to attempt to elucidate the interconnectedness of the ideographic and the phonetic in his concept of writing.

Of all the forms of the ideogram, it is, in particular, the form of the rebus, or picture puzzle, which for Derrida condenses "all the difficulties" accompanying the question of the graphic and phonic in language.¹⁷⁰ It is the rebus which will prove pivotal in Derrida's argument that all languages rely to a degree on the cohabitation of graphic/visual/nonphonetic and phonetic values. The phoneticism or nonphoneticism

¹⁶⁷ Derrida introduces this term for writing in *OG*, 9.

¹⁶⁸ See on these points *OG*, 9. This cultural phenomenon of the move from sound to various forms of "graphie" is manifested in what Gregory Ulmer calls "applied grammatology": The modernist "aesthetics of silence and...mathematicisation" is a sign, he contends, of a cultural shift from voice to script and is more broadly symptomatic of the closure of (phonocentric) metaphysics: "Culture is shifting away from a paradigm based on language toward one based on writing. The humanities need not become mute...but may find support in the nonphonetic features of mathematical operations for exploring the resources of spacing in writing. The resurgence of the graphic element escaping from the domination of the spoken word is a symptom of the end of the metaphysical era." Gregory Ulmer, *Applied grammatology: post(e) pedagogy from Jacques Derrida to Joseph Beuys*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987, 9.

¹⁶⁹ The linguistic circle of Geneva, in *MP*, 149.

¹⁷⁰ See *OG*, 90.

of language systems, he contends, are merely "abstract" characteristics of such systems: phonetic and nonphonetic elements are distributed along a continuum of greater or lesser dominance in pictographic, ideographic *and* phonetic script. The picture-puzzle, according to Derrida, exemplifies this coextensivity of the "*phonie*"¹⁷¹ and the *graphie* in language. Derrida writes:

*As pictogram, a representation of the thing may find itself endowed with a phonetic value. This does not efface the 'pictographic' reference which, moreover, has never been simply 'realistic'. The signifier is...constellated into a system: it refers at once, and at least, to a thing and to a sound...we are dealing...with a script apparently pictographic and in fact phonetico-analytical in the same way as the alphabet.*¹⁷²

Non occidental script, such as ideo-pictographic writing, is also of particular pertinence to Derrida for a number of reasons. First, Eastern systems of writing, conventionally considered as nonphonetic, can be shown, Derrida asserts, to include irreducibly phonetic values. Second, Derrida contends that writing such as the Chinese ideogram graphically refutes the ostensibly necessary and "natural" primacy of voice over writing upon which the western obsession with phonetic writing, considered as a (mere, supervenient) representation of speech, turns. Thus:

*We have known for a long time that largely nonphonetic scripts like Chinese or Japanese included phonetic elements very early. They remained structurally dominated by the ideogram or algebra and we thus have the testimony of a powerful movement of civilisation developing outside of all logocentrism. Writing did not reduce the voice to itself, it incorporated it into a system.*¹⁷³

Such systems, according to Derrida, are neither pure *phonie*, nor pure *graphie*. Indeed, for Derrida, phonetic and nonphonetic writing are essentially co-implicated: he is concerned to demonstrate what he calls the "double value" which subsists in all language, including occidental script. Derrida writes:

For structural or essential reasons, a purely phonetic writing is impossible and

¹⁷¹ Derrida introduces this term in OG, writing of the "articulated unity of sound and sense within the 'phonie.'" See OG, 29.

¹⁷² OG, 90.

¹⁷³ OG, 90.

*has never finished reducing the nonphonetic. The distinction between phonetic and nonphonetic writing...remains very derivative with regard to what may be called a synergy and a fundamental synaesthesia.*¹⁷⁴

Language is inherently "synaesthetic" insofar as its audible/phonic and visible/graphic aspects are inseparable, the *phonie* and *graphie* interwoven. It is this essential interweaving, Derrida asserts in *Grammatology*, which Saussure finds intolerable. If the graphic and phonic in language can be shown to be inextricably intertwined, Saussure's argument about the externality of script to speech fails. So does the doxa of writing as mere representation of speech, and the commitment to the originality of the latter with respect to the former. Once writing and speech become caught up in a interminable reciprocity—Derrida's "synaesthesia"—"representation mingles with what it represents...one thinks as if the represented were nothing more than a shadow or reflection of the representer. A dangerous promiscuity and a nefarious complicity between the reflection and the reflected [comes into play]."¹⁷⁵ In this representational play "the point of origin becomes ungraspable."¹⁷⁶ The stakes are clear for Derrida: if writing and speech, the graphic and the phonic, are imbricated in such a way as to prevent the restoration of vocal primacy, then phonologism, in Derrida's account of language, is threatened at its root.

Indeed, phonetic writing—in which, according to metaphysics, a vocal origin is always recoverable—can never fully "reduce the nonphonetic" in Derrida's estimation. The gaps and fissures, the "punctuations" which ineffaceably inhabit language—the formal elements of spacing and diacriticity which enable linguistic meaning to appear only differentially—are for Derrida precisely the *nonphonetic*, spatial, figural, and graphic aspects of language. Notwithstanding, then, the privilege of alphabetic writing in metaphysics, the teleology of phonetic script *vis-à-vis* vocal "origin" always falls short of itself. Hence, Derrida writes:

Writing can never be totally inhabited by the voice. The nonphonetic functions...the operative silences of alphabetic writing, are not factual accidents or waste products one might hope to reduce (punctuation, figure, spacing). The fact of which we have just spoken is not only an empirical fact, it is the example of an

¹⁷⁴ *OG*, 88-89.

¹⁷⁵ *OG*, 36.

¹⁷⁶ *OG*, 36.

*essential law that irreducibly limits the achievement of a teleological ideal.*¹⁷⁷

The structural "silences" of the nonphonetic are insinuated equally and irreducibly into the written *and* spoken text, according to Derrida: voice itself, not only writing, can never be fully inhabited by voice. It is this "operative silence" of writing (*écriture*—in the deconstructed sense) which precedes and vitiates the 'plenitude' of voice, and which is the dimension that Derrida proposes to re-assert in the term *differance*, as I explore below.

2.3 Saussurian difference and Derridean differance: the *phonè* neutralised

Writing, Derrida will contend, is the very tissue of differences—the differential structure—which underpins the audibility, visibility and intelligibility of language in all its modalities. The "phonic substance"—as the basis for the metaphysical reduction to the inner-sounding-word, and for the systematic exteriorisation of the phonetic writing 'dependent' upon speech—is subject to this difference, the silent spacing which produces structure and meaning.¹⁷⁸ This is the case which Derrida develops against Saussure, mobilising the most obvious resource in Saussure's text: the theory of semiological difference as the fount of linguistic signification.

As was the case in Derrida's deconstructive exposure of the duplicity in Husserl's argument, in which the latter sought to preserve the immediacy of the voice and thought to the present instant, Saussure himself furnishes Derrida's ammunition. In the elaborate exegesis of Part I of *Grammatology*, Derrida seeks to show that the Saussurian doctrines of the differential character of language and the arbitrariness of the sign radically contradict the assertion of the natural nexus between sound, or inner

¹⁷⁷ *The pit and the pyramid*, in *MP*, 95-96. On this point see also *QG*, 59. Here Derrida quotes H J Uldall's assertion that in pronunciation, "no phoneme corresponds to the spacing between written words". These are the spaces of silence to which Derrida alludes, those lacunae which prevent the full restoration of voice to script. And further, see *QG*, 68, where Derrida refers to the "pause, blank, punctuation and interval in general, etc. which constitutes the origin of signification." Derrida puts this case most clearly perhaps in *Positions*, where he asserts: "...if we draw all the consequences from the fact that there is no purely phonetic writing (by reason of the necessary spacing of signs, punctuation, intervals, the differences indispensable for the functioning of graphemes etc.) then the entire phonologist or logocentrist logic becomes problematical." *Positions*, 25-26.

¹⁷⁸ This is the theme that develops throughout Chapter 2, Part I of *OG*. I am aware of the difficulty of using the term 'structure' here, since it is structuralist paradigm that Derrida critiques. However he does note alternative possibilities for the concept of structure: "Differences are the effects of transformations, and from this vantage the theme of *differance* is incompatible with the static, synchronic, taxonomic, ahistoric motifs in the concept of *structure*. But it goes without saying that this motif is not the only one that defines structure, and that the production of differences, *differance*, is not astructural: it produces systematic and regulated transformations which are able, at a certain point, to leave room for a structuralist science." *Positions*, 27.

word, and sense. Derrida's argument is, relatively speaking, quite straightforward here: first, the arbitrariness of the sign—the impossibility of any motivated link between signifier and signified—obviates the contention that there could exist any "natural" relation between the Saussurian "sound-image" and "concept". Moreover, if language is a diacritical economy structured only differentially, then the thesis of the incontrovertibly phonic nature of language is immediately suspect. For Derrida, these qualities of language—the immotivation and discontinuity of the linguistic sign—are decisive in his determination of speech/voice as always already "writing". He writes:

*Before being or not being 'noted', 'represented', 'figured' in a 'graphie' the linguistic sign implies an originary writing. Henceforth it is not to the thesis of the arbitrariness of the sign that I shall appeal directly, but to what Saussure associates with it as an indispensable correlative and which would seem to me rather to lay the foundation for it: the thesis of difference as the source of linguistic value.*¹⁷⁹

Saussure himself, then, develops the critical trajectory that strikes at the root of his enterprise. Since Saussure has conceded the impossibility of meaning arising other than as a function of difference, the institution of sound or sound-image as the *indifferent* or self-identical accomplice of sense must fail. What Saussure styles as the "phonic character" of language, he concedes, contradicting the premises of his own phonologism, has no necessary relation to what "constitutes" language.¹⁸⁰ Says Saussure:

*It is impossible that sound, as a material element, should in itself be part of the language. Sound is merely something ancillary, a material the language uses...[...]Linguistic signals [signs] are not in essence phonetic. They are not physical in any way. They are constituted solely by differences which distinguish one such sound pattern from another.*¹⁸¹

It is at the point at which Saussure concedes the invalidity of the phonological doctrine that writing intervenes: Derrida adduces Saussure's own arguments about the differential structure of writing which he (Saussure) uses as the general case to describe the structure of *all* language, including speech. At the very juncture where Saussure opens up the revolution in linguistics, at the "moment of explaining phonic difference as

¹⁷⁹ OG, 52.

¹⁸⁰ OG, 53.

¹⁸¹ OG, 53; Course, 116-117.

the condition of linguistic value" Saussure appropriates "all his pedagogic resources from the example of writing."¹⁸² Saussure asserts:

*The sound of the word is not in itself important, but the phonetic contrasts which allow us to distinguish that word from any other. That is what carries meaning...[.]...An identical state of affairs is to be found in that other system of signs, writing. Writing offers a useful comparison, which throws light upon the whole question. We find that: The signs used in writing are arbitrary...The values of letters is purely negative and differential...Values in writing are solely based on contrasts within a fixed system.*¹⁸³

Language, then, is conditioned by a diacritical structuring principle; it is formal, structural and definitively irreducible to substance. Language cannot be essentially speech, insofar as "in...language itself, there are only differences...and no positive terms."¹⁸⁴ Phonologism, which installs speech or voice at the centre of language, is contradicted *de jure*. And so too is the theory of the dependence (and exteriority) of writing with respect to the "natural bond" of logos and voice. Thus, Derrida can assert:

*By definition, difference is never in itself a sensible plenitude. Therefore, its necessity contradicts the allegation of a naturally phonic essence of language. It contests by the same token the professed natural dependence [on the vocal signifier] of the graphic signifier.*¹⁸⁵

This is epoch-shattering, according to Derrida: it means that the principle of phonologism is struck down. Yet the theory of difference, which goes to the very heart of, and utterly undermines, the Saussurian (phonological) conception of language, is rather more complex, equivocal and subtle, and has more far reaching consequences, than the mere substitution of a purely formal structuring principle over against the putatively phonic nature of language. What are its effects?

¹⁸² OG, 52.

¹⁸³ OG, 52, notes 16 and 17, 326, 327; Course 116-118.

¹⁸⁴ OG, 68; Course 118.

¹⁸⁵ OG, 53. On this point see also OG, 57. Here Derrida explicates Hjelmslev's work on glossematics in which the latter asserts the formal character of language. In respect of Hjelmslev's assertion that "glossems are by definition independent of substance", Derrida writes, "The study of the functioning of language...presupposes that the substance of *meaning*, and among other possible substances, that of *sound*, be placed in parenthesis."

There are several simultaneous trajectories to Derrida's byzantine argument here, the major features of which I will attempt to describe. First, difference enables, in Derrida's reading, the "articulation" of phonic and graphic signification. This in dual senses: first, in the common sense of the *subdivision* of phonic or graphic substance into elements of language, the differentiation which endows substance with meaningful structure; and, second, in the sense of forming the *connecting* interregnum, the articulation *between* speech and writing, which makes possible the adaptation of speech to writing and vice versa. Hence, in the first sense, Derrida writes that difference "permits the articulation of signs among themselves within the same abstract order—a phonic or graphic text for example...It permits the articulation of speech and writing—in the colloquial sense..."¹⁸⁶

In the second sense, as Derrida points out in *Positions*, Saussure himself had recognised that what is "natural to man" is not speech, that is, an essential relationship between phonic substance and language, but rather, as Derrida puts it, the ability to construct language, to *articulate*, to create a code "independent of any substance."¹⁸⁷ Since articulation is a formal structuring principle independent of substance and anterior to the possibility of language, the adaptation of phonic to graphic to phonic text becomes possible. No such translation between speech and writing would be possible, Derrida contends, if language were essentially to do with speech.¹⁸⁸ Hence, Derrida can assert that difference/difference as articulation is the structure which "permits the articulation of signs...between two orders of expression [phonic and graphic text]"¹⁸⁹; and which allows a "graphic ('visual' or 'tactile', 'spatial') chain to be adapted...to a spoken ('phonic', 'temporal') chain."¹⁹⁰ "Articulation", as the relation between script and speech, corresponds with the trope of "writing" which grounds the Derridean program. Derrida writes: "If language were not already...a writing no derived 'notation' would be possible; and the classical problem of

¹⁸⁶ *OG*, 62-63.

¹⁸⁷ *Positions*, 21.

¹⁸⁸ See on these points *OG*, 54-59. Derrida relies here on the insights of H J Uldall who contended that if either "the stream of air" or "the stream of ink" were integral to language "it would not be possible to go from one to the other without changing the language." *OG*, 59, quoting *Speech and writing*, in *Acta Linguistica* 4, 1944, 11.

¹⁸⁹ *OG*, 63.

¹⁹⁰ *OG*, 66. Elaborating further on the role of articulation in founding the possibility of the translation across signifying modalities, Derrida calls on articulation as spacing; the "means [by] which elements [in language] are related to each other...the becoming-space of the spoken chain—which has been called temporal or linear; a becoming space which makes possible both writing and every correspondence between speech and writing, every passage from one to the other." *Positions*, 27.

relationships between speech and writing would not arise."¹⁹¹

Difference as articulation, then, describes a kind of simultaneous plexus of discontinuity and concatenation: it opposes and unites elements within the same signifying modality, creating significant units of language articulable into linguistic text; at the same time, difference/articulation makes possible graphic text independently of speech, spoken text independently of written text (strictly in the colloquial sense of writing), and their mutual adaptation. The originality of articulation ("this writing of difference", "this fabric of the trace") with respect to the problem of language is posed thus: "It is from the primary possibility of...articulation that one must begin. Difference is articulation."¹⁹²

Further, in the typically arcane closing pages of the key second chapter of Part One of *Grammatology*, Derrida elaborates on another critical inflection of the notion of difference: in this instance he calls on the difference which Saussure posits between the "sound in the world"—the exterior, objective, material sound, the "sensory" appearing of the sound (*le son apparaissant*)—and the phenomenal "being-heard" of the sound, its 'lived' appearance animated by consciousness (*l'apparaître du son*). The key point in the explication is this: this distinction, Derrida argues, is a prototypical difference—a trace. Thus, he asserts, the difference "between the appearing and the appearance [*l'apparaissant et l'apparaître*]" (between the 'world' and 'lived experience') is the condition of all other differences of all other traces, and *it is already a trace*.¹⁹³

As a trace, (elsewhere the "hinge"—"*brisure*"—interval or spacing), difference, now shading into *différance*, institutes what Derrida adduces as a *double* movement—a movement which at once articulates and separates the material and the formal, the 'sound' and the 'thought'. Indeed, the "trace" which opens the difference between sensible externality (sound in the "world"), and the invariant *logos* (silent "lived experience") in the "sound-image" modifies a key opposition analogous to that between

¹⁹¹ *OG*, 63.

¹⁹² *OG*, 66.

¹⁹³ *OG*, 65. It is important to note the centrality of the correspondence Derrida here elaborates between Saussurian difference and his own *différance* or trace: there is considerable slippage between the two terms in the passages of *OG* around 60-68 upon which I will focus here. My own text will inevitably reproduce this sliding between terms. It should however be noted that while Derrida slips readily from term to term within the plexus difference-trace-différance in this section of *OG*, the nontotalisable dimension of *différance*, *inter alia*, distinguishes the Derridean formulation from the closed, synchronic, structural universe of Saussurian difference. On this point see Barry Allen, *Difference Unlimited*, in ed. Gary B. Madison, *Working through Derrida*, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1993, 5-27. See also Derrida's commentary on this issue in *Positions*, 27.

writing and speech. The Saussurian "psychic image", or "psychic imprint"¹⁹⁴ according to Derrida, traces the simultaneous division *and* juncture of the materially sounded word and its inner or psychic ideality. It therefore partakes in the liminal *interplay* between 'interiority' and 'exteriority', (and intelligibility and sensibility), which, in Derrida's view, founds and at the same time undermines conceptual oppositionality.

This duplicity of the trace is described thus: it first, Derrida contends, "...founds the metaphysical opposition between the sensible and the intelligible..."¹⁹⁵ In Derrida's schema, the trace prefigures all oppositions, insofar as it is the condition of oppositionality as difference, (and therefore of the possibility of meaning, since "without a trace...no difference would do its work and no meaning would appear").¹⁹⁶ However, critically for Derrida's anti-metaphysical polemic, this trace or difference, as Derrida contends elsewhere, at the same time renders "all the conceptual oppositions of metaphysics...[.]...non pertinent."¹⁹⁷ Difference, or the trace both *opposes* form and matter, the intelligible and the sensible, *and* "constitute[s] the pattern *uniting* form to all substance..."¹⁹⁸; it oscillates indeterminably between bifurcating and imbricating, differentiating and articulating, the intelligible and the sensible. Derrida rehearses the shimmering undecidability of difference with respect to philosophy's "founding opposition"¹⁹⁹ several times in these passages from *Grammatology* (remembering here, he is still explicating the prototypical trace he locates in the Saussurian psychic imprint). Difference is "not more sensible than intelligible", and, three pages later, "not more intelligible than sensible."²⁰⁰ The trace or difference is irreducible to either of the terms of this fundamental dualism, since, as Derrida contends elsewhere, it is both "the common root of all oppositional concepts that mark our language such as...intelligible/sensible [and] as a common root...also the element of the same...in

¹⁹⁴ Derrida notes that "the 'sound-image', the structured appearing [*l'apparaître*] of the sound, the 'sensory matter' *lived* and *informed* by difference, what Husserl would name the *hylè/morphé structure*...is called the 'psychic image' by Saussure." (QG, 63.) He also translates this structure as the "psychic imprint" (QG, 63) and the "thought sound" (QG, 31.) I discuss its relation to the *hylè/morphé* structure below.

¹⁹⁵ QG, 63.

¹⁹⁶ QG, 62.

¹⁹⁷ Positions, 29.

¹⁹⁸ QG, 60 (second emphasis added).

¹⁹⁹ SP, 133.

²⁰⁰ QG, 62, 65.

which these oppositions are announced."²⁰¹

But how, specifically, does this undecidably intelligible/sensible trace, this difference, correspond to the trace or difference that Derrida has adduced in Saussure's account of language? It does so insofar as Saussure's trace, according to Derrida, is the imprinting of *form* (the 'intelligible') on *matter* (the 'sensible'); or rather, and also, the *materialising of form*. Difference traces what Derrida identifies as a "double passage" through the formal and the material in the psychic imprint. He writes:

*How does the path that leads from Saussure to Hjelmslev²⁰² forbid us to avoid the originary trace? In that its passage through form is a passage through the imprint. And the meaning of difference in general would be more accessible to us if the unity of that double passage appeared more clearly.*²⁰³

Further, Derrida writes: "Difference is...the formation of form. But it is *on the other hand* the being-imprinted of the imprint."²⁰⁴ Like the Husserlian *hylè/morphé* structure, difference traverses both 'formless material' (*hylè*) and 'immaterial form' (*morphé*).²⁰⁵ The trace resists classification as either simply form or simply matter. It is both/and neither/nor either/or material/formal. Derrida quotes Maine de Biran, metaphorically evoking the complicity/duplicity of the equivocal passage that articulates sound and thought in the Saussurian trace: difference, the sound-image, or psychic imprint, he writes, is "wish sensibilised."²⁰⁶ As such, it is "in a certain 'unheard' sense"—in other words, even in the formal domain of subacoustic speech, the realm of the "wish"—"that speech is in the world", irreducibly intertwined with that which "metaphysics calls sensibility in general."²⁰⁷ It is the irresolvable interplay

²⁰¹ Positions, 9.

²⁰² The path from Saussure to Hjelmslev is the path from phonologism, the ontologising of voice, to formalism, insofar as Hjelmslev recognised the independence of language from substance.

²⁰³ OG, 62.

²⁰⁴ OG, 63.

²⁰⁵ Derrida adduces this structure in relation to his explication of the Saussurian trace: see OG, 63-64. Christopher McCann writes on *hylè* and *morphé*: "The complement of the concept of the *hylè*, or of formless material, is that of the *morphé*, or immaterial form. The *morphé* is...the phase of the hyletic data, which is, so to speak, animated by a meaning bestowing act. The *morphé* is formed matter in so far as this formation is referred back to that material bedrock of sensory experience out of which it arises and to which it is tied down." Four phenomenological philosophers, 32-33. For Derrida, there is a correspondence here with Saussure's sound-image or psychic imprint as the "psychological impression of a sound."

²⁰⁶ OG, 67.

²⁰⁷ OG, 67.

between the sensible and the intelligible, between matter and form, and between writing and speech, around which the neographic and theoretical novelty of Derrida's 'take' on difference will pivot.

These points are of immense strategic importance to Derrida. He presumes to be demolishing the foundations of metaphysics by at once imploding and exploding the very dualisms upon which onto-theology has stood. As the self-proclaimed "surpass[er] of metaphysics",²⁰⁸ his concern is to demonstrate the dependence of language and the very possibility of thought on the non-concept which is at once the "differing origin"²⁰⁹ of all diacriticity and the "common root"²¹⁰ of difference. But the salient point in these dense passages on Saussure for the current discussion is the relationship of this differance, this once-occulted trace which Derrida has uncovered at the core of phonologism, to the perhaps less grandiose question of sounding voice. Derrida is helpful here; he sets out unequivocally the dependence of the spoken word on differance: "The phonic element, the term, the plenitude that is called sensible, would not appear without the difference or opposition that gives them *form*."²¹¹ Differance therefore at once obviates the assertion of the incontrovertibly phonic essence or origin of language, as we have already seen. But differance is also, according to the terms of this argument, the very formal possibility of sounding voice, the "condition of [audible...phonic] plenitude";²¹² that without which "the phonic element, the plenitude that is called sensible would not appear."²¹³

Further, "the (pure) trace", differance, is in fact anterior to *both* speech and writing. As the condition of "the audible or visible, phonic or graphic", its possibility "is by rights anterior to all that one calls sign."²¹⁴ The *a priori* nature of differance, moreover, prefigures its ostensible modal *neutrality*: differance is no more related to sensible sound than to sensible image, to phonic than graphic signification, since it precedes both, and is the shared root of their differentiation. Thus, Derrida writes:

²⁰⁸ SP, 135.

²⁰⁹ SP, 141.

²¹⁰ Positions, 9.

²¹¹ OG, 62.

²¹² OG, 62.

²¹³ OG, 62.

²¹⁴ OG, 62.

"The trace is...anterior to the distinction between regions of sensibility."²¹⁵ Since difference is not sensibly differentiated in itself, Derrida putatively refuses, at this point, to privilege one of the major signifying sensory modalities over the other. Difference or the trace, he writes, is

not more sonorous than luminous...[]And as it is...anterior to sound as much as to light, is there a sense in establishing a 'natural' hierarchy between the sound-imprint, for example, and the visual (graphic) imprint? ²¹⁶

Clearly, Derrida thinks not. If there is no sense in such a hierarchisation, what then, is the yield of this modally neutral difference for sensibly sounded voice *vis-à-vis* writing? What of the relative status of the two orders of signification in the radical economy of difference?

We have seen, so far, that Derrida has assiduously warned that the plenitude of the sensible is vitiated by difference. We see above that Derrida's express intent is to insist on problematising the valorisation of sound/voice, *and* to avoid hierarchising the signifying modalities in such a way that writing would achieve primacy *vis-à-vis* voice or difference. We also noted above that Derrida protests that the trace—his newly radicalised 'writing'—is recuperable neither to the sensible generally, nor the colloquially graphic, and still less of course to any phonic substance. Difference rather makes possible speech and writing, and finally, meaning itself. Yet, insofar as Derrida wishes to rewrite 'writing' and speech anti-phoncentrically, the project of deconstruction will, it seems, be to the detriment of sounded voice. Let us revisit the passage where Derrida introduces the originary trace in the discussion of Saussure:

*How does the path that leads from Saussure to Hjelmslev forbid us to avoid the originary trace? In that its passage through form is a passage through the imprint...In both cases, one must begin from the possibility of neutralising the phonic substance.*²¹⁷

This would seem a rather unequivocal *cri de guerre* in a project which wants to avoid the subjugation of one term in a metaphysical opposition, a polemic which seeks to avoid establishing any "hierarchy" in regions of sensibility or signifying modalities:

²¹⁵ OG, 65.

²¹⁶ OG, 65.

²¹⁷ OG, 62 (last emphasis added).

the liquidation of voice speaks of a kind of teleological finality alien to Derrida's professed ends. Elsewhere, Derrida is careful also not to re-assert, against voice, the *graphie* as the potential key to the transformation of philosophical axiology. While "writing, the letter, the sensible inscription has always been considered by Western tradition as the body and matter external to the spirit and breath",²¹⁸ Derrida is cautious not to effect a simple reversal of the opposition. To do so would be to merely reinstate an undeconstructed metaphysical dualism. The project to refute the primacy of speech must, it seems at first, assiduously avoid the valorisation of the graphic, its elevation as a "fundamental principle". In *Positions*, Derrida writes:

*I have often insisted on the fact that 'writing' or the 'text' are not reducible either to the sensible or visible presence of the graphic or the 'literal'...the signifier 'matter' appears to me problematical only...[when] its reinscription cannot avoid making of it a new fundamental principle, which, by means of theoretical regression, would be reconstituted into a 'transcendental signified'.*²¹⁹

On the other hand, it seems that the reassertion of writing is precisely what Derrida seeks to effect through *differance*, and this at the expense of voice. He writes of the special fitness of the term *differance*, (and here he uses the term 'gram'), for the purpose to which he sets it, the defeat of phonocentrism and the freeing up of graphic substance:

*The advantage of this concept [the gram]—provided that it be surrounded by a certain interpretive context, for no more than any other conceptual element it does not signify, or suffice, by itself—is that in principle it neutralises the phonologistic propensity of the 'sign' and in fact counterbalances it by liberating the entire scientific field of the 'graphic substance'...which so far has been left in the shadows of neglect.*²²⁰

Differance will prove to be the key to the "liberation" of the graphic: while graphic difference is given its full force in Derrida's cardinal orthographic deformation—the difference between difference and *differance* is graphically notated in the form of the *a*—any sonorous difference obtaining in the substitution of an *a* for an *e* is effaced. The modal 'neutrality' of *differance*, the parity of writing and speech with respect to their

²¹⁸ *OG*, 35.

²¹⁹ *Positions*, 65.

²²⁰ *Positions*, 27 (emphasis added).

a posteriori relationship to difference, stops short at sound. Sound and image are not simply 'neutral' *vis-à-vis* each other or difference. Rather sound is *neutralised* to effect the emancipation of the *graphie*.²²¹

Derrida has claimed that difference is "not more sonorous than luminous". In fact it is apparently *less* sonorous than luminous (and perhaps *more* luminous than sonorous). Returning to the trace which introduces the correspondence of difference and difference we find that it is "the *unheard* difference between...the 'world' and 'lived experience' [which] is the condition of all other differences."²²² That this primordial difference is *subacoustic*, and yet is marked by the purely *graphic* legerdemain of an insonorous *a*, will constitute both the strategic brilliance and perhaps the tactical flaw of the campaign to annihilate the despotic voice and "surpass" metaphysics.

²²¹ I think the use of the term 'neutralise' is semantically telling here. Its definition is 'to render ineffective by opposing force or effect' (OED). It thus remains fully consistent with the metaphysics of opposition, of dualism, that Derrida is putatively in the process of deconstructing. (Incidentally, as Mark Krupnick points out, Derrida's account of his deconstructive project is "full of military metaphors". In the *Positions* interview with Jean-Louis Houdebine, Derrida "draws on words like intervention, force, surprise, violence. He says that deconstruction requires an 'incision', a kind of surgical strike." Mark Krupnick ed., *Displacement: Derrida and after*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983, 12.) Derrida himself maintains that his strategy involves a "phase of *overturning*" in which philosophical dualisms are inverted, *and*, critically, a corollary phase which involves "the irruptive emergence of a new 'concept' " which would be irrecoverable to "philosophical (binary) opposition." The overturning of the opposition speech/writing is intended to gesture towards the release of the "dissonance of writing within speech." *Positions*, 41-43. My Chapter Three attempts to assess the application of this strategy to the question of sounding voice, questioning to what extent Derrida does indeed move beyond the inversion/neutralisation phase of his project in relation to the binarism of speech/writing.

²²² *OG*, 65 (emphasis added).

Chapter Three

Differance de-voiced:
Derrida and the silence of the a

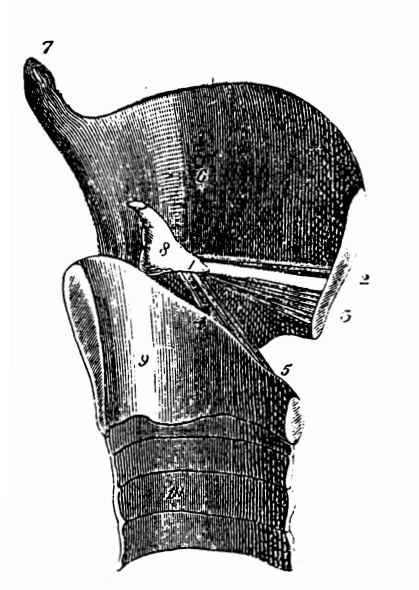


PLATE IX.

SIDE VIEW OF THE VOICEBOX, OR LARYNX, SHOWING
THE INTERIOR OF THE LEFT HALF.

- 1, 2, 3. SHIELD-PYRAMID MUSCLE (THYRO-ARYTENOIDEUS).
- 4, 5. RING-PYRAMID MUSCLE (CRICO-ARYTENOIDEUS).
- 6. SHIELD.
- 7. LEFT UPPER HORN.
- 8. PYRAMID.
- 9. RING.
- 10. WINDPIPE.

Figure 4

*When the voice trembles...it makes itself heard because the point of utterance is not fixed...pure differential vibration...the presence of plenitude without vibration, without difference seems to me to be at once the myth of metaphysics and of death..In lively, plural, differential pleasure, the other is called.*²²³

²²³ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Vox clamans in deserto*, in Notebooks in cultural analysis volume 3: special issue on voice, Durham: Duke University Press, 1986, 12, quoting Derrida, source not given.

3.1 Derridean differance: framing the question of silence

Why is the aphonia of the *a* of differance problematic, especially in terms of Derrida's own arguments? First, let us approach the question somewhat obliquely. The notion of spacing as it appears in Derrida's work clarifies some of the difficulties attending the silencing of voice in the aphonic *a* of differance, and sets in train the work of this chapter. The term connotes literally a connection with spatiality or space, with the "*outside*" of solipsistic, temporally-present monadic life in Husserl, and with the trace which modifies the interior "bond" between sound and thought in Saussure. Correlatively, since spacing, according to Derrida, calls upon the "world" and the "body", it seems potentially to connote a connection with the "worldly", "bodily", sensible voice—the sequestered "exterior" of Husserlian transcendentalism and of the phenomenological reduction effected by Saussure. At the same time, spacing retains its synergy with differance, the gram, the trace and the related themes of the Derridean project: Derrida often uses the terms interchangeably. For these reasons, I will use this trope as a kind of key to frame my concerns.

Derrida's focus in *Speech and Phenomena* and more broadly in his massive anti-phonocentric critique is on short-circuiting the solipsistic loop of silent auto-affection in phenomenology, and the primacy of voice in phono-logocentric linguistics.²²⁴ Sound as material substance, Derrida maintains, is a paradigmatic "exterior" that must be 'bracketed' in onto-theology: sound in acoustic space, and the 'body' of voice are reduced to a temporal instant of inner, diaphanous silence. Phenomenology, according to Derrida, relies absolutely on the *epoché* which reduces the world, the outside, space and sounding voice.²²⁵ In phonocentric linguistics *à la* Saussure, similarly, *phonè* is

²²⁴ Derrida writes, as we have noted, that "question[ing]...the privilege of voice" is his focus in *Speech and phenomena*. *Positions*, 5. In *Of grammatology*, Derrida elucidates his "final intention in [the] book" thus: "to make enigmatic what one thinks one understand by the words 'proximity', 'immediacy', 'presence'..." *OG*, 70. Since the phenomenological voice is the paradigm of presence, proximity and immediacy, (see *SP*, "voice simulates the conservation of presence", 15 and *passim*; and *OG*, "the voice...has a relationship of essential and immediate proximity to the mind", 11 and *passim*) its deconstruction is the key to the Derridean project encompassed by both *OG* and *SP*.

²²⁵ As we have seen, Derrida writes, introducing *SP*: "It is not in the sonorous substance or in the physical voice, in the body of speech in the world, that [Husserl] will recognise an original affinity with the logos in general, but in the voice phenomenologically taken, speech in its transcendental flesh, in the breath." *SP*, 16. The phenomenological voice is the monological voice—as Derrida has it, "the completely muted voice of the 'solitary mental life'." *SP*, 22. Further, Derrida writes, in respect of Husserl: "Between the phonic element (in the phenomenological sense and *not that of the real sound*) and expression, taken as the logical character of a signifier...*animated* in view of the ideal presence of a *Bedeutung*)...there must be a necessary bond." *SP*, 76 (first emphasis added). Derrida points out, as we have seen, that phenomenological certitude requires the reduction of space and the world. The phenomenological voice seems not to "fall outside me, outside my breath, at a visible distance." *SP*, 76. Rather, "The phenomenological voice would be th[e] spiritual flesh that continues

rendered as the "sound-image", a silent, non-sensuous bond between the purely phenomenal 'being-heard' of sound and thought, in a manner which mirrors the phenomenological reduction.²²⁶ Here, at the keystone of the phenomenological-metaphysical project, Derrida deploys spacing as difference.

Throughout *Speech and Phenomena*, and to a notable extent in *Grammatology*, it reads as if spacing is the key to the Derridean enterprise.²²⁷ Derrida seems to claim, *inter alia*, that his introduction into solitary mental life of difference as spacing "in which is rooted...space, the outside, the world, the body"²²⁸ disestablishes Husserlian solipsism by introducing all that comprises exteriority into the transparent sphere of "ownness", thereby corrupting the latter. Appearing also as temporalisation and the trace, spacing turns on the structure of the relationship between, and the imbrication of, the "interiority" of subjectivity and the "outside", the monadic sphere and the world, pure intellection and the corporeal. Thus, as we saw in relation to Husserl:

*In...pure difference is rooted the possibility of everything we think we can exclude from auto-affection: space, the outside, the world, the body, etc...[...][This] trace is the intimate relation of the living present with its outside, the openness upon exteriority in general, upon the sphere of what is not 'one's own'...a spacing."*²²⁹

Similarly, in the *Grammatology*, the almost literal appeal to spacing as the "outside", the "world" and "spatiality"—the manifold of terms which will problematise inner voice—is again explicitly entertained. Spacing is the trope which *undermines* the

to speak and be present to itself—to *hear itself*—in the absence of the world." *ibid.*, 16. And further, Derrida argues that the phenomenological/phonocentric project in its essence, which it is the business of spacing to expose and deconstruct, (here referring to Husserlian expression as self-affecting presence of inner voice), consists in the *reduction* of the outside or exterior which is opened by spacing: "meaning would isolate the concentrated purity of its *expressiveness* just at the moment when the relation to a certain *outside* is suspended." *SP*, 22. And similarly "...the essence of intentional consciousness will only be revealed...in the reduction of the totality of the existing world in general." *ibid.*

²²⁶ Derrida points out, as we saw above, that Saussure decisively reduces sounding voice: "The sound-image is what is *heard*; not the sound heard, but the being-heard of the sound. Being-heard is structurally phenomenal and *belongs to an order radically dissimilar to that of the real sound in the world*. One can only divide this subtle but absolutely decisive heterogeneity by a phenomenological reduction. The latter is therefore indispensable to all analyses of being heard, whether they be inspired by linguistic...or other preoccupations." *QG*, 63 (second emphasis added).

²²⁷ On this point see *SP*, 86-87 and *passim*.

²²⁸ *SP*, 82.

²²⁹ *SP*, 82, 86 (emphases added).

suspension of worldly signification—that is, the bracketing of audible speech and writing—which is putatively effected in solipsism. Derrida:

*Hearing oneself speak, auto-affection...seems to suspend all borrowing of signifiers from the world and thus to render itself universal and transparent to the signified, the phonè...[...][However the] voice...is always already invested, undone...marked in its essence with a certain spatiality.*²³⁰

And in relation to Saussure, writing (or "arche-writing") is the spacing-as-openness-on-the-outside which will precede the possibility of all signification, thereby disestablishing the originality and privilege of voice, yet simultaneously making possible speech. Thus:

*Arche-writing, at first the possibility of the spoken word...this trace is the opening of the first exteriority in general, the enigmatic relationship of the living to its other and of an inside to an outside: spacing.*²³¹

Yet exactly what might this abstruse notion of a "certain spatiality" or spacing as writing, or "exteriority in general" mean with respect to the transformation of the phenomenological voice, this silent guarantor of ipseity?

According to a number of commentators, spacing founds space. Rodolphe Gasché has it that for Derrida, spacing represents the constitutional possibility of spatialisation, the opening of all entities to being "befallen" by space in the colloquial sense. According to Gasché "spacing renders possible spatiality and space in the common sense....Since spatialisation—being befallen by space—is a possibility to which any entity is subject, this possibility must be inscribed within that entity."²³² Spatiality on

²³⁰ *OG*, 289-290.

²³¹ *OG*, 70. There are numerous further references in Derrida's early *oeuvre* to spacing as that which introduces exteriority into the interior: in *OG*, spacing is that without which "the outside, 'spatial', and 'objective' exteriority which we believe we know as the most familiar thing in the world, as familiarity itself, would not appear." *OG*, 70-71. Spacing, or the movement of temporalisation, necessarily implies the irruption of the worldly into the monological sphere: "As soon as we admit spacing both as 'interval' and difference and as openness upon the outside, there can no longer be any absolute inside, for the 'outside' has insinuated itself into the movement by which the inside of the nonspatial...appears...The going-forth 'into the world' is also primordially implied in the movement of temporalisation." *SP*, 86.

²³² *Tain*, 199. On this point, Herman Rapaport also reads spacing as quite literally opening up space. Spacing is "The space [which] is essential in order that relations of being, time and language can be articulated, disclosed." *Heidegger and Derrida: reflections on time and language*, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1989, 61. John Llewelyn lends an active sense to the theme, again showing the role of spacing in the production of space: "spacing, *espacement*, is the "pro-duc-ing of space." John Llewelyn, *Derrida on the threshold of sense*, New York: St Martins Press, 1986, 41.

the interior is, then, *a priori* necessary for the opening out into exterior space, or the hollowing out of interiority which would introduce the interval and the world into the solipsistic temporality of the interior. Spacing 'inhabits' interiority as an exterior/outside; it is the difference which corrupts the possibility of self-identity. The notion of spacing as spatiality is, then, in one sense, constitutionally interior in that it is intrinsic to the soliloquising subject and to subjectivity. It is the very inwardness of this spatiality, this worldliness, and its originary inherence in the 'interiority' of consciousness (Derrida: "the...world is...*primordially* implied in the movement of temporalisation"²³³) which radically interrupts self-identity. But on the other hand, spacing, as the interior diastema, divides the self-presence of the mutely self-affecting subject only insofar as it is also an openness upon the *outside*, a relation to alterity—an alterity figured as *spatial*, *worldly* and *corporeal* by Derrida—which always already subsists and cleaves an externally oriented passage 'within' the entity.

Yet in the conceptualisation of differance as spacing in the Derridean schema, there is an apparent suppression of "worldly", "corporeal" phenomena such as the sonorous voice: this is theme that I intend to develop. Derrida himself appears to "suspend[] the borrowing of the [voiced] signifier from the world". In so doing, he does not, I will argue below, account satisfactorily for the potential consequences of spacing *vis-à-vis* the very problem he himself has raised of the (phenomenological) 'essence' of voice as apogee of onto-theology—voice's reliance on silence, its interiority, its diaphaneity, its disembodiment, its non-spatiality, its universality, its 'opposition' to writing; these features' relation to ipseity. Rather, in "liberating" the graphic to overcome the *phonè*, and in invoking spacing and differance against the phenomenological voice, Derrida seems to systematically silence the hyletic, mundane, 'exterior' aspects of voice, including the sonancy of the *body* of speech which ineluctably accompanies the meaning-conferring aspects of spoken language. In impugning the excision of the "worldly" and the "body" from Husserlian expression and from the Saussurian "phenomenological" reduction, Derrida paradoxically appears to effect an annihilation of sounding voice which renders the de-voiced subject immaterial and mute.

The anti-phonocentric project, in exposing the role of voice as axiological in metaphysics, is therefore perhaps double edged: on the one hand, Derrida's deconstruction of phonocentrism seems to present a number of transformative possibilities for the thinking of voice, approaches incompatible with those

²³³ SP, 86 (emphasis added).

overdetermined by voice's ostensibly inalienable intimacy with monological life. On the other hand, as I will argue below, since Derridean silence preserves the insonority which grounds the *cogito*, and seems to excise or reduce 'extraneous' sound and bodily noise, the spacing which opens the monological realm to the "outside" is perhaps more of an opening of the monad into or *within* itself than a passage out into the "world". Derrida's cardinal deconstructive gesture seems to remain, in a sense which I will attempt in this chapter to elucidate through drawing on various critiques, paradoxically 'closed' and somewhat solipsistic.

These difficulties compel questions such as the following: If interior speech suspends the "world" as the "outside", why does its deconstruction *qua* spacing and differance apparently proscribe the worldly, sonorous, material elements of voice upon whose exclusion the monologue's purity depended? Might not the introduction of the excluded 'exterior' into the silent sphere of transparent self-affection, or that of the sound-image, engage in some way with this exterior, material, non-ideal "outside"? If differance as spacing "renders possible spatiality and space in the common sense" (Gasché) and therefore, Derrida suggests, the "body", the "world", that is, the *sensible*, (indeed, all that is extrinsic to the inner sphere of temporality *qua* consciousness) how is it that this spacing seems to rely on the reduction of sensibly sounding, embodied voice in space? Simply put, does one not hear oneself coughing as well as "hear-and-understand-oneself-speak[ing]"? Isn't our speaking *interrupted* by our coughing? Doesn't this introduce ("worldly", "bodily") sound into the monologue? It seems to me that the *cogito* would have trouble in idealising a contemplative moment interrupted by a cough.

My intention here is not to dispute Derrida's formulation of spacing and differance *per se*—but rather to attempt to confront the question of *voicing vis-à-vis* spacing and differance. These latter themes seem at once to prise the stronghold of monological silence and phono-logocentric privilege open, and slam it shut, against the voice's resonance. This is the polemical trajectory that I wish to pursue *vis-à-vis* Derrida: just as spacing does not seem to introduce sounding voice into phenomenological silence, so does the term differance rely utterly on the *silence* of the literal permutation of the a—an absolute suppression of sound. The trope of mute inscription will be deployed as a kind of distillate, symptom or cipher of Derridean sonophobia, and the notion of spacing will be cited to argue for a sonorising of Derridean *écriture*.

This chapter, then, involves a shift in focus. I will move beyond the contours of Derrida's own lucubrations on the issue of voice to pose the question of voice in

metaphysics rather differently—that is, in relation to Derrida himself. Why is it that Derrida renders the *a* of difference silent, unvoiced? And to what extent does this gesture—the development of a cardinal trope of *mute* inscription—evinced Derrida's complicity with the tradition he seeks to deconstruct? It is necessary to begin by briefly tracing Derrida's own deliberations on his silent orthograph. It then becomes possible to juxtapose Derrida's claims around writing, difference and voice with the insonorous legerdemain of the silent *a*, in an attempt to point to the somewhat paradoxical suppression of voice in the critiques which comprise *Speech and Phenomena* and *Of Grammatology*.

3.2 The *a* of difference: Derrida's exposition

Phonic essentialism is the primary target of deconstruction: the attribution of ontological primacy to the vocal medium, the *principium* of the discourse of philosophy since Plato, must be vigilantly contested. Derrida's radicalised notion of difference—difference—is the term which will actively play out the most stringent reduction of sound.²³⁴ Drawing on a graphic trope to contest "phonic...plenitude", Derrida swaps an *e* for an *a* and invents this neologism, at the same time differentiating his term from the notions of difference deployed by Saussure and others.²³⁵ The term sounds (in the

²³⁴ There are any number of potential paths through this term which, Derrida claims "encompasses and irrevocably surpasses onto-theology or philosophy" (SP, 135) as well as innumerable commentaries on it. I will confine myself here to aspects relating to my interest in the question of voice and writing *vis-à-vis* the silence of the orthographic intervention—the *a*—as a stratagem against phonocentrism. Some of the important claims that Derrida makes about difference, which I do not discuss in detail, should however be noted here. First, Derrida claims that the *a* of difference marks its originality with respect to all differences: "With its *a*, difference...refers to what in classical language would be called the origin or production of differences and the differences between differences, the play of differences." SP, 130. But difference is also an *arche* which is not one. It is, Derrida contends "a protowriting without a present origin..." SP 146. Difference, therefore, is not primordial in the classical sense: it is not, Derrida insists, a plenary origin existing before the play of differences, with respect to which differences would be secondary, contingent, supervenient and derivative. Rather, difference's primordially is itself marked by the play of differing: it is "the differing origin of differences". SP, 141. Second, difference traces the originary inseparability though non-identity of opposed categories—it is the "common, although entirely differant, root" (SP, 129) of speech and writing and all corollary distinctions. Since difference is provisionally the name for the "*sameness* which is not *identical*" (SP, 129) it appeals to and abrogates all foundational metaphysical oppositions, including those between identity and difference, and presence and absence, as it "surpasses" onto-theology. Derrida: "[Difference] belongs to no category of being, present or absent...What is thus denoted as difference is not theological, not even in the most negative order of negative theology." (SP, 134). Elsewhere, Derrida elaborates further on the role of the "undecidable", the ensemble of terms around difference, in dismantling philosophical dichotomies: "Undecidables...can no longer be included within philosophical (binary) opposition, but...inhabit philosophical opposition resisting and disorganising it...The *gram* [difference] is neither a signifier nor a signified, neither a sign nor a thing, neither a presence nor an absence, neither a position nor a negation. Neither/nor, that is, *simultaneously* either *or*..." (Positions, 43). We will see below that Derrida contends that difference disorganises the conventional disjunction between speech and writing.

²³⁵ Derrida conceptual debts *vis-à-vis* his neographism are crystallised in the essay *Difference*. Here he acknowledges Freud, Levinas, Nietzsche, Heidegger and Saussure as predecessors in the development of difference. SP, 153. The essay commences with a roll call of generative moments for

original French) the same as difference; the two terms' non-identity is rendered visibly, yet remains subacoustic. What then, is the conceptual field which this mark of lexical heterogeneity describes?

It is the undecidably spatio-temporal dimension of differance (its differ/deferring) which organises one of Derrida's first direct references to the *a* in the essay *Differance*. He initially explains his idiosyncratic "infracion"²³⁶ in these terms: "...the silent writing of its *a*...has the desired advantage of referring to differing, *both* as spacing/temporalising and as the movement that structures every dissociation."²³⁷ Derrida points here to the double connotation of the term. Differance is duplicitous insofar as the graphic permutation is intended to signal the dual senses of the French '*differer*'. In the first sense, differance means conventional (Saussurian) difference, discernibility, distinction or dissociation—in French, a spatially connoted term. In the second sense it invokes the temporal delay, the spacing/temporalising that interminably adjourns (presence, meaning, sensible plenitude).²³⁸ The temporalising and irrecoverable deferral of phonic plenitude is marked by the *silent a*, by the muteness of the difference between the *a* and the *e* which *puts off* vocal plenitude *ad infinitum*. The *writing* of the *a* (as opposed to the *e*) signals the movement of difference as "dissociation"—the distinctness or discernibility between elements in language whose 'primacy' is transposed from (what in Greco-western philosophy has been) its phonocentric touchstone (that is, voice/speech) onto the graphic trace.

An object of Derrida's exercise is clearly to render *indifferent* the acoustic

differance: "In [differance] we shall see the juncture of...the difference of forces in Nietzsche, Saussure's principal of semiological difference, difference as the possibility of neurone facilitation, impression and delayed effect in Freud, difference as the irreducibility of the trace of the other in Levinas, and the ontic-ontological difference in Heidegger." *SP*, 130. In *Of Grammatology*, the influences of Freud, Nietzsche (and again Levinas) also figure. He writes of Nietzsche and Freud: "The deconstruction of presence accomplishes itself through the deconstruction of consciousness and therefore through the irreducible notion of the trace as it appears in both Nietzschean and Freudian discourse." *QG*, 70. Also see Spivak's introduction to *QG* for further commentary on the influence of Nietzsche, Freud, Heidegger and Husserl on Derridean deconstruction, *ibid.*, xxi - liv.

²³⁶ *SP*, 131.

²³⁷ *SP*, 129-130.

²³⁸ *SP*, 129-30. As Derrida puts it most succinctly in *OG*: "Differance is an economic concept designating the production of differing/deferring." *QG*, 23. Irene Harvey comments that the *ance* ending of differance points to the differing dimension of its play: "Differance is a composite term made up of...two proper words: to differ and to defer...and together for Derrida they form differance (the ending being better translated as *differing* in English.)" Harvey also notes, however, that the "essential impropriety of 'differance' is lost in English since 'differing' is a quite appropriately recognised official word." Irene Harvey, *Derrida and the economy of differance*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986, 210 (hereafter *Derrida and the economy of differance*).

dimension of the two terms (difference and differance) while retaining difference at the graphic level. The collapsing of phonic difference tacitly locates the term in a space 'prior' to the regime of phonological differentiation which both founds Saussurian difference—an acknowledged precursor to Derridean differance—and condemns it to an untenable phonocentrism. Derrida has argued that Saussure's commitment to the voice over writing is intimately interconnected to the phonological bent in linguistics, the localisation of the distinctions and differences which structure language in the *image-acoustique*, that is, in sound—albeit in the sound in the head.²³⁹ Insofar as Derrida's aim is to refuse to accede to the primacy accorded phonological differentiation, and indeed to the privilege of the voice, the latter is provisionally erased. The obliteration of phonic difference is tactical.

Differance can therefore be read as a strategic enactment of resistance to the paramountcy of spoken word or voice over writing. Since the diacriticity of the term in relation to its nonidentical doppelgänger depends solely on the visible, graphemic transformation which tacitly indicates the nonpresence of e and points to the difference between a and e, the neographism could also be said to serve to reassert the materiality of the graphic, "worldly" sign over the ostensible conceptuality or proximity to mind of the voice. In foregrounding writing, differance enacts a tactical reversal of hierarchical, binary opposition—in this case, spoken word/writing—the initial move of the classical operation of Derridean deconstruction.

Indeed, this is the kind of reading—one which highlights the role of differance as a cipher which refuses the hierarchisation of speech over script—that many commentators have produced in relation to the term. Geoffrey Bennington writes, for example, that "[differance] is a witticism of Derrida's: in French, the difference between difference and differance is only marked in writing, which thus takes a certain revenge on speech by obliging it to take its own written trace as its reference."²⁴⁰ Or as Robert Magliola writes, the writing of the a enacts a "side skirmish" against the "naturalness of sense-sound pairing."²⁴¹ Similarly, for Jonathon Culler, "Derrida's

²³⁹ Derrida writes: "The deliberate and systematic phonological orientation of linguistics...carries out an intention which was originally Saussure's..." *OG*, 29. On this point see also Christopher Norris, *Derrida*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987, 90: Here, he points out that Derrida attacks the Saussurian "prejudice" that posits phonology as the most authoritative model for a science of linguistics insofar as it is at the phonological level that "one can point to the crucial distinctions at the level of the signifier (as between 'cat' and 'bat' or 'cat' and 'can') which articulate the whole complex network of meanings in a given language."

²⁴⁰ Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida, *Jacques Derrida*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993, 70.

²⁴¹ Robert Magliola, *Derrida on the mend*, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 1984, 22 (hereafter *Derrida on the mend*).

silent deformation of the term [différance]...show[s] that writing cannot be seen as simply the representation of speech."²⁴²

But what does Derrida himself have to say specifically on the *a* of *différance vis-à-vis* voice and writing? The question of the mute, graphic permutation occupies Derrida for the first few pages of the essay of the same name. Derrida writes:

*The graphic difference (the a instead of the e), this marked difference between two apparently vocalic notations, between vowels, remains purely graphic: it is written or read, but it is not heard. It cannot be heard...It is put forward by a silent mark, by a tacit monument, or one might even say, by a pyramid—keeping in mind not only the capital form of the printed letter but also that passage from Hegel's Encyclopaedia where he compares the body of the sign to an Egyptian pyramid. The a of différence, therefore, is not heard; it remains silent, secret and discreet, like a tomb...It is a tomb that cannot even be made to resonate.*²⁴³

In this reading, the pyramid, like the "worldly" sign, is inert matter that houses a foreign soul, just as the signifier 'cloaks' the signified, and the body houses the spirit. It is the 'soma' of the 'sema'. As the 'other' of the "life" of spirit, it is also the sign of death. And the pyramid bears inscriptions—hieroglyphs—which Hegel reproaches, insofar as they sever the relation to animating breath, to the "spirit" of voice; they are symbols which cannot be fully reunited with the "life" of sonorous substance or ideal meaning since they are imperfectly phonetic and fully polysemous. The pyramid, in Derrida's reading, holds the powers of self-present speech in reserve, irrevocably.²⁴⁴

Like a hieroglyph, *différance* sunders the comfortable union of the graphic and

²⁴² Jonathon Culler, *On deconstruction: theory and practice after structuralism*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1993, 97. Many other writers have also remarked on this aspect of *différance*. See for example, Peggy Kamuf: "The difference between *différence* and *différance* is silent. Because it cannot be differentiated in speech, the work of this difference is only graphic; the *a* of *différance* marks the difference of writing within and before speech." *A Derrida reader: between the blinds*, ed. Peggy Kamuf, Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991, 59. Spivak in the preface to *OG* remarks: "Since the difference between 'difference' and 'différance' is inaudible, this 'neographism' reminds us of the importance of writing as a structure." *OG*, xliii. Rodolphe Gasché writes: "In...this unusual noun...the *a* substituted for the *e* remains purely graphic. [S]ince the difference between the two vowels cannot be heard...it is a difference that depends on the mute intervention of a written trace, and thus a trace that ties *différance* in with the functioning of the *arche-trace*." *Tain*, 195. The *arche-trace*, Gasché remarks earlier, is the space of "the necessary possibility of inscription." *Tain*, 188.

²⁴³ *SP*, 132.

²⁴⁴ On this reading see Derrida's discussion of Hegel on the pyramid and the hieroglyph in *The pit and the pyramid*, in *MP*, 69-108.

phonic in phonetic writing. It introduces a divergence within phonemic/graphemic convergence, pointing tellingly to perhaps one of Derrida's key intentions in fabricating the term: to invoke in order to deconstruct, to show up by short-circuiting, the western obsession with phonetic writing which he has indefatigably critiqued in *Grammatology* and elsewhere. (Derrida writes of the inseparability of the broader question of writing and the graphic gesture of the *a* of difference: "The graphic intervention was conceived in the writing up of a question about writing."²⁴⁵) The *a* is the progeny of Derrida's polemic on writing against voice: its inaudibility is therefore apparently pivotal in his enterprise, since, as we have seen, Derrida has persistently worked to disestablish the notion that there are purely phonetic and purely nonphonetic systems of writing. By making the *a* inaudible, he carves out a mute space, a 'graphic' space, which symbolises the nonphonetic gap that forms the matrix for, precedes and conditions audibility in all language. This, he contends, is the silence-as-difference which allows phonemes to sound, the non-phonetic which is the compossible 'ground' for the phonetic, and the cipher which also serves as a cue to the impossibility of purely phonetic writing. Thus:

*[The] pyramidal silence of the graphic difference between the a and the e can function only within the system of phonetic writing...But...this silence...reminds us in a very opportune way that...there is no phonetic writing. What is called phonetic writing can only function...by incorporating nonphonetic 'signs' (punctuation, spacing etc)...Saussure had only to remind us that the play of difference was the functional condition, the condition of possibility, for every sign; and it is itself silent. The difference between two phonemes, which enables them to exist and to operate, is inaudible. The inaudible opens the two present phonemes to hearing as they present themselves. If, then, there is no purely phonetic writing, it is because there is no purely phonetic phone. The difference that brings out phonemes and lets them be heard and understood [entendre] itself remains inaudible.*²⁴⁶

Difference, moreover, is apparently not simply inaudible. Derrida claims, a page after he had asserted that "the graphic difference...remains purely graphic", and that "it is written or read",²⁴⁷ that the graphic difference of difference is in fact invisible.

²⁴⁵ *SP*, 132.

²⁴⁶ *SP* 133. Derrida refers again later in the essay to the pyramid: "[Difference]...is never presented as such. In presenting itself, it becomes effaced; in being sounded, it dies away, like the writing of the *a*, inscribing its pyramid in difference." *SP*, 154.

²⁴⁷ *SP*, 132.

Derrida writes:

*It will perhaps be objected that...the graphic difference itself sinks into darkness, that it never constitutes the fullness of a sensible term, but draws out an invisible connection, the mark of an inapparent relation between two spectacles.*²⁴⁸

I comment on this perhaps inopportune invocation of invisibility below.²⁴⁹ But, for the moment, Derrida concludes the first section of his disquisition on difference by focusing once again on the question of the relation of voice to writing. The (putative) elision of the visible and that of the audible evinces that sensible substance can no longer be the phonologistic basis for language. However, Derrida argues, neither can conceptuality organise the field of difference. Rather, difference takes place between the sensuous and the conceptual, and between writing and speech. Difference, as the "common, although entirely different, root" of all distinctions, founds and at once *confounds* the conventional dichotomy between script and speech, and the sensual and the noetic:

*Since...the difference between the e and the a marked in 'difference' eludes vision and hearing, this happily suggests that we must here let ourselves be referred to an order that no longer refers to sensibility. But we are not referred to intelligibility either...We must be referred to an order, then, that resists philosophy's founding opposition between the sensible and the intelligible. The order that resists this opposition, that resists it because it sustains it, is designated in a movement of difference (with an a) between two differences or between two letters. This difference belongs neither to the voice nor to writing in the ordinary sense, and it takes place...between speech and writing and beyond the tranquil familiarity that binds us to one and to the other, reassuring us sometimes in the illusion that they are two separate things.*²⁵⁰

How is it, it may be asked, that this "between" of speech and writing is intractably *unspoken*, and wholly written; is a formal device that elides absolutely the sensuousness of voice in its inextricability with script, and remains purely inscriptional? This problem is my focus below. For the moment, let us see what other

²⁴⁸ SP, 133. Derrida had already suggested in *OG* that: "The graphic image is not seen...The difference in the body of the inscription is also invisible." OG, 65.

²⁴⁹ See Postface, Instead of a conclusion: Derrida vision, silence; below.

²⁵⁰ SP, 133-4.

commentators have had to say on the relativity of vision and hearing, and text and voice, in difference.²⁵¹

3.3 Graphic shadow /acoustic lack: Derrida's interpreters

How to interpret this difference, this "silent token I must give"²⁵² in order to speak? According to a number of writers, the purely orthographic change in difference, the silent "spelling mistake",²⁵³ itself draws attention to the absent acoustic difference between the terms difference and difference. It resonates (despite Derrida's protestations?) in the process of its effacement. John McCumber contends, for example, that the erasure of different sounding serves to heighten the undecidability of auditory distinctions as it problematises the nature of distinction or opposition itself. Derrida's ploy, he holds, foregrounds the acoustic dimension of difference through the very obvious absence of an unequivocal phonic distinction between the (unsounded) a and the (sonant) e. Thus:

*The replacement of e in the French différence by a...is not simply an orthographic change, for...the two words are pronounced exactly alike in French: the difference between e and a is in that perspective no difference. Derrida's gesture rather points to a place where a and e do not differ, where their distinction is questionable, where the line between them cannot be drawn but cannot simply be erased either. The questioning of the distinction between e and a is thus conducted, not from the visual realm, but from the auditory: as inscriptions the two letters remain distinct, and it is from the aural point of view that we are invited to question that distinction.*²⁵⁴

Garrett Stewart agrees that a chimerical graphic/phonic difference subsists in the strange space of difference. This difference is encrypted at what Stewart considers the "emptied" though latently sounding nucleus of the sign:

²⁵¹ This is of course, a vast literature of commentary on Derridean difference. I confine myself here to a number of the very much smaller pool of commentaries which have developed specifically the silence of the a in difference *vis-à-vis* the question of voice. Below, I note other commentaries which have addressed more generally questions of voice and script opened by the Derridean project.

²⁵² *SP*, 146.

²⁵³ *SP*, 131.

²⁵⁴ John McCumber, *Derrida and the closure of vision*, in *Modernity and the hegemony of vision*, ed. David Michael Levin, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, 241 (hereafter, *The closure of vision*).

Coined....to cover those two simultaneous differential chains that are mutually activated in language, the phonemic and the graphemic, the term différance enacts the formal interchange [between speech and writing]...Contrived, therefore, to illustrate the fact that written characters...have no inalienable bond to sound, still, the coinage derives its effect from our tracing an apparent (alphabetically marked) difference back to its emptied vocal centre. Its whole force as a pun, as reading effect, thus depends on invoking (evocalising) the phonemic determinants of language—if only in deferral and under erasure.²⁵⁵

According to these arguments, the graphically marked nonpresence (or "erasure") of acoustic difference invites attention to aurality. This absence of sound, for Stewart and McCumber, is itself an index of a potential though elided phonic differential: it operates, on the one hand, as a 'virtually' reverberant trace, inviting "questions" about phonological distinction, adverting to the "vocal centre" of the trope. But how reverberant is this difference? On the other hand, the quasi-audibility which these writers identify is open to repression in favour of the glaring visual primacy of the term. This tendency appears in the argument that Robert Magliola adduces on difference. For Magliola, the unheard a, the "lack" constituting the a's inaudibility, is a penumbra—a kind of "shadow"—around the unnameable, vocally "lost" difference between the a and the e. Magliola writes:

The graphic notation [of difference] possesses a strange status; it cannot in and of itself be heard...The a which is 'lost' in the vocalisation becomes a shadow, if you will, of all differences. That is to say, the difference between graphic e and a...cannot be heard; this lack is a shadow of the difference...between graphic e and a...a difference which cannot be named.²⁵⁶

Hence, while for Stewart (and for McCumber), the emptied vocal centre still in a sense repercusses in difference's weird locus, for Magliola, the elision of vocal difference becomes a silent adumbration indexically marked by the a. This tendency to literalise and de-sonorise the trope, suppressing the already elided acoustic locus (in the manner in which, for Magliola, the unheard is metaphorised as a visual presence and an acoustic "lack") is what concerns Stewart about Derridean difference. Stewart

²⁵⁵ Garrett Stewart, *Reading voices: literature and the phonotext*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990, 105 (hereafter *Reading voices*).

²⁵⁶ *Derrida on the mend*, 22

goes on to argue that the deferral and (liminal?) erasure of sounding effected in difference, which also plays itself out more broadly in the deconstructive project, is problematic.

Stewart is primarily concerned with written textuality, and with what he sees as the suppression, in the economy of difference, of the acoustic/phonemic aspects of reading as a form of textual production. Insofar as Derridean deconstruction conceptualises language in, he contends, textual/visual rather than oral/acoustic terms—as *arche-writing*, symbolised by the *graphemic* presentation of the *a* of difference—it suppresses the acoustic dimensions of the read text. Thus:

In the sense that...deconstruction is taken to reconceive language in a graphic rather than oral image of itself [as a tracery of signs, a differential notation] it must be admitted that grammatology leaves out a theory of textuality as a reading effect.[...]What the principal meaning of différance itself defers, often deters, from consideration is the role of the phoneme in that uncertainly fissured and fused stream of signification which is the read text.²⁵⁷

According to Stewart, voice as a kind of aberrant audibility or potential "speakability" accompanies text, not as the possibility of uniting text and word in plenary meaning, but conversely, as the necessary abrogation of the self-evident meaning putatively intrinsic to voice.²⁵⁸ Stewart contends that if, as Derrida argues against Saussure, the spoken word alone does not constitute the "linguistic object", still, Derrida's theory of difference does little to elucidate the *interplay* of writing and voice which (Stewart argues, and elsewhere Derrida affirms) comprises textuality. In Stewart's account, the restitution of the phonemic, phonotextual aspects of text/writing as ("evocalised") "text production" would serve not to reinforce, but to problematise notions of presence accompanying the *phonè*. He writes:

To include...considerations of speech in textual reception would...reinscribe the phonemic stratum. It would be returned not as a dimension of full presence, never more than the mere trace of speech in writing...A close reading of Derrida's difference...thus leads not so much to the confirmation of his theories as to the source of the original confusion they are meant to reduce. To understand textuality

²⁵⁷ *Reading voices*, 104-106 (emphasis added).

²⁵⁸ See on this point *Reading voices*, 106.

as text production, in other words, is to isolate the phonocentric temptation.²⁵⁹

Textuality for Stewart involves a tension, a "graphonic" interplay, between text and speech, such that the restoration of voice is always undermined by the insistence of text, which itself is evocalised as the differential trace of speech. Neither speech nor text are ascendant; both, rather, engage in an equivocal phonemic-graphemic slippage:

*The textual object, produced as read, is exactly 'defined by the combination of the written word and the spoken [that is, speakable] word'...Their bond is a never stabilised compact, the shakiness of its terms being exposed when the usual maintenance by suppression it involves—by which all sense of the spoken is subordinated and contained by script—is suddenly abrogated in the act of reading. The scriptive warranty of lexical autonomy may then frequently be breached, words rent by jostling divergences, syntax itself unravelled in the slippage of difference.*²⁶⁰

Such an argument, however, can slip easily into an approach that would seek to grant voice its primacy over text, and restore that opposition which Derrida locates at the heart of philosophy between voice as presence and text as its supervenient and nefarious other. Donald Wesling, for example, in seeking to combine the putatively complementary insights of Derrida and Walter J. Ong, argues, on the one hand: "What needed to be destroyed...[in literary theory] was the idea of original orality, and we must be grateful to Derrida for [that]."²⁶¹ On the other hand, Wesling seems to suggest that Derridean differance presages a possible 'merging' of *phonie* and *graphie* which would seem to favour a reactivation of "full" voice encrypted in writing. In text, Wesling argues after Ong, there persists the "irreducibility of the spoken word and of sound itself."²⁶² Hence, while Wesling finds "[Derrida's] denunciation of presence [as voice] persuasive", he also finds Ong's valorisation of presence (as the irreducible vocal origin of text) "equally persuasive" and argues also for "a certain play between text and speech"²⁶³; in this instance, a "play" which would seemingly restore a plenary, ordinary, "irreducible" and "present" voice to writing.

²⁵⁹ Reading voices, 104-105.

²⁶⁰ Reading voices, 106.

²⁶¹ Donald Wesling, *Difficulties of the bardic*, Critical Inquiry, Autumn, 1981, 77 (hereafter Difficulties of the bardic).

²⁶² Difficulties of the bardic, 77.

²⁶³ Difficulties of the bardic, 78.

Here Wesling has both identified and perhaps obscured the founding premises of Derrida's anti-phonocentrism. Derrida does indeed seek to radicalise the intra-philosophical dichotomy between speech and text which deludes us into believing that they are "two separate things." But Derrida also wishes to *problematise* that very metaphysical distinction which has it that voice and text are opposed (and conjoined) as, respectively, presence and absence. Further, Derrida has on the other hand (albeit provisionally) sought to *sever* voice from script for this reason: to show that the economic play of differing and deferral in *differance* conditions both speech and script. This play never settles into a restoration of the Ongian "irreducibility of spoken word and sound" as a "valorisation of presence." Voice, understood in Wesling's terms as the name for the "resistance" to the "separation of medium [voice] and meaning [*logos*]",²⁶⁴ reproduces precisely the phonocentric axiology which is the object of Derrida's critique.²⁶⁵

Differance, according to Derrida, is an irreducibly duplicitous ensemble: on the one hand, it is Derrida's intention to silence voice—including acoustical difference in the writing of *differance*—precisely because he wants to irreparably breach the overdetermined intra-metaphysical nexus between "medium" (voice) and "meaning"; and, correlatively between *phonè* and text in phonetic writing. From a Derridean point of view, any unproblematised restitution of "full" speech or voice to text would too readily replay a paradigmatic instance of phonologocentrism: voice would too easily once again become origin, text merely transcribed voice, encrypted speech, available to

²⁶⁴ *Difficulties of the bardic*, 76.

²⁶⁵ I think it is rather inopportune to attempt to marry the insights of Derrida and Ong, since Ong's polemic insists on maintaining the absolute originality of voice in its relationship to self-presence, and the secondarity of writing. See on this point Ong's argument that "One cannot have a voice without presence...And voice...being the paradigm of all sound for man, sound thus itself of itself suggests presence." *The presence of the word: some prolegomena for cultural and religious history*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967, 114. And further: "The presence of man is a presence of the word." *ibid.*, 306. On writing and other non-aural 'media', Ong contends: "All reductions of the spoken word to non-auditory media...attenuate and debase it." *ibid.*, 322. (Further, Ong argues that Derrida is a "textualist" and that Derrida's critique of phonocentrism is misguided. In reference to Derrida he writes: "To try to construct a logic of writing without investigation in depth of the aurality out of writing emerged and in which writing is permanently and ineluctably grounded is to limit one's understanding." *Orality and literacy: the technologising of the word*, London: Methuen, 1982, 77.) Geoffrey Hartman develops a similar argument to Wesling, (although one which is rather more attuned to the subtleties of Derrida's program) in *Saving the text*. He argues also for an interplay between script and voice, but one which does not settle in the recovery of a plenary and "irreducible" voice: "Voicing the written word may be on the side of differentiation, for the gap between the graphemic and phonic appears most acutely when an equivocal or homophonic word generates allophones. Yet these relations could be reversed. The dead (mute) letter may be more differential (because of its reserve) than the living (voiced) letter. The border [between them] is indeterminate. Or if it has a more precise form, *chiastic*." Geoffrey H Hartman, *Saving the text: literature/Derrida/philosophy*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981, 14 (emphasis added). The "chiasm" between text and voice evoked here is developed below.

be realised in its plenary presence and meaningfulness. Voice, as that which "reanimates" text and resists this rending—this separation between medium and meaning—by reconstituting the "life" of an originary presence, must, apparently be neutralised. This gesture, however, is concomitant with Derrida's countermove: on the other hand, equally, Derrida ostensibly wants to resist the dichotomisation of "medium" and "meaning" only to the extent that he wishes to problematise the metaphysical lacuna between the sensible—for example, vocal or graphic substance 'foreign' to the purity of monological thought—and the intelligible; and correlatively between speech, as amenable to interiority, and writing, as putative exteriority. (Hence, difference "resists" and "sustains" philosophical dichotomies, occurs "between speech and writing.") And, according to Derrida, the orthographic deformation of the term difference underpins the equivocal or undecidable relationship he wishes to effect between these sets of opposed orders. As we have seen, he claims that difference is adroitly irrecoverable to either of the sensible modalities of signification. Nor is difference reducible, of course, to the order of the intelligible. Rather, as the "differing origin of differences" it undecidably interweaves *and* bifurcates voice and text, the intelligible and the sensible, medium and meaning.

Let us revisit Derrida's key paragraph on this point:

Difference...suggests that we must...let ourselves be referred to an order that no longer refers to sensibility. But we are not referred to intelligibility either...[The] order..that resists [the opposition between the sensible and the intelligible], that resists it because it sustains it, [is]...difference...This difference belongs neither to the voice nor to writing...and it takes place....between speech and writing and beyond the tranquil familiarity that..reassure[s] us sometimes in the illusion that they are two separate things.²⁶⁶

Voice and text are undecidably intertwined *and* irreparably rent, as are intellection and the sensate. And the relationship between voice (medium) and *meaning* is also played out simultaneously though differentially in the oscillation between these two imperatives: Derrida seeks to undecidably preserve yet efface, "sustain" yet "resist", the divide between *phonè* and logos. Insofar as difference at once ruptures, conjoins and hollows out voice, meaning *and* script, it obviates the restoration of phonetic text and vocal plenitude, or voice and plenary meaning, to their "natural" or unimpeded coupling: rather, the concepts of voice, meaning and writing are transformed and

²⁶⁶ SP, 133-134.

displaced. In place of the foundational metaphysical gap between signifier and signified, writing and voice, or sensible and intelligible (which Derrida insists is the "founding [metaphysical] opposition"), Derrida introduces what Stewart has aptly christened the "proto-scriptive gap",²⁶⁷ the intervals, breaks and fissures of language which underpin and structure *both* the "medium", the sensible aspects of verbal and written textuality and the "meaning", its intelligible aspects. Vocal "plenitude", silent or spoken, only becomes language with the interpolation of the interstices of difference, arche-writing, trace or difference, the Derridean "hinge" upon which the possibility of writing, and of all intelligibility, also 'hangs'. And this difference, Derrida reminds us time and again in *Differance*, is inaudible, silent, mute; indeed it becomes in the critique of phonocentrism an "inaudible...literal permutation"..."prescribed by a *mute irony*."²⁶⁸

Yet, the cogency of the deconstructive transformations undergone by voice in the anti-phonocentric project seems lacking. Derrida does not account adequately for the polysemy and physical pluridimensionality of *phonè*. Derrida has argued that the supra-ontotheological trick is "to avoid simply *neutralising* the binary oppositions of metaphysics and simply *residing* within the closed field of these oppositions, thereby confirming it."²⁶⁹ He has similarly argued that voice and text, and the intelligible and the sensible, are engaged in an irreducibly equivocal interplay which difference mobilises between the opposed orders. Perhaps, then, the somewhat paradoxical juncture at which the mute privilege of the grapheme takes centre stage—precisely the juncture at which sounded voice is opposed or "*neutralised*", and graphic substance "*liberated*"—is also the point at which Derrida's dazzling legerdemain, his anti-metaphysical balancing act which forbids the ontological ascendancy of any term, begins to topple. The silencing of the *a* as a cipher to resist the supremacy of the *phonè*—Derrida's "mute irony"—fails to answer wholly, as an anti- or supra-phonocentric stratagem the question of voice in onto-theology. Why so? Let us return to Derrida's own arguments in his confrontation with Saussure, and listen carefully to the silence of the *a*.

²⁶⁷ *Reading voices*, 104 (emphasis added).

²⁶⁸ *SP*, 131 (emphasis added).

²⁶⁹ *Positions*, 41.

3. 4 The silent letter: against Derrida

We have seen that in the term *differance*, sound is arrested at the level of inaudibility, since *differance* is that term that demonstrably vitiates aural plenitude as it does plenary meaning. What allows any sensible or conceptual "plenitude" to appear, always as non-plenary, always already corrupted by the breaches of arche-writing, is spacing or *differance*—the non-sensible, non-intelligible interval between terms. Yet material plenitude as voice (which would always already be a nonplenitude, post deconstruction) is struck out of the field of *differance*: the masthead of this term is the irrevocably silent *a*. I will attempt to assemble here the contours of my discomfort with this "neutralisation" of sound in *differance*. As it is possible to mobilise Derrida's own claims *against* his "spelling mistake", I will proceed through a number of Derrida's arguments set out above, with a degree of unavoidable repetition since his themes form an indissoluble ensemble. My focus here is on juxtaposing the indissociable relativity of speech and script which Derrida has described in setting out the field of *differance*, against the hypostatic and ascendant grapheme.

First, Derrida has maintained that *differance* is reducible neither to voice nor writing: ("Differance belongs neither to the voice nor to writing in the ordinary sense and it takes place *between* speech and writing." "Differance...permits the articulation of speech and writing...Difference is articulation") How is it, then, that this eminently liminal, marginal, undecidable space, this space which Derrida claims is the *intereggnum* of script and voice, is symbolised by a silent orthograph—that is, the *decidedly, unequivocally* unspoken, unsayable, and wholly written?

Second, Derrida has written that there is no sense in ceding primacy to one sensible substance or sensory modality over another, since *differance* precedes and conditions the very possibility of sensibility. To retain, then, the always-already imbricated and interwoven parity of sound and image, hearing and vision, with respect to each other, and their secondarity to *differance*, *differance* would have to avoid the reduction of one region of sensibility in favour of another. ("[Differance] is anterior to the distinction between regions of sensibility...And as it is anterior to sound as much as light, is there a sense in establishing a...hierarchy between the sound imprint, for example, and the (visual) graphic imprint? ") Derrida thinks not. How is it then, that the locus which is neither graphic nor phonic and neither sensible nor intelligible turns, despite Derrida's protestations of modal neutrality, on the silent *a*, on the absolute sublation of hearing into vision, and on the exile of *phonè* in favour of the sovereignty and hierarchical supremacy of the graphic?

Third, Derrida has claimed that the trace is the "passage" through form and matter; it is the irreducibly duplicitous gram, the mark of the primordial intertwining of all oppositionality, the "common, although entirely differant, root" of intelligibility and sensibility. This he showed in uncovering the trace at the heart of the Saussurian sound image. ("The trace's passage through form is a passage through the imprint. And the meaning of difference in general would be more accessible is the unity of that double passage appeared more clearly.") Speech, even in its 'unheard' sense—in the formal, monological moment—is in the world, rooted in that which "metaphysics calls sensibility in general." How is it that the trace which traces the double passage between "form" and "the imprint", elides absolutely, in the mute *a*, the "sound imprint", and defeats sensibility to sound?

Derrida has, moreover, insisted that the *graphie* and the *phonie* are imbricated in all writing, that a "double value" subsists in the inscription: he has based his rigorous critique of the phonetic obsession intrinsic to occidentalism on it. All *graphie* is somewhat *phonie*, all *phonie* is somewhat *graphie*; the rebus condenses "all the difficulties" accompanying the question of the graphic and the phonic in language. This is precisely what Saussure, in Derrida's symptomatology, feared: the phonic and the graphic would become so inextricably intertwined that the "originality" of the former with respect to the latter would be irrecoverable. This lost origin is Derrida's "fundamental synaesthesia". How is it, then, that difference as hieroglyph is the sole case to escape this synaesthetic formulation, since it is *graphie* without *phonie*? How is it that the *potentially* polysensuous ground of the "rebus" is concretised into a phonically indifferent, quasi-mathematical symbol.²⁷⁰

According to Derrida, difference's "locus and operation will be seen wherever speech appeals to difference."²⁷¹ Difference, he contends, is the "condition of [audible...phonic] plenitude", the term *without which* "the phonic element" the

²⁷⁰ Julia Kristeva suggests to Derrida in the interview *Semiology and grammatology* collected in *Positions* "Would not grammatology be a nonexpressive 'semiology' based on logical-mathematical notation rather than linguistic notation?" *Positions*, 32-33. Derrida comments in reply that "everything that has always linked *logos* to *phonè* has been limited by mathematics whose progress is in absolute solidarity with the practice of a nonphonetic inscription." However, interestingly, he adds that the "formalisation of writing must be very slow and very prudent" since "the function of the 'naive' side of formalism...has been to complete and confirm...logocentric theology...Thus in Leibniz the project of a universal, mathematical and nonphonetic characteristic is inseparable from...the divine *logos*." *ibid*, 34-35. Derrida's complicity with the onto-theological tradition, in terms of the development, in his project, of a cardinal "non-phonetic characteristic", perhaps itself "inseparable from the divine *logos*", is traced below.

²⁷¹ *SP*, 104.

"sensible" would not appear. Then how is it that this "locus", this *condition of possibility of speech*, is *inoperative* in respect, precisely, of speech (in difference)? The locus and operation of difference can "be seen" but speech's "appeal" to difference is thrown out of court: the lack of the "phonic element" in the regime of difference seems to speak, or rather write, a aporetic effacement of the trace with respect to the voice, that very term which was the trace's target. Since there is no sound in difference, there is here an unequivocal effacement of the trace *in the absence of which* no sound would "appear".

In difference, graphic "substance"—in the form of a trope of silent inscription—is liberated and rendered as the *urquelle* of deconstruction, and phonic substance is indeed "neutralised", silenced, wholly. The abnegation of sound is absolutised and ontologised, as the *principium* of the polemical locus which organises Derridean thought. The shimmering undecidability of the unity and disarticulation of speech and writing is hypostatized and reified in an algebraic *a*, an aphonic gram—an absolute silence. In a program which wants to mobilise the undecidable and liminal "between" of philosophically opposed terms, Derrida's recourse to a trope of unequivocal silence, to one term in an opposition *over* another, seems somewhat inconsistent: how ironic that the *a* is symbolically mute.

Perhaps this is a hubristic, mechanistic and naive account of the Derridean enactment of the silencing of voice. Rhetorical and baseless, even, since the *a* sounds, only not differently. But let us take Derrida at his word. Difference is purely figured as a silence. Derrida, in *Difference*, writes that difference "cannot be heard", is "mute", is "inaudible", "cannot be made to resonate". References to its unmitigated insonority appear some fifteen times in the first few pages of the eponymous essay. Difference is the unequivocally silent gram. In *Grammatology*, the trace is similarly unheard. It is philosophy's "cadence", literally, the fall of the voice.²⁷² Perhaps the aetiology of Derrida's mutism (or is it deafness?) should be investigated to determine if it is hereditary. Why such a fundamental role for silence as the mute gram in Derrida?²⁷³

²⁷² *OG*, 69.

²⁷³ Elsewhere Derrida has commented differently on the writing of silence. In *Writing and difference*, drawing on Bataille, Derrida contends that the perversity of silence's "sliding equivocality", the slippage of meaning that it institutes in the disseminative economy of language, consists in that "in pretending to silence meaning, it *says* nonmeaning, it slides and erases itself, does not maintain itself, silences *itself*, not as silence but as speech." *From restricted to general economy*, *WD*, 262. My argument is that silence fails in this imperative to silence *itself* in difference; that is, the silence of difference is not "equivocal", it does not silence itself *as* speech. There is of course an entire literature of silence which could be called upon here, as well as a vast history of silence as a structuring ground in music and literature, which is beyond the scope of this work. Of particular interest is the relation of silence to ontology and negative theology, which I develop immediately below, in response to Derrida's claims that "what is...denoted as difference is not theological, not

The question of silent writing and aphonic voice mobilises a genealogy which is not at all conducive to Derrida's purportedly anti- or supra-metaphysical arguments. In *Language and Death*, Giorgio Agamben amply evinces what he sees as the apophatic theological dimensions of the invocation of silence. Silence, he contends, is the very core trope of metaphysics conceived as negativity. The concept of silent voice, Agamben argues, is intrinsic to onto-theology and the place of negativity as death in metaphysics, adverting specifically to Heidegger's "voice without sound", his "silent voice of conscience", and the role of voice in Hegel.²⁷⁴ Indeed the notion of a "removed" voice—conceived as pure and silent meaning figured in the trope of "*gramma*"—has, according to Agamben, a fundamental onto-theological obligation coextensive with post-Socratic thought.

In late antique Gnosticism and early Christian mysticism, Agamben contends, God is figured as that which is inexpressible, unspeakable and unnameable, yet he may be 'spoken' "with the voice of silence". The Gnostic "abyss", the "incomprehensible", the "eternally" and "primordially "pre-existent", harbours the thought of silence, the figure of "*Sigé*", which is the ground for the negative revelation of *logos*. Agamben quotes a Valentinian Gnostic text: "Silence (*Sigé*) [is] the mother of all things that have been emitted from the Abyss"²⁷⁵—the matrix of all language and thought. Hence:

Silence comprehends the Abyss as incomprehensible...Without Sigé and its silent thought, the Abyss could not have even been considered incomprehensible...Inasmuch as Silence negatively unveils the arch-original dimension of the Abyss to sense and to signification, it is the mystical foundation of every possible revelation and every language, the original language of God as Abyss (in Christian terms, the figure of the dwelling of logos in arche, the

even in the most negative order of a negative theology." *SP*, 134.

²⁷⁴ Giorgio Agamben, *Language and death: the place of negativity*, trans. Karen E Pinkus with Michael Hardt, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991 (hereafter *Language and death*). On Heidegger see *ibid.*, especially 54-62 and *passim*, and on Hegel, *ibid.*, especially 41-48 and *passim*. Agamben's treatise is a dense one which is impossible to explicate in detail here. I introduce him here, if too briefly, because he has brought into the closest proximity the issues of silent writing as the negative ontological *principium* and the critique of Derrida's attempt to overcome metaphysics. Derrida himself asserts that the problem with Heidegger was that his program remained within a metaphysics of insonorous voice as "voice of Being". (See on this point *QG*, 20, 22.) Noted above is Derrida's confrontation with the concept of voice as the most ideal of phenomena in Hegel, the sensuous substance which can most readily be sublated and idealised in the life of the mind. Throughout *Language and death*, Agamben argues that the Heideggerian and Hegelian concepts of sound and voice constitute the primary ground for metaphysical thought, and cites Derrida as wholly participating in this lineage.

²⁷⁵ On these points see *Language and death*, 63.

*original place of language.)*²⁷⁶

The Christian trope of the name of God as unpronounceable and unsayable also grounds Hebraic thought. The saying of the name of the God, according to Agamben, was proscribed by the Israelites, and recorded only in writing—in the consonantal tetragram 'IHVH'—until the sixth century. Agamben cites Meister Eckhart's interpretation of "the four letter name", "sacred and separate which is written and not spoken and...alone signifies the pure and naked substance of the creator."²⁷⁷ Thus, Agamben asserts, the ultimate mystical experience in both Hebraic and Christian thought takes place only in the *proscription* of voice, signified in the appropriation of the letter, the "gramma". Agamben writes:

*As the unnameable name of God, the gramma is the final and negative dimension of meaning, no longer an experience of language...but its taking place in the removal of voice. There is, thus, even a 'grammar' of the ineffable; or rather, the ineffable is simply the dimension of meaning of the gramma, of the letter as the ultimate negative foundation of human discourse.*²⁷⁸

Agamben's genealogical reading helps to clarify the contention that voice in onto-theology is always *already* conceived as writing, determined as the *silent* letter, trace or *gramma*, "removed" from sounding voice. (Agamben capitalises Voice to indicate its 'spacing' from the vocalising subject, its status as always-already writing, its silence.) He locates the origin of this figure in the Aristotelian hermeneutic. Agamben revises the conventional reading of Aristotle which suggests that the letter is thrice removed from "things themselves", tertiary to voice and to mental experience, and therefore derivative. For Aristotle, the nature of language is conceived as a hierarchical relationship which determines the passage between interconnected terms: mental experience is symbolised by "that which is in the voice" (*phonè*), of which written words (*grammata*) are in turn the symbols. While writing and voice are contingent and vary from subject to subject, mental experience is invariant, as is also the "thing" of which the mental experience is the image.²⁷⁹ Agamben notes that "if the meaningful nature of language is...a process of interpretation"...('that which is in the

²⁷⁶ Language and death, 63-64.

²⁷⁷ See on these points Language and death, 30.

²⁷⁸ Language and death, 30.

²⁷⁹ See Aristotle, *De interpretatione* 16a, 3-7 in The works of Aristotle, trans. E M Edgill, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971; quoted in Agamben, Language and death, 38.

voice' symbolises the mental experience which in turn corresponds to the thing), "then what remains problematic is the status of the *grammata*." Further, he asks, "Why does Aristotle introduce this 'fourth interpreter'?"²⁸⁰ Insofar as, Agamben argues, the ancient philosophers had determined that once meaning was constructed as referential, as a re-presenting or signifying act between the voice and experience, and between experience and things, "it was then necessary to introduce a fourth element to assure the interpretation of the voices themselves."²⁸¹ The element, this ultimate "interpreter", Agamben holds, is writing:

Since, as the final interpreter, the grammar is the ground that sustains the entire circle of signification, it must necessarily enjoy a privileged status within this circle. Greek grammatical thought came to locate this particular status of the grammar, in that it is not simply...a sign, but an element of voice...Following what was in the a certain sense already implicit in the Aristotelian formula (...that which is in the voice, and not simply of the voice itself) the ancient grammarians defined the grammar as...the quantum of signifying voice. As a sign, and, at the same time, a constitutive element of the voice, the grammar comes thus to assume the paradoxical status of an index of itself (index sui).²⁸²

This means, according to Agamben, that the philosophy of language locates the *grammar*, rather than the voice, as originary. And, since grammar is voice *removed*, its negativity corrupts self-affection: the immediacy of voice is always already wrested away from self-coincidence by the intervention of the letter:

From the beginning, Western reflections on language locate the grammar and not the voice in the originary place. In fact, as a sign the grammar presupposes both the voice and its removal, but as an element [of voice], it has the structure of a purely negative self-affection. Philosophy responds to the question, 'What is in the voice?' as follows: Nothing is in the voice, the voice is the place of the negative, it is Voice...[grammar].²⁸³

In Agamben's reading, this is precisely what Derrida has shown: that in Husserl

²⁸⁰ Language and death, 38.

²⁸¹ Language and death, 38.

²⁸² Language and death, 39.

²⁸³ Language and death, 39.

voice is always already signification as *protowriting*, and identically, that in Saussure, the silent *image-acoustique* is always already the trace. An irreducible signifying interval opens up in thought, obviating unmediated communion with any plenary truth, ultimate referent or transcendental signified. Voice always loses itself in the gram; it surrenders access to positive self-affection just as silence as *gramma*, in Agamben's reading, relinquishes immediate proximity to the theological, the divine *logos*, the eternally present. Derrida's contention that the *gramma*, the written trace, marks the "death" of self-presence at the heart of the "life" of consciousness animated by breath, is, in Agamben's terms, the negativity as death fundamental to metaphysics. The absolute, the "thing in itself", or indeed God, remain unreachable, unspeakable, abyssal and ineffable, symbolised only negatively in the trope of the displacement and deferral of vivifying voice as *gramma*/silence/death. *Gramma* becomes the terminal interpreter of this negativity, the "limit" of onto-theology. In Agamben's reading, Derridean differance, as *index sui* of the latter's program, mirrors this fundamental ontological trope. It thus remains intra-metaphysical. Hence, Agamben contends that Derrida's contribution to metaphysical thought lies not so much in leaving metaphysics behind, but in confirming the apparent insuperability of its conception of the *gramma*/silent voice as the negative structuring principle of conceptuality. He argues, moreover, that Derrida has deluded himself into believing that he has surpassed onto-theology, when his work has been far less heroic. Derrida has merely archaeologised its ontological ground; that is to say, he has merely elucidated metaphysics' negativity as *gramma*, the *arche* of its *logos* as silence. Agamben writes:

*We must certainly honour Derrida as the thinker who has identified with the greatest rigour...the original status of the gramma and of meaning in our culture, [but] it is also true that he believed he had opened a way to surpassing metaphysics, while in truth he merely brought the fundamental problems of metaphysics to light. For metaphysics is not simply the primacy of the voice over gramma. If metaphysics is that reflection that places the voice as origin, it is also true that this voice is, from the beginning, conceived as removed, as Voice. To identify the horizon of metaphysics simply in that supremacy of the phone and then to believe in one's power to overcome this horizon through the gramma is to conceive of metaphysics without its coexistent negativity. Metaphysics is always already grammatology, and this is fundamentology in the sense that the gramma (or the Voice) functions as the negative ontological foundation.*²⁸⁴

²⁸⁴ Language and death, 39.

Since the "mythogeme" of Voice is the *archon* of philosophy, and the originary place of negativity, Agamben argues that negative, (written, silent) voice (the *gramma*) and metaphysics are inseparable. Thus, implicitly recapitulating his earlier rejoinder to Derrida, he writes:

*Here the limitations of all critiques of metaphysics are made evident; they hope to surpass the horizon of metaphysics by radicalising the problem of negativity...as if a pure and fundamental repetition of the fundamental problem could lead to a surpassing of metaphysics.*²⁸⁵

Agamben suggests a passage that might "radicalise" this negative ontological ground. No longer the flight of the (silent) Voice to the negative firmament of apophatic onto-theology, the transformative confrontation with voice would take place rather in the weighty opacity of the mundane located at the "bottom" of aphonia. He writes: "We can only think if language is not our own voice, only if we reach our own aphonia at its very bottom...What we call world is this abyss."²⁸⁶ Any 'going beyond' of metaphysics, Agamben holds, would unite the *logos* with an "*ethos*", an ethical dimension that is firmly rooted in the worldliness of speech as an inherently social phenomenon. Not just "our own voice" but the voice as human "praxis" is at issue here: "Th[is] *ethos*, humanity's own, is not something unspeakable...that must remain unsaid in all praxis and human speech. Neither is it a nothingness, whose nullity serves as the basis for the arbitrariness [of] violence. Rather, it is social praxis itself, human speech itself."²⁸⁷

²⁸⁵ Language and death, 85.

²⁸⁶ Language and death, 108.

²⁸⁷ Language and death, 106. On this point, Harold Coward would dispute the claim that Derrida's silencing of voice is an exclusion of speech in the world, contending rather than the teleology of Derridean silence is positive vocalisation. He would, however, support the assertion that Derrida may be construed as advancing a negative theology, in terms which would be most incompatible with Derrida's own proclamations about difference as the term which exceeds apophaticism. Coward writes: "For Derrida, the ultimate silent experience of the divine does not cancel out ordinary language...rather it throws us back into our experience of worldly language. Freed from entrapment in the privileging of one of the pairs of opposites, we are infused with a divine demand for moral action. In Derrida's silence is a dynamism, a divine difference, that is not found in the divine logos or the pure consciousness...It is a reality that starts with God's silent desire to speak." *A Hindu response to Derrida's view of negative theology*, in Derrida and negative theology, eds. Harold Coward and Toby Foshay, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992, 222. For Derrida's own response to the issue, see *How to avoid speaking: denials*, ibid., 73-142. I remain with Agamben's view, since to my mind he most persuasively links the themes of voice, writing, silence and apophaticism with an implicit trajectory which would suggest that Derridean deconstruction *disengages* from the voice in praxis and its worldly dimensions, and therefore contributes less toward answering the metaphysical problem of voice than Derrida himself would assert. (See further on the question of Derrida and negative theology the introduction to Languages of the unsayable: the play of negativity in literature and literary theory, eds. Stanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser, New York: Columbia University Press,

Keeping this in mind, let us return to Derrida. Derrida has maintained that phonocentric thought—metaphysics—has relied on the reduction of phonic substance, the "outside", the "body", indeed, the "world", to aphonic voice. He has maintained that difference is reduced to the presence of silent noesis in order that the pure immediacy of *nonmundane* monological solitude be preserved. This according to Derrida is metaphysics writ large; the imperative intrinsic to occidentalism that occults the trace. In revealing the trace, he believes he has shown the *gramma*, the writing with which voice is fatally entangled, thereby surmounting onto-theology. But just as he shows this trace, this difference (which according to Agamben, has always already in any case, been metaphysics' horizon) he seems to close off the "world" which he has himself invoked. This "world" may perhaps be conceived as the mundane locus which Agamben invokes, the "world" at the nadir of "aphonia" which would open silence and negativity to bodily speech, and metaphysics to its other, as yet 'unspoken', ethical dimension.

For Agamben, then, metaphysics is Voice as *gramma* and Derrida has simply traced this genealogical fact. Derrida concurs to the extent that the brilliance of his polemic consists in the devastating way in which it shows that *gramma* and silent voice are primordially co-implicated in metaphysical thought, *despite* what *he* considers is metaphysics' resistance to this inherent delimitation. Agamben then shifts the axis of the problematic, suggesting that if there is any passage to "overcoming" onto-theology's aphonic *gramma*, it would be in the praxis of a speech rooted in the world. Derrida, having identified the *gramma* within voice has not taken the latter step. He has not followed successfully the premises of his own argument that the introduction of his ostensibly *revolutionised* trope of writing into monological solitude would mobilise an engagement with the "world". If "in...pure difference is rooted...space, the outside, the world, the body"²⁸⁸ then where is sounding voice, in Derrida's universe, as space, outside, body, world? Indeed, in terms of Agamben's argument, where is the "praxis" of an embodied speech in the world?

It is nowhere to be found, or, indeed, heard. Derrida's own "neutralisation" of the phonic substance—the cardinal inscriptional silence, the elliptical trace in which the worldly voice evaporates in difference—is a trope of the intra-metaphysical *gramma* which Agamben locates at the heart of all negative theology. The trace does nothing,

1989.)

²⁸⁸ *SP*, 82.

in Agamben's view, to radicalise, surpass or surmount metaphysics. So long as the voice is rendered silent, voice, conceived metaphysically, remains impervious to the very deformations and worldly, practical contingencies—in Agamben's terms, the *praxis*—which would transform its status as (negative) guarantor of ontology. In repressing acoustic voice, in repressing the "body" and the "world" within speech, Derrida has arguably re-enacted, moreover, the repression within voice of his putatively *transformed* notion of writing—in his own terms, the *worldly*, the *corporeal*, the *spatial*—which he thinks *he* has located as the excluded "outside" of onto-theology and has claimed to re-assert *against* onto-theology. He has repressed that very relational interplay of the mute interior to exteriority, to writing ostensibly reconfigured as "body" and "world", which he ostensibly sought to salvage and reinstate as the definitive deconstructive blow to monological life. Is Derrida then, the pre-eminent negative theologian or perhaps high priest of metaphysics at the altar of the a? If so, perhaps it is the body-of-the-voice-in-the-world which he has sacrificed.

3. 5 Differance revisited: *écriture* as embodied voice

If Derrida were to be talked out of his sonophobic malaise how might voice again sound? Let us return, on this point, to the notion of spacing with which we began this chapter—the trope which, in the critique of Husserl, is intended to introduce "space, the outside, the world, the body" into the monologue.

David Wood is suggestive here: he posits that while spacing potentially opens the way to thinking sonorous speech, Derrida paradoxically negates this possibility. In *The Deconstruction of Time* Wood notes that a "consequence of...differance is that it opens up the interiority of subjectivity to the 'outside'."²⁸⁹ Yet, adducing spacing (or "the movement of temporalisation") as the literal index of Derrida's argument for the imbrication of interiority and exteriority, Wood charges that the 'spatialisation' of the 'interior' effected by Derrida is at best symbolic. Derrida's assertion that spacing, differance or the trace effects a relationship between inside and outside, and introduces "space", "body" and "world" into auto-affection is, according to Wood, merely structurally analogical. Derrida does not convincingly demonstrate the constitutional dependence of the "inside" on the "outside". Wood contends:

When [Derrida] writes:

²⁸⁹ David Wood, *The deconstruction of time*, New Jersey: Humanities Press International, 1989, 129, (hereafter *Deconstruction of time*.)

As a relation between an inside and an outside in general, an existent and a non-existent in general...[spacing] is at once the power and limit of phenomenological reduction...'²⁹⁰one is tempted to respond that he is confusing structural analogy with some sort of constitutional dependence. [Spacing] does indeed in some senses involve a relation between...an inside and an outside, but it can at best be said to symbolise the inside/outside relation involved in the phenomenological reduction.²⁹¹

In Wood's reading, Derrida's own notion of spatiality and exteriority has undergone a "bracketing" which reduplicates the phenomenological reduction whereby "the operation of hearing oneself speak seems to reduce even the inward surfaces of one's own body";²⁹² indeed to reduce the body entirely. For Wood, Derrida's "indebtedness to phenomenological themes returns to haunt his solutions", insofar as Derrida has arguably "refurbished transcendental thinking at this point."²⁹³ All Derrida's references to spatiality, Wood contends, are solipsistic in that they point to "an exteriority *within* subjectivity" and do not demonstrate "an opening from subjectivity to the world."²⁹⁴ Just as for the phenomenologists whom he critiques, the voice in Derrida, Wood evinces, remains resolutely interior and mute.

As Wood has it, for the spacing or difference that interrupts self-identity to have real force, the relationship between the interior and the exterior would have to be more than symbolic and analogical. Husserlian silence excludes space, body, outside and world, as does the 'interior' nexus between the subacoustic word and meaning in Saussure: phenomenological interiority is thereby established. The deconstruction of mute interiority would therefore engage the materially sounded voice as an irreducibly "worldly" and "bodily" phenomenon. In Wood's schema, voice would irrupt ineradicably into, and corrupt, the self-sufficiency of the monologue:

The way out of interiority is surely not most obviously via the 'spacing in all temporalisation' but rather via the embodiment of the speaking voice and the

²⁹⁰ Wood quoting *SP*, 86.

²⁹¹ *Deconstruction of time*, 130.

²⁹² *SP*, 79.

²⁹³ *Deconstruction of time*, 129-130.

²⁹⁴ *Deconstruction of time*, 129.

*manifold ways in which the purity of that listening to oneself might get interrupted, distorted (from a sore throat, coughing, coping with eating at the same time, to various parapraxes of speech, in which the spoken word seems to have run forward, ahead of thought...).*²⁹⁵

In Wood's estimation, the physiognomic aspects of voice fissure phonocentric solipsism and introduce "exteriority" into monadic unity: the physical/acoustic dimensions of vocal experience most obviously instance the corporeality and worldliness with which Derrida purportedly seeks to breach the soliloquy. Sounded voice, with its opaque physicality, impedes semantic "purity" or transparency as a cough or splutter interrupts an otherwise seamless oration. Such sonant tropes, in Wood's reading, introduce the spacing that is the "outside" of phenomenology—as acoustic "*embodiment*"—into phenomenological speech. The auto-affecting voice *materialised*, in Wood's account, is akin to Derrida's "*wish sensibilised*". It is always non-full and non-original; it is spacing.

Spacing, Derrida claims, is a "certain spatiality" on the "inside", a spatiality which is reduced by the phenomenological voice, insofar as the operation of hearing-oneself-speak "seems capable of dispensing with...[the] interior space in which...our image of our own body is spread forth."²⁹⁶ Henceforth, in Derrida's reading, it is exclusively the *visual* body of the written sign "that is given over to the world and the visibility of space."²⁹⁷ Derrida here appeals to the voice considered only as silent, crystalline noesis, a concept of voice which grounds Husserl's excision of gesture, writing and the manifold of exterior terms—what Derrida calls the "whole of the visible and spatial as such"²⁹⁸—from the pure temporality of phenomenological interiority. However, Don Ihde suggests that the conflation of space with *visuality* alone is limited. Appealing to the "voiced spatiality of things", Ihde seeks to recuperate a notion of sounded voice which incorporates a spatiality and corporeity primordially grounded in "interior space". Ihde's argument concerns the assertion that all objects, inanimate and animate, have voices which "sound" their inner materiality and spatiality. Ihde writes:

²⁹⁵ Deconstruction of time, 130.

²⁹⁶ SP, 79.

²⁹⁷ SP, 77-78.

²⁹⁸ SP, 35.

*Our spatial orientation is not and never has been simply visual—yet we have often so interpreted it...The voiced spatiality of things...suggest[s] that we may be as badly off in our usual interpretation of the voices of language as we have been in our interpretation of experienced spatiality [as purely visual]...Human voice recapitulates the [voiced spatiality of things].*²⁹⁹

In Ihde's account, voice exteriorised in space retains vestigial traces of the interior, visceral space of the body; traces which ineluctably accompany the "desired" or "willed" aspects of intention in intelligible language. The noise of the body as a *material* space interrupts the crytallinity of speech—"interiority", in this reading, relinquishes the connotations of non-spatiality and transparency required by conventional phenomenological accounts of ipseity. Indeed, the "visibility of space" which in Derrida's account, would be "the death of self-presence",³⁰⁰ becomes a 'sonority' of space which evocalises the "pathology" of matter—the excised outside of the "life" of silent, monadic speech in philosophy. Thus:

*Sometimes, and against the will of the speaker, what is spoken is not desired. The wheezing voice of the emphysemiac, of the far too long smoker, bespeaks the interior space of the body and its pathology.*³⁰¹

On this point, a number of writers have adverted to the utter reduction which the "body", and the sensuous aspects of sounded signification, undergo in the regime of differance. David Appelbaum, in *Voice*, an exegesis on the various sonorous registers of phonality, seeks to 'uncover' the voice—indeed the "organic" and often "pathological" manifestations of voice—which, he contends, are "concealed" in Derridean deconstruction. In Appelbaum's estimation Derrida has elided all of speech apart from those aspects tied up with the intelligibility of signification. "Voice's voice", Appelbaum argues, is the sonant substratum, the disturbingly audile 'subtext' "deeply organic and fraught with...human suffering"³⁰² which is irrecoverable to language considered only as a 'sign', indifferently writing or speech. According to Appelbaum, the acoustic properties of voice such as the cough, the laugh and babble—the 'sonic

²⁹⁹ Don Ihde, *A phenomenology of voice*, in Consequences of phenomenology, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986, 38-39 (hereafter Phenomenology of voice).

³⁰⁰ SP, 35.

³⁰¹ Phenomenology of voice, 39.

³⁰² David Appelbaum, Voice, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990, xiv (hereafter Voice).

notes' which subtend language with all the thickness and opacity of visceral, lived corporeality—are "written over" by Derridean textualism. As Appelbaum has it, Derrida is unconcerned with voice's inalienable physical sonority, insofar as his program remains preoccupied only with pure meaning.³⁰³ And, since noesis requires no sonority, Appelbaum charges that "within the opposition speaking/listening, Derrida acknowledges nothing of the audible, acoustic dimension of vocal experience. All voicings could as easily be subvocal."³⁰⁴ With Wood, Appelbaum contends that the "voicings" which Derrida reduces, the "slurred, improper, curlish or animal" aspects of voice which "escape the lips unframed" are precisely those irruptions which would "betray...lapse[s] in cognition"³⁰⁵ rendering speech unassimilable to the pristine transparency of 'unmediated' thought.

Appelbaum's polemic suggests Jean-Francois Lyotard's commentary on the bifurcation of voice in philosophy. Western thought, Lyotard considers, has divided the voice into two irreducible components: *lexis* and *phonè*.³⁰⁶ The *lexis* is the articulated or "legible" voice,³⁰⁷ in other words, the 'written' voice (from the Latin: *legere*, to read). For Lyotard, *lexis* is also the intelligible voice of the "*logos*".³⁰⁸ The voice of the *phonè* on the other hand corresponds to timbre or tone, and relates to affect. *Phonè* is visceral, sonorous and somewhat aphasic: it "explodes...whines, sighs, yawns, cries...is thin or thick",³⁰⁹ much like the voice of babble, laugh and cough, or "unframed", "improper" speech for Appelbaum. Since the *phonè* is the voice of affect and not "communication" (that is, "reply, debate, conclusion, decision"), it cannot, according to Lyotard, "tell tales."³¹⁰

In Appelbaum's account of Derrida, voice and writing become somewhat analogous to Lyotard's *phonè* and *lexis*: Derrida, according to Appelbaum, provisionally conflates or fuses (sounded) voice and the "legible". However, his

³⁰³ See on these points, *Voice*, ix-xiv.

³⁰⁴ *Voice*, xiv.

³⁰⁵ *Voice*, x.

³⁰⁶ Jean-Francois Lyotard, *Voices of a voice*, *Discourse*, 14.1, Winter 1991-1992, 129-130 (hereafter *Voices of voice*).

³⁰⁷ *Voices of voice*, 129.

³⁰⁸ *Voices of voice*, 130.

³⁰⁹ *Voices of voice*, 130.

³¹⁰ *Voices of voice*, 130.

imbrication of the "bipolarity" of spoken voice and script—the 'intertwining' of *phonè* and a scriptive trope (*lexis*)—has proved fatal for sound: nothing of the audible dimension of voice survives the conflation. For Appelbaum, "Derrida's position hides the being of voice by limiting it to spoken recitation [a voice *a posteriori* to legible *logos*] or the written transcript", producing "an approach to voice which...*writes over* its authentically disturbing and inherently sonic note."³¹¹ Since the "essential matter", for Derrida, in Appelbaum's estimation, "is the *intelligibility* of the sign, word or idea"³¹² Derrida sublates the sonancy of voice into its "legibility", *logos* or logic: voice becomes a dessicated instrument for the articulation of (the newly deconstructed) *logos*, as its timbral sonority falls away into the silence of the always-already written.³¹³

Yet differance, precisely *as* writing in Derrida's critique, also purportedly yields a newly deconstructed voice: the trace or *écriture* is voice's very possibility. On this point, Garrett Stewart is suggestive. He posits, as discussed above, an approach to writing which would involve the activation of the phonemic (spoken) stratum *vis-à-vis* the graphemic (written) stratum of the text, "not as a dimension of full presence, never more than a mere trace of speech in writing"; in such an interplay "lexical autonomy may be breached, words rent by jostling divergences, syntax itself unravelled in the slippage of difference." Perhaps though, this formula would have to be inverted to capture the newly possible vocality that I am attempting to point to: it might be called the trace of *writing in speech or voice*, the trace upon which Derrida's anti-phonocentric project could be said to turn—the introduction of *écriture* as space, body and world into the monad which would perhaps "neutralise", in Derrida's own hubristic terms, solipsistic phonocentrism. Differance, after all, is precisely that non-concept that has shaken us from our delusional slumber that led us to believe, as Derrida has put it, that speech and writing are "two different things": the trace of writing in speech, writing and speech intertwined, would surely obviate, in Derrida's own terms, his aporetic enshrinement of the axiom of (silent) voice. Speech need only remain mute so long as the Husserlian and Saussurian distinction which insists on the radical heterogeneity of inner silence, and exterior, sensuous speech (or writing), prevails. If writing is "body" and "world", if writing is "the body and matter external to spirit",³¹⁴

³¹¹ *Voice*, xiii-xiv (emphasis added).

³¹² *Voice*, xiii (emphasis added).

³¹³ I am indebted for my reading of Lyotard here to Frances Dyson, *The silencing of sound: metaphysics, technology, media*, unpublished PhD dissertation, Sydney: University of Technology, Sydney, 1993, 118.

³¹⁴ *OG*, 35.

then surely, it can also be sonant. This is precisely what Derrida affirms, yet does not enact; the transformed concept of writing which he advocates would, he argues, "*simultaneously provoke[] the overturning of the hierarchy speech/writing...and release[] the dissonance of a writing within speech.*"³¹⁵

On this point, Régis Durand affirms that the "apparent transcendence" of voice in philosophy relies on its remaining mute: "*Auto-affection: from myself to myself. I do not even have to speak to you, as long as I hear myself. I do not even have to speak.*"³¹⁶ However, once (sounded) speech occurs, "something else takes place." The voice can only be equated with presence, in Durand's account, insofar as the "body" of language, of the signifier, is reduced and rendered transparent. In speech, on the other hand "we can never say that the body of language is totally absent...For speech is not [the phenomenological] voice. It is a voice that has run over and through language: 'a wading through language, a wading that occurs inside [and] outside the body.'"³¹⁷ It is this 'corporeal' engagement with language's "body" which problematises its relationship to self-evident sense. Voice run through the body of language, Durand contends, is "something other than pure presence". It "differs and it *defers*: difference [is]...what happens when the voice runs through the body of language, becomes speech and writing (*écriture*)."³¹⁸

This interpretation, which invokes speech/writing as a kind of linguistic corporeity, mobilises a significant literature around voice. Roland Barthes' work, and the writings of continental feminist thinkers such as Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous are suggestive here. Voice thought by these writers turns largely on a trope of *écriture*, but *écriture* considered as audible: a sonorous voice gestures toward inscriptional motifs, and "releases", in accordance with Derrida's unfulfilled program, the "dissonance" of script in speech. The liminal vocal audibility which these writers invoke, moreover, opens the juncture between sounded voice and the *slippage* of meaning, evincing a polysemia and polyglossia irrecoverable to the fiat of the divine *logos*. Indeed, voice thought by Cixous, Irigaray and Barthes enacts the undermining of the presence of *logos* while simultaneously calling upon precisely those physiognomic aspects of voice

³¹⁵ Positions, 42 (second emphasis added).

³¹⁶ Régis Durand, *The disposition of the voice*, in Performance and postmodern culture, eds. M. Benamou and C. Caramello, Madison: Coda Press, 1978, 100 (hereafter Disposition of voice).

³¹⁷ Disposition of voice, 100-101 (quoting John Vernon, *Writing and language* in American Review, 22, 1975, 215).

³¹⁸ Disposition of voice, 101.

which, in Wood, Lyotard and Appelbaum's estimation, render its "ideality" or unmediated relation to intellection suspect.

Barthes' notion of the "grain" of the voice is apposite here: the grain is "the body in the voice as it sings, the hand as it writes, the limb as it performs",³¹⁹ those "gestural" and physical elements of 'exteriority' which the phenomenological reduction sequesters from solipsistic life. The grain, moreover, corresponds to the ineffaceable corporeality of language. It draws upon the passage of voice through the thickness and opacity of body cavities and the viscera, the "muscles, the membranes the cartilages"; the "tongue, glottis, teeth, the mucous membranes, the nose."³²⁰ Barthes opposes the grain (the "genotextual" aspects of language) to the rigid signifiatory demands of the "phenotext", the codes and genres of language which serve "representation."³²¹ The profoundly material grain of voice, unlike the 'transparent' voice of the phenomenological locutor, is unassimilable to the "soul" of the speaker as unitary "origin" of language.³²² The economy of the grain is rather a timbral "play" which liberates the "voluptuousness of...sound-signifiers", language's "letters".³²³ Indeed, Barthes holds, the genotextual voice is a kind of *écriture* insofar as "what is produced at the level of the geno[text] is finally writing."³²⁴

The notion of a written voice appears again in *The Pleasure of the Text*. Here Barthes invokes a "writing aloud" (*l'écriture à haute voix*), an analogue of voice's grainy timbre. "Writing aloud", for Barthes, is concerned not with the intelligibility of the *logos* but the incarnate, sounded *phonè*: "its aim is not the clarity of messages", insofar as "due allowance being made for the sounds of language, writing aloud is not

³¹⁹ Roland Barthes, *The grain of the voice in Image-music-text*, trans. Stephen Heath, London: Fontana, 1977, 188 (hereafter *Grain of voice*).

³²⁰ *Grain of voice*, 181, 183.

³²¹ *Grain of voice*, 182. Here, Barthes draws on Julia Kristeva's notions of "pheno"- and "genotext". The "phenotext" is concerned with societal, cultural, syntactical and other grammatical constraints in language. A mathematical demonstration is close to a pure phenotext. (See Kristeva, *Revolution in poetic language*, trans. Margaret Waller, New York: Columbia University Press, 1984, 5.) The "genotext" on the other hand, issues from the Kristevan "semiotic", the pre-symbolic realm of the drives, and constitutes, for Kristeva, the poetic in language. The genotext is a "process which tends to articulate structures that are ephemeral (unstable, threatened by drive charges...) and non-signifying." See *ibid.*, 86.

³²² *Grain of voice*, 182.

³²³ *Grain of voice*, 182.

³²⁴ *Grain of voice*, 185.

phonological."³²⁵ Rather, its sonority is "phonetic".³²⁶ As a "stereophony" (etymologically, "stereo" derives from 'solid', that is, dimensional, spatial), writing aloud issues from the viscera, the physical space of interiority, now understood as eminently corporeal. *L'écriture à haute voix* "searches for...the pulsional incidents, the language lined with flesh...the grain of the throat, the patina of consonants, the voluptuousness of vowels, a whole carnal stereophony: the articulation of the body, the tongue, not that of meaning."³²⁷ This trope of written voice thus relinquishes the bodiless, dimensionless realm of the 'mono-logos', abandoning the crystallinity of meaning putatively conserved in the phenomenological *phonè*: Voice here is equated with "breath" but not as a transparent vehicle for intellection. "Breath", rather, becomes a metonym for "materiality" and "sensuality", a conduit for the "gutturals" which engages "the fleshiness of the lips."³²⁸

Cixous and Irigaray, like Barthes, adduce a notion of a highly somatic voice, but one which is specifically feminine.³²⁹ For these thinkers (phal)logocentrism debases corporeality—which is equated with the feminine—in favour of ideality, specularity and transparent intellection. Cixous and Irigaray respond by advocating, against 'phallogocentric' language, a brutally material, sexually-specific "morphological" voice. Woman's voice, in Cixous' and Irigaray's accounts, resonates with the inimicality to "pure" meaning which Wood and Appelbaum have also invoked: the voice is ruptured by coughs and other distortions which catch and trip up language; it engages various parapraxes of speech, and it irrupts into manifold unchecked sonorities which corrode the putative apodicticity of the *phonè*. For Cixous and Irigaray, moreover, voice and hearing offer no complicity with the *theoria* or *eidos* of vision; rather the voice is a polysensuous, even "tactile", phenomenon that breaks with the ocularcentrism accompanying phonocentrism in Derrida's account of onto-theology.³³⁰

³²⁵ Roland Barthes, *The pleasure of the text*, trans. Richard Miller, New York: Hill and Wang, 1975, 66 (hereafter, *Pleasure of text*).

³²⁶ *Pleasure of text*, 66.

³²⁷ *Pleasure of text*, 66-7.

³²⁸ *Pleasure of text*, 67.

³²⁹ I am not unaware of the vast problems of some of this work in terms of its essentialist tendencies, especially *vis-à-vis* the positing of an unmediated relationship between the feminine body and language, and the tendency to circumscribe the feminine within an archaic, prediscursive, materially or maternally connoted space. However, I cite these works (with these reservation) as a suggestive response to the silencing of physical voice that I have attempted to point to in Derrida, and as a site of re-appropriation of physiognomy into the purely solipsistic abstraction and transparent intelligibility of silent voice.

³³⁰ Irigaray, for instance, contends that "Investment in the look is not privileged in women as in men. More than the other senses, the eye objectifies and masters...In our culture, the predominance of

For Irigaray the "specularity" of Western philosophy is complicit with the "linear", "teleological", "stratifiable" structure of "proper" logical language.³³¹ The rethinking of language and its "specular make-up" necessitates a radical reorganisation of its teleological nature. Woman's "writing" would be a disruptive excess within unilinearity and the "recto-verso" structure of language, a "style" which "puts the torch to...proper terms, well constructed forms" and which is, amongst other things (as Cixous has also argued), "*tactile*".³³² Such a style does "not privilege sight"; rather, that which "resists" and "explodes" univocal meaning, linearity and teleology is made "audible and comprehensible."³³³ Irigaray's feminisation of language would thwart its cogency and integrity in such a way that "for every meaning posited—for every word, utterance, sentence...every phoneme, every letter—...a linear reading is no longer possible."³³⁴ Rather, "the retroactive impact of the end of each word, utterance or sentence upon its beginning" would work to "undo the power of its teleological effect."³³⁵

For Irigaray, the decimation of language engages a "*parler-femme*" which audibly enacts the morphological plurality of the feminine. *Parler-femme* is polyvocal insofar as it "speaks" from female corporeality: in contradistinction to the unicity of the masculine/phallogocentric order, the sexually-specific female body, according to Irigaray, is multivalent, diffusely erotogenised and unassimilable to any singular term, any 'identity'. Analogously, her language is polysemous and inimical to the unitary self-identity of *phonè* and *logos* required by ratiocination. The somatic and sonant manifestations of voice fracture discursive propriety, jettisoning "words": "she"

the look over smell, taste, touch, hearing has brought an impoverishment of bodily relations." Interview in eds. MF Hans and G Lapouge, *Les femmes, la pornographie, l'érotisme*, Paris, 1978, 50; (quoted in Stephen Heath, *Difference in Screen* Vol 19, #3, 1978, 84). For Cixous, masculine language turns on the "reductive look, the always divided look returning, the mirror economy", in contradistinction to the feminine text in which she locates a "privilege of the voice." See *The newly born woman*, trans. Betsy Wing, Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1986, 94, 92 (hereafter *Newly born woman*). Cixous writes further: "All the feminine texts I have read are very close to the flesh of language, much more so than masculine texts. There's tactility in the feminine text, there's touch, and this touch passes through the ear." *Castration or decapitation?* trans. Annette Kuhn in *Signs*, Autumn, 1981, 54. Irigaray also evokes a synaesthetic relation between language, tactility and physical contiguity, below. I explore this synaesthesia in relation also to Merleau-Ponty, below.

³³¹ See on this point *This sex which is not one*, trans. Catherine Porter, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985, 79-80 (hereafter *This sex*).

³³² *This sex*, 79-80.

³³³ *This sex*, 79-80.

³³⁴ *This sex*, 80.

³³⁵ *This sex*, 80.

"murmurs", "exclaims", "whispers", "[leaves] sentences...unfinished."³³⁶ "Her" words are "contradictory...somewhat mad from the standpoint of reason, inaudible for whoever listens to them with ready-made grids."³³⁷ *Parler femme*, in becoming audible, calls rather upon "another ear", an ear tuned in to "an 'other meaning', always in the process of weaving itself, of embracing...words, but also getting rid of words in order not to become...congealed in them."³³⁸ Speech, rendered here as absolutely proximate to morphology, is "contiguous" and haptic: *parler femme* finds its *arche* in the sexualised female body. Irigaray writes: "What she says is never identical with anything...rather it is contiguous. *It touches (upon)*. And when she strays too far from that proximity, she breaks off and starts over at 'zero': her body-sex."³³⁹

Irigaray's invocation of a corporealised voice is mirrored in Cixous. Cixous, however, extends the trope of somatic voice into an explicit appeal to a sonorous '*écriture*'. She writes of an "entwining" of body, voice and writing which renders the ostensible semantic 'plenitude' of voice suspect, insofar as it is suspended by manifold acoustic deformations and "lapses in cognition" (akin to those which Wood and Appelbaum invoke against Derridean silence). For Cixous, as for Irigaray, the speaking/thinking woman is corporeally "contiguous" with the voice, yet the 'interlacing' of body, voice and intellection is never perfectly coincident: voice constantly runs ahead of itself, "losing" itself and relinquishing its relation to ipseity as it traverses diverse material registers. The carnalisation of voice ultimately becomes a sonant "inscription" of "saying". Cixous writes:

Writing and voice are entwined and interwoven and writing's continuity/ voice's rhythm take each others breath away through interchanging, make the text gasp or form it out of suspenses or silences, make it lose its voice or rend it with cries....She goes completely into her voice...her flesh speaks true. Really she makes what she thinks materialise carnally, she conveys meaning with her body. She inscribes what she is saying...[]...Voice!...is launching forth and effusion without return. Exclamation, cry, breathlessness, yell, cough, vomit, music. Voice leaves. Voice loses. She leaves. She loses. And that is how she writes, as one throws a voice—forward, into the void.³⁴⁰

³³⁶ This sex, 29.

³³⁷ This sex, 29.

³³⁸ This sex, 29.

³³⁹ This sex, 29.

³⁴⁰ Newly born woman, 92-94.

Voice "inscribed", thought "materialised" in voice: the idea that spoken voice can, in its multifarious corporeal manifestations, undermine the purity and apodicticity of phenomenology's voice is not new. Nor is the trope of a textualised "writing aloud", of an "inscribed...saying." As Michel de Certeau points out, philosophy, on occasion, has laboured to hear "these voices [of the body] again", and thus to "create an auditory space" within text.³⁴¹

In "scholarly writing", Certeau locates a voice which bespeaks the "reminiscences of bodies lodged in ordinary language."³⁴² The "literary text" is "modified by becoming the ambiguous depth in which sounds that cannot be reduced to a meaning move about."³⁴³ A "dismembered writing", perhaps corresponding to that adduced by Irigaray and Cixous, evokes a "a *plural* body in which ephemeral oral rumours circulate:...a stage for voices."³⁴⁴ In such writing unframed sonorities irrupt into and fracture the coherence of language, creating "gaps in syntagmatic organisation",³⁴⁵ "undoing", as Irigaray wished, language's teleological imperative. No longer the province of transparent ratiocination, speech flows rather from the sonorous, fissile text as from an "opaque body",³⁴⁶ a body perhaps analogous to the fleshy corporeity of the Barthesian "grain" or "*l'écriture à haute voix*". And finally, voice appears here for Certeau as an audible *inscription* "without one's knowing where it came from (from what obscure...*writing of the body*)."³⁴⁷

With this notion of writing and voice entwined we return to the explicit concerns of the early Derrida: it was Derrida who ostensibly wished to liberate the "dissonance of writing *within* speech",³⁴⁸ a writing which, Derrida reminds us, is "the *body* and

³⁴¹ Michel de Certeau, *Quotations of voices*, in *The practice of everyday life*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988, 162 (hereafter, *Quotations of voices*). Here de Certeau cites Gilles Deleuze's and Felix Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* and Jean-Francois Lyotard's *Libidinal economy* as exemplary of philosophy's engagement with the body and voice in text.

³⁴² *Quotations of voices*, 163.

³⁴³ *Quotations of voices*, 162.

³⁴⁴ *Quotations of voices*, 162 (emphasis added).

³⁴⁵ *Quotations of voices*, 163.

³⁴⁶ *Quotations of voices*, 163.

³⁴⁷ *Quotations of voices*, 163 (emphasis added).

³⁴⁸ *Positions*, 42 (emphasis added).

matter external to the spirit."³⁴⁹ It is however Merleau-Ponty who, before Barthes, Cixous, et al, thought through voice in such a way as to strikingly anticipate Derrida's unfulfilled program, and perhaps to supplement the latter's somewhat paradoxical de-sonorisation of voice. In *The Visible and the Invisible* Merleau-Ponty interrogates the problem of voice *vis-à-vis* philosophy's "founding opposition": that between corporeality and noesis. (He does so, moreover, in such a way that meaning is problematised, but not entirely jettisoned in an appeal to a sonant corporeality, as is perhaps the case for Cixous and Irigaray.) The yield of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological meditation is a notion of sonorous inscription, and a trope of voice which, in striking opposition to that of Husserlian phenomenology, abandons the self-coincidence of *phonè* and *logos* required in the conventional 'reduction'. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty seems to prefigure the Derridean polemic concerning the chiasmic relation between a motif of inscription and speech—Derrida's own argument about the irreducible "intertwining" of terms which difference is intended to mobilise. The proximity between Merleau-Ponty's thinking on voice, and that of Derrida, takes us to the core of the polemic that I have attempted to adduce against the Derridean deaf spot.³⁵⁰

3.6 Merleau-Ponty, spacing, voice

David Farrell Krell discusses the conundrum of voice in Derrida in a reading of Merleau-Ponty which draws on the notion of embodied speech as sonorous writing.³⁵¹ Krell notes that Derrida had, in *Speech and Phenomena*, categorically denied that "the phenomenology of our body"³⁵² enables a rigorous confrontation with the problem of voice's idealisation. Further, he notes, Derrida had asserted that phenomenology is in any case always a "phenomenology of perception."³⁵³ Both claims, Krell evinces, are

³⁴⁹ OG, 35 (emphasis added).

³⁵⁰ In invoking Merleau-Ponty as a 'supplement' to Derrida, I am not unaware of the ontological overtones and metaphysical register of the former's work. I cite Merleau-Ponty in much the same way as I did the feminist commentators on voice. His argument is particularly suggestive on the question of the relationship of voice to world and corporeality; the very question that seems to undergo a reduction in Derrideanism in such a manner as to arguably disestablish Derrida's concomitant claims for the "body" and "world" against Husserlian transcendentalism.

³⁵¹ David Farrell Krell, *Engorged philosophy II*, in *Postmodernism and continental philosophy*, eds. Hugh J Silverman and Donn Welton, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988 (hereafter Engorged philosophy).

³⁵² SP, 75.

³⁵³ SP, 104.

repudiations of Merleau-Ponty. However, Krell asks, isn't perception in Husserl, and Derrida's polemic against it, based on the 'evidence' of the abstracted, acorporeal, nonmundane, living present—the source point for consciousness' contents—and on the quest for eidetic essence? Merleau-Ponty, in Krell's estimation, conceives on the other hand "the always-already-there character of the world, the impossibility of complete reduction, the merely apparent independence of eidetic essences..." the thrust of which is to "unsettle all the mechanisms and presuppositions of Husserlian phenomenology."³⁵⁴

Krell is interested in the "engorgement" of philosophy, the notion of a body which subsists in speech as the irreducible corporeal "integument" of signification. Thinking voice through Merleau-Ponty, Krell argues, may open the way to a conceptual engagement with the body's signifying sonority—an "engorged" philosophy (the play here being on the French 'gorge', the throat.) Krell raises the following questions:

*Must the voice function in unfailing complicity with idealisation? Or might the voice itself, especially if it is engorged by Jacques Derrida or Maurice Merleau-Ponty, hear the dull reverberations of its supposedly 'pure ideas'?...Can the speaking voice—leaving the phenomenological voice to its chronic laryngitis—ever refrain from plunging into the space of the world?...Is it not precisely the voice-in-communication that introduces alterity into the speaking subject?...Are not my words...so alive that they leap into the space of the world, drawing me in their wake out of myself and making me an 'allocutor', someone who speaks and is spoken to and who is never perfectly coincident in time?*³⁵⁵

This attenuated but still "reverberant" sound, the "allocation" of communication and its disconcerting temporal alterity, might obtrude noisily, according to Krell, at the point at which Derrida's objection to the phenomenological voice takes shape: where the voice fades away in its instantaneous passage to idealisation in the monologue. But this would require something that Derrida proscribes: the differant corporeality of sounded voice. For Derrida the idealising flight of the word is inevitable. For Merleau-Ponty, Krell argues, it is less so. He locates in *The Visible and the Invisible* an intertwining that redoubles voice and body in a profoundly decentering and indissoluble "*verflechtung*". In the section of the work entitled *The Intertwining—the Chiasm*, and in his unfinished *Working Notes*, Merleau-Ponty develops his "ultimate truth", (surely

³⁵⁴ Engorged philosophy, 56.

³⁵⁵ Engorged philosophy, 57.

a laughable idea to Derrida), the "reversibility" or crisscrossing of the interstices of corporeality, intellection and the world.

The world and the subject are thought by Merleau-Ponty as relational: There is "an exchange between me and the world. Between the phenomenal body and the 'objective' body, between the perceiving and the perceived."³⁵⁶ Vision, Merleau-Ponty contends, is caught in an irreducible intertwining with its object: "He who looks must not himself be foreign to the world that he looks at. As soon as I see...vision [is] doubled with a complementary vision or with another vision: myself seen from without, such as another would see me..."³⁵⁷ Touch, similarly, both touches and is touched. Each of the senses, moreover, is inter-implicated, engaged in a reciprocal relation, a kind of kin- or synaesthesia: touch "writes" itself in the visible, since the look also "palpates",³⁵⁸ and just as the look touches, touch "sees". Merleau-Ponty writes:

*There is a circle of the touched and the touching, the touched takes hold of the touching; there is a circle of the visible and the seeing...[what are these adhesions compared with those of the voice and the hearing?]....there is even an inscription of the touching in the visible, of the seeing in the tangible.*³⁵⁹

Intercorporeity and sight, then, are "inscribed" in their chiasmic interrelation, but so—and here we come to the salient point, in Krell's reading—is voice. Merleau-Ponty writes:

Like crystal, like metal and many other substances, I am a sonorous being, but I hear my own vibration from within;...I hear myself with my throat [je m'entends avec ma gorge]. In this...I am incomparable; my voice is bound to the mass of my own life as is the voice of no one else. But if I am close enough to the other who speaks to hear his breath and feel his effervescence and his fatigue, I almost witness, in him as in myself, the awesome birth of vociferation. As there is reflexivity of the touch, of sight, and of the touch-vision system, there is a reflexivity of the movements of phonation and of hearing; they have their

³⁵⁶ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The visible and the invisible*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968, 215 (emphasis added) (hereafter *Visible/invisible*).

³⁵⁷ *Visible/invisible*, 134.

³⁵⁸ *Visible/invisible*, 133.

³⁵⁹ *Visible/invisible*, 143 (emphasis added). The material in brackets appears in an editor's note indicating that Merleau-Ponty had inserted these words in the text.

*sonorous inscription...This new reversibility and the emergence of the flesh as expression are the point of insertion of speaking and thinking in the world of silence.*³⁶⁰

Undoubtedly, there are most undeconstructed Hegelian overtones here: the sounds of nature as the reverberations of subjectivity are invoked.³⁶¹ But Krell also notes the juncture that seems to link Merleau-Pontyan phenomenology with the deconstruction of voice via a kind of writing—a writing which is precisely the *sensible* inscription which philosophy considers the "body and matter external to the spirit". The chiasmic relation between phonation and hearing evinced by Merleau-Ponty traces a passage through the ineffaceable 'thickness' of the throat. There is a reversibility of 'speaking' and 'hearing'—the *je m'entends* or hearing-and-understanding-oneself-speak operates—but the phenomenological circle of conceptuality is transected here by the *gorge*. A visceral tract cleaves the transparent interiority of soliloquy, introducing lived corporeality, a body, into the solipsism's abstraction: I hear myself from within, but no longer *im selben Augenblick*—rather, "*avec ma gorge*." This reversibility of phonation and hearing, moreover, is metaphorised as a "*sonorous inscription*". An acoustic 'writing' traces an embodied passage through speaking and hearing, transforming the pure intellection of phenomenological silence, of "expression", into audible speech, and into "flesh". Indeed the "flesh", for Merleau-Ponty is this irreducible reversibility, the dual inward and outward, "phenomenal" and "objective", orientation which contests the reduction or sublimation of sensory reflexivity and embodied corporeality to solipsistic abstraction.³⁶²

³⁶⁰ Visible/invisible, 144-145. On the question of silence in Merleau-Ponty see Richard Lanigan, Speaking and semiology: Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological theory of existential communication, The Hague: Mouton, 1972, 164-167. Lanigan writes: "Merleau-Ponty's development of silence does not evolve a solipsistic point of view inasmuch as being silent always presumes a community of men (sic) endowed with speech..." *ibid.*, 167. And quoting Merleau-Ponty, he notes that solipsism is avoided because, as Merleau-Ponty writes "solitude [i.e., the silence of solipsism] and communication cannot be two horns of a dilemma, but two 'moments' of one phenomenon, since in fact other people do exist for me." Phenomenology of perception, trans. Colin Smith, New York: Humanities Press, 1962, 359. In such a reading, Merleau-Ponty's distance from Husserl's reduction of the spoken voice in communication is obvious.

³⁶¹ See on this point, Derrida, *The pit and the pyramid*, in MP, 69-108.

³⁶² On this conception of the "flesh" as reversibility see the Preface to Visible/invisible, liv-lvi. Merleau-Ponty's translator denotes "flesh" thus, showing both its cardinal status in the former's work, and its relation to the reversibility of perception and the body: "The concept of flesh emerges as the ultimate notion of Merleau-Ponty's thought; it is, he says...a prototype for Being universally...The flesh is the body inasmuch as it is the visible seer, the audible hearer, the tangible touch." *ibid.*, liv. This reversibility between the perceiver (the phenomenal body) and the perceived (the objective body) is, moreover, not perfectly circular, but fraught with an essential non-coincidence. On this point, Elizabeth Grosz notes: "Flesh is the term Merleau-Ponty uses to designate being, not as plenitude, self-identity or substance, but as divergence or non-coincidence...Flesh is being's reversibility [its] reflexivity, [a] fundamental gap or dehiscence...Between feeling (the dimension of subjectivity) and being felt (the dimension of objectuality) is a gulf spanned by the indeterminate and reversible phenomenon of the being touched and of the touching, the crossing over of what is

Wayne Froman has also adverted to the relationship between Derridean *écriture* and Merleau-Ponty, juxtaposing Derrida's notion of writing with Merleau-Ponty's interrogation of speech.³⁶³ With Krell, Froman contends that Merleau-Ponty has radicalised the question of voice/speech in a manner comparable to Derrida's deconstruction of phonocentrism. The polemic here concerns Derrida's declamation at the beginning of *Grammatology* which announces the "death" of "full speech", and a "new situation for speech....within a structure of which it will no longer be the archon."³⁶⁴ According to Froman, Merleau-Ponty articulates the structure which renders untenable the (phenomenologically-posed) coincidence of speech and meaning which makes of speech the "archon" of conceptuality. Froman seeks to show the correspondence between Merleau-Ponty's theorem of the perceptual-corporeal chiasm—the reversibility of the subject's sensate relation with the world—and the reversibility of speech.

The argument concerns the inevitable *incompleteness* of the circuit of reversibility. For Merleau-Pontyian phenomenology, the torsional interlacing of the perceptual relation between the world and the self, (such as that of "the touching and the touched") never coincides perfectly. Merleau-Ponty writes:

*To begin with we spoke summarily of a reversibility of the seeing and the visible, of the touching and the touched. It is time to emphasise that it is a reversibility always imminent and never realised in fact. My left hand is always on the verge of touching my right hand touching things, but I never reach coincidence; the coincidence eclipses at the moment of realisation, and either one of two things always occurs: either my right hand really passes over into the rank of the touched, but then its hold on the world is interrupted; or it retains its hold on the world, but then I do not really touch it—my right hand touching, I palpate with my left hand only its outer covering.*³⁶⁵

touching to what is touched, the ambiguity which entails that each hand is in the...position of both subject and object...phenomenal and objectual body." Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile bodies: Towards a corporeal feminism*, Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1994, 100. I develop this "gulf", "divergence" or dehiscence "spanned" by reversibility in relation to the reversibility of phonation and hearing below.

³⁶³ See Wayne Froman, *Merleau-Ponty and l'écriture*, in *Writing the politics of difference*, ed. Hugh J Silverman, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991, 193-202 (hereafter *MP* and *l'écriture*).

³⁶⁴ *OG*, 8.

³⁶⁵ *Visible/invisible*, 147-148.

This dynamic and asymptotic interrelationship of self-touching and touching the world, or interiority and exteriority, is marked by an ineliminable interruption. There is an inevitable slippage between touching and being touched, a dynamic flux between the body as subject and the body as object. The diastematic space which opens within the auto-affective, tactile relation to the self, and between the self and the world, is also the divergence—the "hinge", "hiatus" or "slippage"—immanent in the chiasm of voice and hearing. Merleau-Ponty writes:

I do not hear myself as I hear the others, the sonorous existence of my voice is for me...poorly exhibited; I have rather an echo of its articulated existence...But this incessant escaping, this impotency to superpose exactly upon one another...the auditory experience of my own voice and that of other voices—this is not a failure. For if these experiences never exactly overlap, if they slip away at the very moment they are about to rejoin, if there is always a 'shift', a 'spread', between them, this is precisely because...I hear myself both from within and from without. I experience...the transition and the metamorphosis of the one experience into the another...[through] the hinge between them...this hiatus...between my voice heard and my voice uttered.³⁶⁶

This "hiatus" might perhaps be thought as a spacing: it impedes the temporal coincidence of voice and subjective interiority *qua* consciousness, rendering impossible the concomitant superposition of voice projected and voice interiorised (as *logos*). The subject cannot 'hear' and 'understand-oneself-speak' in a plenary self-coincidence. The voice's projection traces, rather, a bending-back or return of speech, an "echo" of "articulation". The interval between projection and interiorisation "eclipses" the exercise of pure auto-affection, making an ellipsis of the closed circuit of conceptuality *qua* voice: "I hear myself from within and without" in such a way that the temporal instantaneity of noesis putatively effected by voice is obviated. Superposition "slips away". The subject experiences not the identity of voice uttered and heard, but the transformation of the voice "without" to the voice "within". Since the deferred, displaced "outside" is ineffaceably implicated in the "inside", a proto-Derridean *écriture*, perhaps, abjures the exercise of ipseity.

This "hinge" or "hiatus", moreover, appears later in *The intertwining—the chiasm* as a "trace(ing)."³⁶⁷ Here, Froman suggests, the trace becomes the key to

³⁶⁶ *Visible/invisible*, 148.

³⁶⁷ As Krell points out, other Derridean terms such as "invagination", "*différence*" and "inscription" are "Merleau-Ponty's words." *Engorged philosophy*, 63.

thinking through the "most difficult point": the relation of conceptuality to corporeality, and subjective interiority to exteriority. These axiomatically opposed terms are thought relationally by Merleau-Ponty, in a manner which retains a synergy with the transformed concept of *écriture* as the difference which "resists" and "sustains" philosophical dichotomisation in Derrida's account.

The drive to self-coincidence (solipsism), Froman argues, requires that an opposition be established between the intelligible and the sensible. The sensible can then be reduced, in the case of voice, to noetic silence. The trace, however, is the interval into the world and upon embodied speech which persists ineluctably, even as an attempt is made to *elide* the chiasmic or interlaced relation of conceptuality and sensibility by *dichotomising* body and intellection. Froman writes:

*The 'trace' is the 'hinge' that remains when the 'noncoincidence' of reversibility is effaced in the establishment of an opposition between the...sensible and the intelligible—in an effort to recapture a self-coincidence of a subject before the sounding of...voice.*³⁶⁸

The attempt to seize "self-coincidence"—an instant of plenary presence—is anterior to *sounding* voice: it occurs, in other words, in the silence of solipsism, a pure but aphonic speech secure in the sphere of ratiocination. The exertion toward aphonic auto-affection, is, Froman suggests, "That effort [which] suppresses writing, in that writing is relegated to a falling away further from the self-coincidence that is to be recaptured, in the domain of the purely intelligible, by way of full or pure [silent] speech."³⁶⁹ Yet, the trace, in Froman's account, persists against the effort to suppress it. As the point of dehiscence and rupture of auto-affection which opens the possibility of speech, the trace corrupts the silence of pure intelligibility, gesturing rather, Froman contends, towards the "reversibility at work between the 'graphic' and the 'sonorous substance' between locutors."³⁷⁰ Voice and 'writing' entwined intervene to displace the Husserlian enterprise in which plenary conceptuality is "expressed" by the irrevocably-mute monad: the dichotomisation of silence as intellection, and speech as embodied sensibility, fails. Rather, in Froman's reading, the terms are co-implicated, chiasmically. Sounding voice inexorably corrupts silence insofar as a trace irrupts into

³⁶⁸ MP and l'écriture, 198.

³⁶⁹ MP and l'écriture, 198

³⁷⁰ MP and l'écriture, 201-202 (emphasis added).

solitude, transforming the realm of noesis into that of sensible speech, a speech which engages the other as "locutor". Hence, in Froman's estimation, "...it is Merleau-Ponty who worked a way through the problem of full speech to a new situation of speech within the dynamic structure of 'reversibility' and the question concerning 'the trace'"; Merleau-Ponty did so, moreover, in such a way that "speech makes its appearance in writing."³⁷¹ This reversibility of writing (trace) and speech, Froman suggests, perhaps becomes the liminal "point of insertion of speaking and thinking in [solipsism's] silence."

The displacement of solipsistic silence by voiced writing, the sonorising of *écriture* such as Froman has identified, leads Krell to propose a point of contact between Derrideanism—the deconstruction of phenomenology's silent voice; and Merleau-Pontyan phenomenology—the possibility of a nonself-coincident but still audible voice. He writes: "If something like a Merleau-Ponty/Derrida colloquy...develops, might it not hinge on the question of the relation of the *sonorous inscription* to *archaic writing*? And would not such a colloquy link phenomenology and deconstruction to engorged philosophy?"³⁷² I think not, as far as Derrida is concerned, for Derrida has already ruled out Merleau-Ponty *tout court*. Merleau-Ponty is the mere *dissecta membra* of the deconstructive machine.³⁷³ This elliptical reversibility, the spaced intertwining of voice and writing upon which Merleau-Ponty's engagement with voice turns, is perhaps the *audible écriture* which Derrida annuls in *differance*.

However, Merleau-Ponty's anticipation of the Derridean gesture of *differance*, as the undecidable limen that at once opposes and interweaves auto-affection and alterity, and intellection and the body, is remarkable. Merleau-Ponty, as Krell points out, invokes also elsewhere the figure of a speaker speaking with a kind of dehiscence which means that she hears herself not only through the closed-circuit 'interiority' of the glottal and palatal work of phonation (an interiority already 'heard' corporeally, through the *gorge*), but also through the ineliminable *extrinsicity* of outside—here figured as alterity. Speaking to oneself becomes allocution, an 'other-ed' speaking that fails to coincide with the plenary interiorisation required by the absolute subject. Merleau-Ponty writes:

³⁷¹ *MP and l'écriture*, 198, 202.

³⁷² *Engorged philosophy*, 61.

³⁷³ See Derrida's brief repudiation of Merleau-Ponty in *The time of a thesis: punctuations*, in *Philosophy in France today*, ed. Alan Montefiore, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, 38.

*To the extent that what I say has meaning, I am for myself, when I speak, another 'other'; and to the extent that I understand, I no longer know who is talking and who is listening.*³⁷⁴

Just as in *The Visible and the Invisible*, the conflation of voice and ratiocination is vitiated. Rather, a chiasm between the self and "another other" gestures toward a dynamic intertwining and dehiscence, a simultaneous yet discrepant interplay, of saying and understanding, speaking and listening, interiority and alterity, which renders ipseity and otherness simultaneously fissile and conjoined: I am (both) "for myself" (and) "another other". The self both speaks and listens, but now, always, at an irreducible self-distance—in a diacritical, chiastically intertwined relation as both the 'speaker' and the 'spoken to'. Merleau-Ponty seems to prefigure Derrida's insistence that phenomenological solipsism, 'speaking to oneself', is always already a "theatre stage". A re-presentational interval, akin to a spacing, splits the circuit of intellection. Ipseity itself is relational, since meaning always comes at the expense of pure self-coincidence: to the extent that meaning is available to me, I am always "another other". Since alterity corrupts monadic life, there is, perhaps, a difference in the "hinge" of reversibility.

Such a spacing, according to Krell, introduces a discursive outside into the nonmundane *s'entendre parler* : an outside which engages the other, and points to the rootedness of the commerce of body and speech in the world. Here, Krell invokes the figures on the "Cozumhualapa stele...whose discourse with one another is portrayed by coiling ribbons of speech flowing from the mouth of each...to the mouth of the other." Speech, Krell writes, traverses from "gorge to gorge *through the medium of the world*."³⁷⁵ Perhaps, at this point, the phenomenological voice plunges to the bottom of Agamben's aphonic abyss. It falls bathetically from its transcendental passage to universality into the weight and opacity of the empirical and corporeal—into sounded speech.³⁷⁶ Philosophy's concern, Merleau-Ponty suggests, is "*the reconversion of silence*

³⁷⁴ Merleau-Ponty, *Signes*, Paris: Gallimard, 1960, 121, quoted in *Engorged philosophy*, 62.

³⁷⁵ *Engorged philosophy*, 62.

³⁷⁶ Krell sets out the following challenge to Derridean deconstruction: "The scene of writing is *of the world*. If the philosopher cannot quit the Hegelian gallery of spirit's heroes, the gallery that is in fact a labyrinth [the labyrinth that Derrida invokes at the conclusion of *SP*] he can surely learn that his maze and the world are not coterminous...Foucault accuses Derrida of *la petite pedagogie*, with all the little scholars rapt to His Master's Voice. [Perhaps this is the aphonic *gramma*, the "Voice" Agamben locates in Derrida?] If we want to say that Foucault's accusation is unfair, as I am convinced it is, then we must insist on the worldly engagement—and engorgement—of deconstruction." *Engorged philosophy*, 63.

and speech into one another."³⁷⁷ But clearly, Derrida demurs; he paradoxically "surpasses" a philosophy besmirched by fleshy speech. Perhaps, then, the Derrida of *Speech and Phenomena* and *Of Grammatology* would himself have to be surpassed to render voice sonorous, if never replete.

To invoke a somatised voice is perhaps to risk a crude materialism or essentialism, to perhaps appeal to a mere inversion of opposition, or worse, to hazard what Derrida would no doubt consider a "theoretical regression" into "a phenomenology of [the] body". Perhaps the 'answer' to the question of "the privilege of voice" is not simply, or unproblematically, Barthes "writing aloud", Appelbaum's sonorous voice "fraught with human suffering", Cixous' "flesh speaking true", Agamben's "human speech itself", or even Merleau-Ponty's sonorous, "engorged" *écriture*—although it does seem to me that these writers, particularly Merleau-Ponty, are interrogating the eminently liminal and undecidable space *between* spoken voice and an inscriptional trope, and between intelligibility and sensibility, upon which Derrideanism stakes its claim. And even if the conundrum of voice—like metaphysics—is perhaps insuperable, still, to reduce spoken voice to a trope of aphonia is to circumvent the very *problem* posed by it, if, as Derrida has it, the silent *phonè* governs all of onto-theology.

Derrida has claimed, in *Speech and Phenomena*, that the voice's "excellence" in metaphysics is based on the "unity of sound and *phonè*" which conditions voice's status as the "sole case to escape the distinction between what is worldly and what is transcendental."³⁷⁸ Yet he himself has shown that in philosophy, voice's "worldliness", its physical sonority and its spatiality are always already sublimated and idealised in the reduction to a diaphanous silence conflated with the temporal instantaneity of noesis. For Husserl, only the "completely muted voice of solitary mental life" is equal to consciousness; for Saussure, it is the phenomenological "being-heard" of the sound, the radically other of "real sound in the world." The inability to distinguish the worldly and the transcendental *qua* voice perhaps presupposes only *philosophy's* voice: a crystalline voice which is silent, pure, transparent, "alive", immediate, apodictic, temporally "present", free of the mundane spatiality which would be "the death of self-presence", and uncontaminated by corporeality with its thanatic stench of the finite. A voice conceived as "opaque", "embodied", "thick", "visceral", or "entwined" with the writing which philosophy considers "the body and matter external to spirit" would most assuredly not escape this distinction. Especially

³⁷⁷ *Visible/invisible*, 129 (emphasis added).

³⁷⁸ *SP*, 79.

not, if as Krell argues, voice engages the *spatial* and *worldly* motility of the viscera—the tongue, pharynx lungs, glottis and larynx—"inevitably a *space in the world*."³⁷⁹ Rather, "voice's voice" would obtrude into the *cogito* as a noisy, intractable residuum of all the detritus which it is philosophy's vocation to exclude. Hence, the other side of metaphysics' voice is revealed: it is "by the same token" that voice makes "th[e] distinction [between the worldly and the transcendental] possible."³⁸⁰ The paradigmatic dichotomy mobilised by both Husserl and Saussure—metonyms, in Derrida's hands, for the history of western thought—is the familiar, ineradicable abyss between the sensible and the intelligible; or matter and form, exteriority and interiority, spatiality and temporality, body and spirit, the sensual and the noetic, mere sonorous voice, and silence.

In claiming to surmount the founding metaphysical oppositions, Derrida contends that spacing (hence difference and writing) introduce "space", "the outside", "the body" and "the world"—all that philosophy expunges—into solipsism. He asserts moreover that his anti-phonocentric opus delivers the "dissonance of a writing within speech." Yet sounding voice has no place in the anechoic world of the early Derrida, which takes as its *principium* the "neutralisation" of the phonic substance. Perhaps Derrida thus reveals his own sonophobic deaf-spot: the intra-philosophical legacy of a tradition which only ever thinks voice as interior, disembodied and nonmundane. For in *Speech and Phenomena* and *Of Grammatology*, the "spacing", "body" and "world" of voice are ultimately eclipsed by aphonia, and voice is restored once again to its rightful ontological *arche*, not as sound, but as noetic silence.

³⁷⁹ *Engorged philosophy*, 57 (emphasis added).

³⁸⁰ *SP*, 79.

Postface

Instead of a conclusion: Derrida, vision, silence

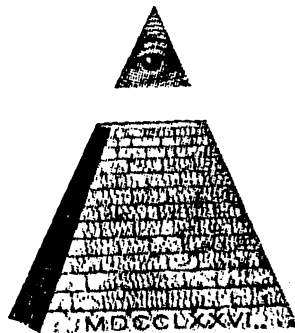


Figure 5

How might it become possible to engage with the formidable polemic which reveals the silent voice at the centre of philosophy, yet still allow the voice its sonority? Is there a way to disengage the Derrida who would reproduce the axiological silencing of voice in western philosophy from the Derrida who furnishes the conceptual basis for rethinking this very silence? It seems to me, rather, that a disentanglement from the critique which "neutralises" sound as it "encompasses and irrevocably surpasses"³⁸¹ all metaphysics, is not so easily accomplished, just as Derrida's own emancipation from onto-theology is perhaps incomplete. The Derrida of *Speech and Phenomena* and *Of Grammatology* perhaps takes his place within the genealogy of orthodox thought on voice and sound, in respect not only of the sublation of sounding voice, but also, arguably, in the recourse to an appeal to visionary motifs.

In his scrupulous critique of phonocentrism Derrida has restored primacy to the now transformed notion of writing. The ultimate residue of the critique is an intractably mute inscriptional trope, an organising and primordial *ne plus ultra* of philosophical insight, symbolised, Derrida says, in a "silent mark", the "capital form of the letter", a "pyramid", a "tomb" which "cannot even be made to resonate",³⁸² an anechoic sepulchre for voice. In differance, the insonorous, pyramidal 'A' stands as an apical moment—or, as Derrida wishes, a "tacit monument"—elucidating his program. Yet the pyramid, despite Derrida's protestations, is perhaps not fortuitous here. For at its apex, in western thought, is also the omniscient eye. Mark C. Taylor describes the iconography of the pyramid complete with the ocularcentric motif at its vertex: "Who's eye is in the triangle? God's we are told. The image of the eye within a triangle surrounded by rays of the sun is a common symbol for the all-seeing, panoptical, penal, eagle eye of God."³⁸³

Or perhaps the eye of Derrida? Derrida, as I have suggested, is acutely cognisant of the constitutive role of the theoretical authority of vision in onto-theology.³⁸⁴ However, on this line of argument, there are, arguably, parallels between the cardinal

³⁸¹ *SP*, 135.

³⁸² *SP*, 132.

³⁸³ Mark C Taylor, *Altarity*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987, 257. It should be noted here that Taylor does not propose the argument that I am pointing to here which would examine the relationship between this particular symbolisation of the pyramid and Derrida's deconstructive gesture.

³⁸⁴ See on this point 7-8, above.

status of difference in Derrida's *oeuvre*, and the complicity of silence, visionary motifs and writing in philosophy. On this point, Stephen Tyler contends that philosophical/scientific discourse (in which, he argues, Derrida participates) is "no hankering for inner voices", but rather "the lust for the visual, for the *res* [the thing] as *eidos*, for 'mental experience' as a 'vision'."³⁸⁵ Philosophy, he maintains, is a "videocentrism" in which writing partakes as the symbol for a vision which would reveal "universal things."³⁸⁶ Derridean writing, in Tyler's account, becomes the "visible sign of the yearning for the visible, which, when cleansed of its oral residues, dreams the destiny of...a glass to see through—a lens to amplify the power of sight."³⁸⁷ Moreover, Tyler contends, writing has to do with *topoi*, spaces, which favour the static "visual allegory" over the impermanence, flow and change of sound.³⁸⁸ David Levin, similarly, argues that writing (understood empirically) provides the immutable form which onto-theology requires, and enables the presence of the object to the gaze. Levin asserts that "Derrida's contention that the 'metaphysics of presence' is 'phonocentric' will turn out to be more problematic and controversial than he may have thought, because the temporality of sounds never lets us forget impermanence and never allows us a total grasp and possession."³⁸⁹ In the context of a critique of a "fully and self-sufficiently present" seeing,³⁹⁰ which makes possible "totalisation" and "reification", Levin contends that it is the written/visual text which always "tempts us to see a total survey of words that are more permanently recorded and unchanging."³⁹¹ Insofar as this is the case, Levin concludes (in an implicit rejoinder to Derrida's cardinal inscriptional motif) that "it would seem that writing would do more to encourage traditional ontology than speaking."³⁹²

Further, John McCumber points out that Derrida's polemic against phonocentrism replaces voice (the audible) with writing (the visible). He notes however that such a

³⁸⁵ Stephen Tyler, The unspeakable: discourse, dialogue and rhetoric in the postmodern world, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987, 9 (hereafter, The unspeakable)

³⁸⁶ The unspeakable, 9.

³⁸⁷ The unspeakable, 9-10.

³⁸⁸ See on this point, The unspeakable, 47, 48.

³⁸⁹ David Levin, The listening self: personal growth, social change and the closure of metaphysics, London: Routledge, 1989, 28 (hereafter, Listening self).

³⁹⁰ Here, Levin draws on John Sallis, Delimitations: phenomenology and the end of metaphysics, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986, 22.

³⁹¹ Listening self, 28.

³⁹² Listening self, 28.

statement must be qualified, since Derridean *écriture* is not writing in the "vulgar" sense but rather "a set of characteristics which applies to all textuality...whether we see it or hear it. It is no more literally visual than was Plato's vision of the Forms: it is vision displaced."³⁹³ Nevertheless, McCumber contends, traces of the metaphysical project remain in the Derridean text; indeed the comparison McCumber makes is precisely that of Derridean difference with a photological trope of Platonic formalism:

*Insofar as it gives the conditions of the possibility-and-impossibility of textuality, indeed of philosophical discourse in general, must not écriture be itself unchanging—not an unchanging structure, but, like Plato's sun, a sort of eternally occurrent, and in that way stable, de-structuring?*³⁹⁴

This apparent "stability" or immutability of *écriture*—symbolised and monumentalised in the hypostatised, silent a—is also somewhat puzzling. Derrida had himself shown that Husserl was forced ineluctably to concede that writing is the form in which idealities can most perfectly be preserved to fulfil their teleological commitment to the infinite repetition of the same.³⁹⁵ Mere voice is inopportunately tied to individual subjectivities. It cannot guarantee the infinite transmission of sense. To conserve absolutely ideal meaning, voice must be recorded in writing; it must be universalised so as to transcend and perdure beyond the finite existence of the sole locutor. Yet, writing inevitably institutes the "crisis" that removes voice from self-evidence: writing, unlike the phenomenological (silent) voice, is merely empirical, contingent and sensuous.³⁹⁶ This irreducible contradiction which besets writing is, in one sense, the core of Derrida's stratagem: his "liberation" of writing/graphic substance against voice is intended to *induce* the crisis in phenomenology. But perhaps it is *also* the aporia which strikes at the heart of his own project. As I have tried to show, in emancipating writing as the empirical, sensuous and contingent, Derrida does little to follow to his own potential conclusions the liberation of language from the grip of phenomenology with respect to the contingency, sensuousness and empiricity of sounded voice. Moreover, at the same instant at which he celebrates the crisis that is instituted in the deconstruction of silent

³⁹³ The closure of vision, 245.

³⁹⁴ The closure of vision, 245. McCumber adds, with respect to Derrida's panoptic and totalising treatment of the philosophers whom he critiques, "Is there not a kind of uniformity to the lability that Derrida introduces into the texts he writes on—whether of Plato, Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, Heidegger, or others—such that all the vibrations, the undertones and overtones, the resonances and dissonances he finds in them seem to take us, again and again, to the same nonplace?" *ibid.*, 246.

³⁹⁵ See the critique of ideality undertaken in Derrida's Husserl's origin of geometry: an introduction.

³⁹⁶ On these points see Husserl's origin of geometry, 87-93.

voice, Derrida seems to monumentalise the 'ideality' of difference as a "scripturalised", immortal 'sense', as David Farrell Krell argues.

Krell agrees with Derrida's interpretation of *Origin*, that it is in fact writing which monumentalises the *logos* in western philosophy; writing (and, Krell suggests, correlatively, vision) lend conceptuality its formalist due of infinite iteration. But, he seems to suggest, is it not somewhat curious that Derrida arguably repeats this move:

*Is it phonality as such that is decisive for the tradition of intellectualism, or is it not rather the perceptual faith of anonymous visibility...?...Is it not the nonacoustic signifier, preeminently the written sign, that grants access to a monumentalised, scripturalised, immortalised infinite? Is not the most intriguing aspect of Derrida's analysis of the voice the fact that it never speaks but only writes phenomenological or deconstructive tracts?*³⁹⁷

Irene Harvey extends the assertion that links Derridean difference with an "immortalised infinite". Harvey contends that Derridean difference is a form of Kantian idealism which wrests writing from its empirical dimension only to reinstate it as a transcendental form. The appropriation or "borrowing" of writing understood empirically

*allows for the constitution of a model which is then transplanted from the 'empirical' plane of...writing...to one which can only be considered, if not metaphysical...at least, in the sense that Kant used the term—transcendental. Writing as difference, in its ontological role, thus appears to us in much the same way [as] form.*³⁹⁸

Writing as difference loses its particularity as it ascends to the realm of universality "where it not only sustains the same form but, in taking on a transcendental character (beyond empirical intuition...) it returns to organise and preformulate all experience as within that same form."³⁹⁹ Derridean *écriture*, Harvey contends, mirrors Kant's *a priori* forms of intuition insofar as it "extend[s] beyond knowledge as such to a realm which organises the conditions of its possibility."⁴⁰⁰ And it was Derrida himself, as

³⁹⁷ Engorged philosophy, 57-8.

³⁹⁸ Derrida and the economy of difference, 241.

³⁹⁹ Derrida and the economy of difference, 241.

⁴⁰⁰ Derrida and the economy of difference, 241-242.

noted at the beginning of this circuitous trajectory through difference, who warned that "form is presence itself."⁴⁰¹ Linking the concept of form to ocularcentrism, Derrida argued further that "the metaphysical domination of the concept of form cannot fail to effectuate a certain subjection to the *look*." This subjugation effected by form "would always be a subjection of *sense* to seeing, of sense to the sense of sight..."⁴⁰²

If however, as Derrida claims, difference is as 'invisible' as it is inaudible, since it always "sinks into darkness",⁴⁰³ and since it is "anterior to...light",⁴⁰⁴ the axis of the problem is shifted, but perhaps not overcome. The invisibility of what Rodolphe Gasché names the Derridean "infrastructure" is itself potentially problematic since, as Gasché contends, it "seems to be linked to a powerful motif in classical philosophy according to which what makes visibility possible must itself remain invisible."⁴⁰⁵ Indeed, this is just what Derrida's has argued: "Visibility should—not be visible. According to an old, omnipotent logic that has reigned since Plato, that which enables us to see should remain invisible, black, blinding."⁴⁰⁶ The heliotropic tenor of Western metaphysics, which metaphorises the sun as the source of philosophical illumination, also engages, according to Derrida, with darkness and invisibility: the sun can be at once "blinding...luminous [and] dazzling"; and like God's presence, the sun's "presence disappear[s] in its own radiance, the hidden source of light, of truth, and of meaning."⁴⁰⁷ In this reading, difference, as the "invisible...connection between two spectacles",⁴⁰⁸ the "invisible difference" in the "body of the inscription"⁴⁰⁹ begins to

⁴⁰¹ SP, 108. In *Speech and Phenomena*, Derrida shows the consonance between Husserl's notion of form (which is the subject of the above comment) and the Kantian Idea: "Every time the element of presence becomes threatened, Husserl will awaken it...and bring it back to itself in the form of...an Idea in the Kantian sense. There is no ideality without there being an Idea in the Kantian sense at work...This ideality is the very form in which the presence of an object may...be infinitely repeated as the *same*." SP, 9.

⁴⁰² SP, 108-109. See on these points page 8, above. Derrida is drawing here on the notion of form as *eidos*, with its ocularcentric connotations as, in Heidegger's etymological account, "that in which what presences shows what it is." (see 7, above); or as Derrida himself puts it as "the presence of the thing to sight as *eidos*" (see 4, above).

⁴⁰³ SP, 133.

⁴⁰⁴ OG, 65.

⁴⁰⁵ Tain, 230.

⁴⁰⁶ Derrida, *Living on: Border lines*, in *Deconstruction and criticism*, ed. Harold Bloom et al, New York: Seabury Press, 1979, 90-91, quoted in Tain, 230.

⁴⁰⁷ Derrida, *White mythology: metaphor in the text of philosophy*, in MP, 267, 268.

⁴⁰⁸ SP, 133.

⁴⁰⁹ OG, 65.

appear, somewhat paradoxically, as analogous to the conventionally philosophical heliotrope. It takes on the (ontological) character of an intractably *inapparent* origin of light (and of sound and all conceptuality).

Gasché, however, defends Derrida against the charge that the ground which he himself establishes (the invisible, the inaudible—*differance*) is itself the hidden source which is classically philosophical condition of the possibility of the visible. Gasché writes: "The motif of the invisible source of light, this unheard source of speech [*differance*] is only the negative image of what I have called the irreducible and originary doubling [the infrastructure of *differance*]."410 *Differance*, then, is a kind of motif of the originary invisibility; *differance* "images" or *reflects* negatively the invisibility of what makes visibility possible. In this account, Derridean *differance* takes on a redoubled and even more profoundly ocularcentric tenor as a reflection of an "invisible source". John McCumber notes the paradox which renders Derridean *differance* consummately ocularcentric: "Gasché...at once subtracts visionary motifs from Derrida's account of the 'unseen source' and reinstates them more deeply: visionary motifs do not apply to the 'unseen source' because it is in fact the 'negative image' of the unseen source."411

In this photological scenario Derrida maintains that *differance*—the 'blink', which would descend to sever the circuit of silent voice and "close the [phenomenological] eye"412—renders eidetic insight dark, and itself remains invisible. But this is perhaps because it makes possible a superior kind of "look into essences". After all, the crepuscular adumbration of the blink, the invisible/inaudible source, reveals the ultimate 'truth' of the *indisponibilité* of the look and the collusive voice in occidentalism: the *essence* of post-Derridean philosophy comes down to the assertion that "there never was any 'perception'."413 And if, in the economy of *differance*, Husserl's phenomenological "'look' cannot 'abide'"414 this is perhaps because the look *need* not abide: the hubristic decimation of phono-ocularcentrism reveals, finally, that there is no-thing to be seen, and, indeed, no-thing to be heard in the phenomenological voice. *Differance* yields the putatively supra-metaphysical insight that "the thing

410 *Tain*, 230.

411 *The closure of vision*, 247.

412 *SP*, 65.

413 *SP*, 103.

414 *SP*, 104.

itself always escapes"⁴¹⁵ the eye of *eidos*, and the corresponding self-evidence of voice. The intra-philosophical conventionalism of this 'discovery' is revealed, in turn, by Agamben. As Agamben notes, philosophy has always answered the question 'What is in the voice?' in the following way: "Nothing is in the voice...It is Voice"; in other words, it is writing, that ineffaceable difference between the "thing" and its interpretation, which is, and always has been, the formal limit of thought.⁴¹⁶

Perhaps then, Derrideanism, with all the ostentatious brilliance of its arcane polemic encompasses rather more than it surpasses metaphysics. Perhaps Derridean deconstruction is caught up, in much the same way as those writers who fall victim to its dazzling deconstructive manoeuvring, with the aporetic nature of philosophical argument. Krell points telling to this conundrum, in reflecting on Derrida's confrontation with voice. He writes: "Is there not a sense in which Derrida is so entirely right because he is so completely wrong?"⁴¹⁷ So entirely right—the silent voice is indeed a touchstone of occidentalism. Yet *so completely wrong*—so are writing and "anonymous visibility", or indeed invisibility as the origin of vision; and in reducing voice to silence and writing Derrida's misprision perhaps repeats a fundamental metaphysical gesture.

I do not proffer here the critique that would be required to trace in the requisite detail Derrida's relation to the ocularcentrism which, he asserts, accompanies phonocentrism in western thought. Rather, I return to the voice, offering an elliptical response to Derridean anti-phonocentrism by way of Derrida's own *cri de coeur* at the denouement of *Speech and Phenomena*: "It remains, then, for us to *speak*, to make our voice *resonate*...in order to make up for [*suppléer*] the break up of presence."⁴¹⁸ To "speak" in philosophy, to "supplement" the corruption of presence, is to attempt to *recapture* presence; it is to know in the identity of an instant the fullness of an ideality immediately available to a transcendental subjectivity. Derrida must be just kidding: his invocation to "resonant" vocality is surely duplicitous. For Derrida a "making up

⁴¹⁵ SP, 104.

⁴¹⁶ In the preface to *Language and death*, Agamben notes that the book is the result of a "long *sunousia* with 'the thing itself'." Language and death, ix. As noted above, Agamben argues that the confrontation with the "thing" always turns on the place of negativity in philosophy as the ground for thought, represented in the notion of the silent voice as *gramma* or writing. He extends this polemic in an article entitled *The thing itself* wherein he argues, as he had in *Language and death*, that the Aristotelian "letter" as the "interpreter of voice" is the "limit", the "index sui" beyond which no further interpretation of the "thing", in philosophy, is possible. See Agamben, *The thing itself*, Substance #53, 1987, 27. Agamben dedicates this work to Derrida.

⁴¹⁷ Engorged philosophy, 58.

⁴¹⁸ SP, 104.

for", a supplementarity—that is, *writing*—will never come to restore full presence to voice. Rather, the Icarian pretence of the *phonè* to transcendence, to the plenitude of voice without difference, is doomed to failure: "The phoneme...is the *phenomenon of the labyrinth*. Rising toward the sun of presence, it is the way of Icarus."⁴¹⁹ For the Derrida of *Speech and Phenomena*, words' wings fall singed back into the chthonic space of the labyrinth, scorched by sun as the heliotrope remains high in the firmament. The luminous *a* of difference—perhaps so dazzling that it is "blinding, dark, invisible"—thwarts the flight toward transcendence of the word. Philosophy—phonocentrism—is burnt by the incandescence of difference, as speech is touched by difference's sun. But need the Icarian descent of the word mean silence?

On the question of a voice utterly silenced, perhaps by the heliotrope of difference, a segue may be inserted, which returns, like a repetition, to the critique of the complicity of the eye and the ethereal voice. In the short essay *Form and Meaning*, (contemporaneous with *Speech and Phenomena* and *Of Grammatology*), Derrida extends the polemic on Husserl embodied in the latter works. Derrida adverts here to the visionary motifs of onto-theology, the complicity of vision with *eidos* as pure "form", revolving endlessly in the infinite repetition of the same. He also addresses that radical heterogeneity which I traced in the exposition of Derrida's Husserl: Husserl had sought to establish an idealising passage to infinity, a circular complicity between the pre-expressive stratum of sense—pure form, the 'eye' of the *eidos*—and expressive meaning, that ether of silent voice. Between this solipsistic silence, and the mere material and contingent world of spoken discourse, Husserl set up an irremediable rift. But the repetition which, as we saw, introduces material contingency into the ideal of self-presence, intervenes as an ellipsis—perhaps, a spacing—to displace the circle. And what does Derrida conclude? It is perhaps fitting to close by invoking Derrida against Derrida:

*By strictly speaking repeating this circle in its own historical possibility we allow the production of some elliptical change of site, within the difference involved in repetition; this displacement is no doubt deficient, but with a deficiency that is not yet, or is already no longer, absence, negativity, nonbeing, lack, silence.*⁴²⁰

If this elliptical displacement, this spacing, is not silence, then what? To invoke

⁴¹⁹ *SP*, 104.

⁴²⁰ *SP*, 128.

"intramundane metaphors",⁴²¹ Derrida says, is no solution. Rather, Derrida counsels, we must multiply *antagonistic* metaphors: "wish *sensibilised*."⁴²² Perhaps, then, this ellipsis harbours the *flesh* of voice, the *matter* of mind, the *sensible* of the sentient, the *world* of the Word. Perhaps it traces that "passage through form which is also the passage through the imprint"; the duplicity which would make "the meaning of difference...more accessible if the unity of that double passage appeared more clearly."⁴²³ Perhaps, suffice to say, in the words of the philosopher whom Derrida silences absolutely, and banishes irrevocably from his pantheon:

*We touch here the most difficult point...the bond between the flesh and the idea.*⁴²⁴

⁴²¹ OG, 66.

⁴²² OG, 67.

⁴²³ OG, 63.

⁴²⁴ Visible/invisible, 149.

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