

DIALOGUE AT THE LIMIT OF PHENOMENOLOGY

Dear Listener.

It is to you that I speak. My speech is not extemporaneous, and I have prepared these lines in advance. But it was with you in mind that I composed them, and I thought of this moment of direct encounter with you when writing them down. I wrote them so that they could be spoken.

I insist on this event-like character of speaking that is happening here and now because it is integral to what I want to speak about. I want to retrieve the importance of speech for phenomenology and bring back the communicative dimension of experience to the heart of phenomena. In doing so, I hope to restore the inherently dialogic character of the self which has in my view been profoundly misconstrued in classical phenomenology by means of the transcendental ego, this solitary subjective center of consciousness accessible in the first person only. I hope to challenge the primacy of the ego and so to counter the pervasive and yet harmful individualist bias of classical phenomenology. I also hope to provide a more socially anchored understanding of who and what we are.

To set the stage, let me start at the source of the phenomenological tradition and consider the status of speech in Husserl's phenomenology. I propose to focus on Husserl's account of the pronoun I and trace the way in which this indicator of the speaker role in discourse mutated into a transcendental agency that speaks a mute language – *transcendentalese*. In other words, I propose to expose the kind of violence to usage that is performed when the word I is taken out of its ordinary sociolinguistic context. Ordinarily, in conversational context, I continuously reverses into you, i. e. it reverses between the first person mode of the addressor and the second person mode of an addressee. Indeed, children can be credited with full mastery of the pronoun I only once they are able to use it to indicate the self and to respond to the address of others by means of the pronoun you. Furthermore, children must understand the usage of the pronoun I in the case of other speakers, and to address them in the second person mode. Pronominal competence requires therefore a grasp of the role and perspective in discourse, interrelated as it is with other roles and perspectives. It depends on the child occupying a position in a polycentric universe and adopting the reversible roles of speaking and listening.

Note that once the pronoun I is transposed from the conversational context into the transcendental domain, it is forced into the irreversible first person mode of introspective insight that ceases to call upon and respond to a potential interlocutor. It no longer occupies a polycentric but rather a

monocentric universe of speechless thought, and it neither addresses nor listens to others. In what follows, I want to raise the question of what philosophical consequences follow from such a confinement of the self to the first person mode and from the construal of speech in terms of internal discourse that claims to preserve the usual meaning of the words even though it divorces them from the native ground of communication.

In the *Logical Investigations* (Investigation I, ch. 3, §26), Husserl categorized the pronoun I (together with other subject-bound terms such as here, now, yesterday, tomorrow, later, etc) as an *essentially subjective and occasional expression*, to be distinguished from *objective expressions*. What distinguishes the two types of expression is the relative stability of their meaning. An objective expression, for example the word ‘lion’, pins down (or can pin down) its meaning “merely by its manifest, auditory pattern, and can be understood without necessarily directing one’s attention to the person uttering it, or to the circumstances of the utterance” (314). That does not preclude the possibility of an objective expression pinning down more than just one meaning – with homonyms such as the adjective ‘mean’ standing both for ‘average’ and ‘unkind’. The resulting ambiguity does not, however, remove the possibility of locating ideal and objective meanings of the word, even though there might be more of them than just one. The differing meanings are self-identical unities unaffected by their common attachment to a single expression. Henceforth, the speaker can limit her expression to a single meaning at the exclusion of others, and so remove the equivocation from her meaning-making acts.

Things stand differently with the essentially occasional expressions. Here the meanings are necessarily contextualized by the occasion on which they are produced, and they are inextricably bound to the speaker and to the situation. Hence the meaning of the word I can be gleaned only at the moment of the “the living utterance” made by a given speaker, and it would fluctuate as soon as another speaker uttered a statement in the first person singular. The meaning of an occasional expression such as the pronoun I is inescapably unstable or equivocal for it is inextricably related to the participants in a speech situation. Importantly, Husserl regarded speech to be the “normal circumstance” of using occasional expressions. The latter need therefore to be thematized primarily as speech acts, for their meaning is realized fully when they are being spoken. As Husserl puts it, “The word ‘I’ has not itself directly the power to arouse the specific I-presentation; *this becomes fixed in the actual piece of talk*. It does not work like the word ‘lion’ which can arouse the idea of a lion in and by itself.” (§26, 316, emphasis added). The meaning of the word I, unlike the meaning of an objective expression, is therefore dependent on its enactment or performance in speaking. Unsurprisingly, Husserl postulates therefore a priority of speech over writing in the context of occasional expressions. That is why, in his view, the word I becomes divorced from its meaning when transformed to the medium of the written text. The I of the written text is uprooted from the context of the speech event situated in

a given spatiotemporal location, and so its meaning ceases to be occasion dependent.

Insofar as the pronoun I does not possess a fixed conceptual meaning but fluctuates depending on who assumes the speaker role at a given moment, Husserl advanced the problematic thesis that this word may embody a multiplicity of personal meanings which would be different from one individual to another. It would stand for “the immediate idea of one’s own personality,” (316) that supposedly unique and inalienable core of one’s existence available directly to the subject’s own intuitive insight. The word I would be no more than a handy label for one’s inner intuitionistic presentation of self. Crucially then, the meaning of the pronoun I could purportedly be fully realized in the instances of *silent soliloquy* and would not be dependent on *communication with others* for its achievement. Consider briefly that this possibility of uncommunicative meaning fulfillment in speech rests upon Husserl’s classic “essential distinction” between expression (*Ausdruck*) and indication (*Anzeichen*).

Following Husserl, signs can be categorized as expressive and indicative. The paradigmatic example of an expressive sign is found in “living discourse”, where the meaning (*Bedeutung*) of the verbal sign is fully available to the speaking subject. On this account, the speaker’s intention is manifest in a transparent and exhaustive manner in her linguistic expression. In contrast to expressions, indicative signs stand for a referent that is not directly present to the speaker’s and/or hearer’s awareness. Husserl provides examples of signs “deliberately and artificially brought about” (§2, 270), such as a knot in a handkerchief, which may serve as a memo to do X, but whose meaning is not contained in the sign but rather in need of interpretation (in this case, by the subject who tied the knot in the first place). Crucially, the distinction between expression and indication does not map onto two materially distinct regions of signs. As Derrida phrases it, it is not a *substantial* but rather a *functional* distinction, with expression and indication denoting functions or signifying relations rather than terms (1973, 20). The same sign can therefore carry an expressive as well as an indicative function. The case in point is speech. From the perspective of the speaker, her utterances are infused with meaning and belong to the order of expression. It would be erroneous to suppose that the speaker needs to *indicate* the meaning of her utterance to herself, as if she needed to interpret the expressive intent from the sequence of the signs she utters. The speaker’s expressed intentions are available to her “at that very moment” (279/80), but they do need to be interpreted by the hearer for who the spoken signs function not as expressions but rather as indications. In communicative speech, the utterance *intimates* to the hearer the inner sense-giving experience of the speaker (§7, 277). The communicative speech appears therefore to blur the previously established “essential distinction” between expression and indication, since “[m]eaning - in communicative speech - is always bound up (*verflochten*) with ... an indicative relation” (269). As Derrida argued, this entanglement (*Verflecht-*

tung) ultimately undermines the possibility of maintaining the kind of rigid separation between transparent and fully accessible meaning on the one hand and the opaque physical indicators on the other. For Derrida, all signs are material traces inherently threatened by the loss of meaning, such that no full possession or authorial ownership of intention that Husserl credited expressions with is possible. Signs circulate in the public space shared by the self and the other, and no single subject could claim monopoly on the interpretation of the sign's meaning. Husserl's attachment to the purity and ideality of meaning in expression, rigidly demarcated from the materiality of signs and the communicative context in which they circulate testifies, in Derrida's view, to Husserl's profound indebtedness to the Western metaphysical tradition, in its desire for full presence at the exclusion of alterity, in its denigration of temporality and fixation with static beings, in its epistemological bias at the exclusion of ethical concerns, in its ideal of a pure grammar distinct from the multiplicity of natural languages, in its celebration of life which construes absence and loss of meaning as derivative and secondary. Importantly for our purposes, Derrida accuses Husserl of *phonocentrism*, i. e., of privileging the voice (*la voix*) over writing, and so of excluding the opaque body of the sign from the domain of meaning.

The question remains: What kind of a voice does Husserl privilege? Paradoxically, it is the voice (*phone*) that does not speak but "keeps silence," confined as it is to the province of intuitive insight, in line with Husserl's purported attachment to the "intuitionistic imperative" (97). The voice privileged by Husserl turns out therefore to be a philosophical abstraction, the substance of speechless thought, which serves as an idealized medium in which pure meanings could be attained in their full luminosity by the thinking I. "The voice is consciousness" (80); it belongs to the phenomenological interiority stripped of worldly being (76).

This *phone* construed in terms of diaphanous *phenomena* is therefore a mere insinuation of the voice. For Derrida insists that it only *seems* that the words I utter do not leave me, that speaking and hearing is an auto-affection of a unique kind with no external detour (such as the reflective surfaces of the mirror when I look at myself), for it *seems* that I hear and understand (the double meaning of *entendre*) myself at the very instant that I speak, and so it *seems* that the voice does not circulate in the physical space of mundane objects and that there are no obstacles to its emission. It *seems* that the voice is not co-extensive with the world, but belongs rather to the element of ideality (76-79). It *seems* that the voice constitutes together with breath a spiritual medium out of which the metaphysical tradition was keen to derive its conception of the spirit and psyche as the invisible animating principle directing the physical body. (Consider that etymologically psyche derives from *psykein*: to blow, cool). This spirituality and the attachment to metaphysically filtered conception of the voice and breath would be preserved in the phenomenological conception of consciousness: "no consciousness is possible without the voice" (79). Phenomenological attachment to

consciousness turns out therefore to be a direct result of phenomenology's insistent commitment to phonocentrism, the metaphysical tradition that celebrates voice in its quest for presence. The transcendental conception of the ego as introspectively attained subject would be a direct result of this misconception of the voice and the internalization of the pronoun I within isolated mental life.

To reverse this "traditional phonologism of metaphysics" (80), Derrida proposes to retrieve the materiality of the sign as a trace, an opaque remainder which resists effacing itself for the sake of the ideality of meaning. The materiality of the sign can be best thematized in the context of written text. Derrida disputes therefore Husserl's claim that speech provides the "normal circumstance" of language use, even in the case of occasional expressions like the pronoun I. Recall that for Husserl the meaning of the word is originally established in speaking, and divorced from its usual meaning in the written text. Derrida objects that this line of thought supposes the need to have an intuitive grasp of "the object I in order to understand the word I" (96). And it goes without saying that Husserl does regard the word I as a label for one's inner presentation of self when he says that "In solitary speech the meaning of 'I' is essentially realized in the immediate idea of one's own personality" (§26, 316). Derrida challenges the need of such intuitive self-presentation by pointing to the continued significance of the word I in the absence of the author – the author may be unknown or even dead, as in the case of fictional prose or historical report. It follows that "the signifying function of the *I* does not depend on the life of the speaking subject... The anonymity of the written *I*, the impropriety of *I am writing*, is, contrary to what Husserl says, the "normal situation." (97). Writing is therefore, Derrida argues, not added on to speaking from the outside. To speak (*dicere*) is already to dictate a text.

The question remains: were he to abandon this metaphysically filtered conception of speech as muted monologue, would Husserl necessarily embrace Derrida's principle of continuity between speaking and writing? I contend, contra Derrida, that Husserl may have continued to uphold the separation between speaking and writing even if he did admit that both are mediated by historically sedimented material traces and if he did abandon an intuitionistic conception of meaning. Husserl may have continued to argue that a change in meaning occurs when an occasional expression such as the pronoun I passes from speech to text. In the former case, the meaning of the word I is intrinsically contextualized by the situation in which it is uttered and by the specific individual who adopts it at a particular time in a given place. Without this contextualization, the word I would fail to perform its ordinary function of picking out a single speaker out of the multitude of candidates; it would no longer perform its addressor role in discourse. This performativity and context-dependence of the pronoun I provides the reason for making a distinction between spoken and written discourse. In the latter case, the meaning of the word I ceases to be contextualized by a given situation and its participants; it no longer connects to a flesh-and-blood individual who

vociferates to another. There is therefore no need to rely on an intuitionistic imperative to preserve the distinction between context-dependent and context-independent meanings. Scholars of speech such as Benveniste and Lyons preserved this distinction without invoking a mentalistic subject.

I conclude therefore, contra Derrida, that Husserl was correct to privilege speech in his account of occasional expressions, and that this privileging is not exclusively a tributary of a pre-existent phonocentric tradition and its misconception of the voice but results rather from Husserl's attentiveness to the fluctuations of meaning between spoken and written discourse in occasional expressions. Insofar as Derrida subsumes speaking under writing, he fails to recognize these fluctuations in meaning. In his focus on the text, Derrida glosses over the importance of context for the fashioning and sharing of meaning. His dismissal of the muted voice of metaphysics seems to lead him to regard just any statement about specificity and uniqueness of speech as suspect and derivative of this metaphysical tradition. In response to Derrida's charge of *phonocentrism*, we can therefore wonder whether the founder of Deconstruction may not be charged with *phonophobia*. After all, it only *seems* that voice lends itself to a confinement to solitary consciousness, and on a different interpretation, voice would not lead us to the compounded metaphysical illusions enumerated by Derrida. It may be that Derrida took the master's voice too seriously and was unable to envisage an alternative perspective which would preserve the specificity of spoken discourse *and* be unburdened by metaphysical baggage. After all, the rich and yet notoriously underestimated tradition of dialogue in Continental philosophy provides us with a perspective where speech – rather than silent cogitation - is regarded as the foundation of philosophy. In this perspective, represented by Martin Buber as well as Franz Rosenzweig and Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy and numerous others, speech is not subjected to the service of the metaphysics of presence but rather helps to loosen its grip and to restore temporality and alterity to the speaking process. The dialogic tradition responds therefore to the concerns about exclusions of alterity raised by Derrida in *Voice and Phenomena* without leaving behind the terrain of embodied communication. I believe therefore that it is a pressing matter to engage in a dialogue at the limit of phenomenology in an effort to overcome the subjectivist bias of classical phenomenology. I believe that this dialogue will help to liberate the pronoun I from its enforced enclosure in the exclusively first person ruminations of the transcendental ego, and to reconnect I with you, the addressee and respondent to my speech.

This urgency of dialogue is motivated in part by my agreement with Derrida that the theoretical framework of the Logical Investigations which isolates solitary mute meanings out of the fabric of communication in adherence to the intuitionistic imperative is not limited to the 1900 text of the Logical Investigations but rather that it anticipates the main developments of phenomenology, exhibiting “the germinal structure of the whole of Husserl's thought” (3). Furthermore, as Len Lawlor (2002, 168) stresses, this

framework is broader than the determination of the whole of Husserl's thought; it concerns "the phenomenological project in its essence" and "the historical destiny of phenomenology" (Derrida 1973, 22 and 27). The analysis presented here is therefore not limited to an exegetical study of Husserl's thought but has implications for the discipline of phenomenology as a whole. Specifically, it exposes the ambiguous status of speech in phenomenology, which is both celebrated by its practitioners and misconstrued as a subjectivist experience. I in no way believe that phenomenology needs to be abandoned on account of its inherent individualism in favor of a structuralist or post-structuralist line of inquiry; I do however contend that phenomenology needs to revise its conception of speech, meaning and selfhood in a way that retains their inherently social and dialogic nature. Let me provide some clues for how this revision may be accomplished.

In his brief discussion of Husserl's account of occasional expressions, Aaron Gurwitsch noted that "For a complete account of the essentially occasional expressions, the facts and problems of intersubjectivity must be ... taken into consideration." (1977 [1950], 122-23). After all, we are dealing here with words indissociable from the speech situation, which includes not only the speaker but an at least potential addressee, both anchored in the here-and-now context of interaction. It is notable that Gurwitsch proceeded to draw on linguistic accounts of occasional expressions, especially the work of Wilhelm von Humboldt to throw some light on the inherently communicative nature of speech in general and personal pronouns in particular. My analysis will follow Gurwitsch's lead and I propose to engage some of Humboldt's insights in what follows.

On April 26, 1827, Humboldt presented a lecture "Ueber den Dualis" to the Academy of Science in Berlin. This relatively remote date is of significance if only because this ground breaking study has not as of today been translated into English (the citations are my own translation). In this study, Humboldt makes the case for a dual number or duality (*Zweiheit*) which is irreducible to the traditional plural number. The duality in question is not simply a diminutive case of the plural number but a category that stands on its own. Between the one and the many Humboldt inserts therefore the category of twin-hood, rarely heard of in Western metaphysics but evidenced by the grammar of natural languages. An example of this duality can be found in ancient Greek, where *ho pais* stands for the child, *hoi paides* for children, but a separate grammatical category *tý paide* is used to indicate twins. Importantly, we find evidence of this dual number use in Plato's *Symposium* – in the Aristophanes' celebrated speech on the twin nature of humanity. Aristophanes tells the story of the natural human form being originally that of congenitally conjoined twins. These twins were roundly shaped, two faced, four-legged and four-armed creatures, and could walk in any direction – or spin rapidly like cartwheels if they wanted to locomote fast. They were equipped with two sets of genitals, male-male, female-female, and mixed. These powerful beings "made attempts on the gods," and were severely

punished by Zeus by being torn asunder. From that time on, each severed being longed for its other half, and desired intimacy with a man or a woman, depending on the nature of its original form. Men desired men, women desired women, and either desired the opposite sex, in accord with the composite character of the conjoined twin they previously formed a part of.

It is easy to read Aristophanes' speech as a folk tale of nostalgia for the irretrievably lost unity and a desire for erotic fusion with the other which reduces her alterity to sameness. Notably Levinas reads Aristophanes' speech as a clear expression of such a reduction of alterity to unity in the *Totality and Infinity* (TI, 254). Equipped with Humboldt's notion of duality, I would like however to offer an alternative reading of the myth. I believe that the twin-like human form does not represent unequivocal sameness of the one but indicates rather the complex non-identity of the dual number which refuses to be construed as either singular or plural. Plato's use of the dual rather than singular or plural number is grammatical and philosophical evidence that the original human form should not be read as a straightforward case of identity and sameness. Nor should we construe the separated twins in terms of sheer plurality of the many. Consider that plurality can be produced by multiplying instances of the same, as in adding apples to apples and oranges to oranges. Such a plurality is typified by numerical impartiality – items are added up to form aggregates with no internal relation binding multiple members. In the case of duality, however, the relational bond is integral to their numeric form, for a couple is not constituted by means of external additions but rather by a lived attraction and reciprocal attachment of the two who are not one. Aristophanes' story is after all the story of desire, not an impartial treatise on numbers, and the question of the dual number cannot be settled by multiplication tables. It needs rather to be addressed phenomenologically as a lived mutuality, as a first to second person circularity of emotion experienced within the couplet.

This lived reciprocity within a pair is best exemplified by what Humboldt takes to be a key duality: the I and you pronouns. I and you are markers of interrelated speech roles of speaker and addressee that are integral and indispensable to language (*Sprache*) and grammar. The de facto existence of the dual number is therefore not only of philological and historico-philosophical but also of systematic interest; it provides us with deep insight into what constitutes speech. Humboldt insists that the function of speech does not consist only in the transmission of information; speech is the very fabric and medium of sociality (*Geselligkeit*). Due to its social and dialogic nature, duality (*Zweiheit*) is built into speech qua speech. "There lies in the primordial essence of language an unalterable duality (*Dualismus*), and the possibility of speech itself is determined by addressing and replying (*Anrede und Erwidern*).” The spoken word is in essential need of extension (*Erweiterung*) by the hearer and the respondent. This necessity of extension belongs to the archetype of all languages (*Urtypus aller Sprachen*), regardless of whether they dispose of personal pronouns of the I and you type. Language

as such, language as speech (Sprache), deploys and marks speakers and hearers as co-primordial co-participants in discourse. It may do so by means of semantically poor person deixis we are familiar with in Indo-European languages (I-you, Ich-Du, Je-Tu), where self and other are not marked for gender, race, social status. It may use more complex and content laden forms of self and other reference, that are infused with meanings related to the individual's role and position in the society. It may adopt self-deprecatory and honorific forms such as your humble servant and your highness to construe the relation in vertical rather than horizontal terms. Regardless of the weight of its semantic load and the nature of the relation established between the interlocutors, the mutual relation of address and response must obtain to form the key duality of speaker and hearer within which the speech unfolds.

Note that Humboldt's conception of speech differs profoundly from the received view of speech as *facultas repraesentandi* of ready made concepts. For Humboldt, speech (or language) helps to fashion concepts and is a generative rather than reproductive faculty. In agreement with Schelling who regarded speech as imprint of the inner type of understanding, Humboldt considers speech to be a veritable "organ of thought" – a corporeal source and generator of meanings. The corporeality of meaning-making must, needless to say, be construed in social terms as an inter-bodily process of vociferating to the other who receives and responds to the speaker's vibrations. Both share the aerial element in which their communications travel and are firmly supported by the back of the earth. Now, if speech is an organic element of thought and meaning-making, then its inherent duality of speaker and addressee must be inserted into the deepest levels of selfhood rather than regarded as secondary and derived. On this account, I and you connectedness is foundational and primary, whereas the lone ego appears as the philosopher's abstraction, a ghost settlement built on the ruins of communication. In this perspective, the muted subject of solitary thought can only be posited as primary if the philosopher is deliberately oblivious of the ways in which meanings are grounded and dependent on the community of speakers from whom the philosopher learnt to formulate and articulate her insights in the first place. The philosopher was after all a child who received the gift of language from her elders and she carries this gift around to even the most deserted parts of the world and to the loftiest regions of the mind.

That is why Humboldt insists that the primordial duality of I and you is preserved even in solitary thinking: "Human thought is by nature accompanied by an inclination toward social existence. Apart from all relations based in the body and sensations, human being longs, for the sake of thought, for a you corresponding to the I. The concept will acquire its clarity and certainty only through a reflection from a foreign intellect." This insight is reiterated in the still relatively unknown work of Vygotsky (1978) who argued that higher mental functions are internalized forms of social interaction, and that they retain this social interactive character even when they are performed in solitude. Humboldt's insight forms also the bedrock of

the dialogic tradition in philosophy where I-you connectedness is consistently regarded as primary and foundational.

The limits of the current presentations enable me to give an all-too-cursory account of the dialogic tradition. I propose to focus on its best known representative, Martin Buber. Like Humboldt, Buber argued for the unsurpassable duality (*Zweiheit*) within the I-you couplet, and like Plato, he cast it in a bodily relation to another. I-you signifies the primordial word, not a sum of independent units but an original dual being of standing in relation (*Beziehung*). Contra the formalist view which regards individual words as basic units of meaning, Buber's approach focuses on basic speech acts such as a greeting or personal address which may take entire verbal strings to express the relational process in its wholeness. A word-sentence or a word-couplet may therefore stand as a basic unit of meaning, as long as we regard spoken discourse as primary point of reference. From this perspective, persons are embedded in the wholeness of interpersonal relation, prior to the illusory "rounded independence" of personal pronouns and substantive nouns (70).

Needless to say, Buber argued that we can adopt two existential stances – the reciprocal relation of direct address expressed pronominally as I-you and the one-sided experience of objectivities expressed pronominally as I-it. However, the former relation has priority over the latter both in terms of genesis (it comes first) and in terms of significance (it is filled with meaning and value). Contra the mystical striving for fusion with the other and contra the Hindu notion that the one is more primary than the individuated self, Buber insisted that the duality of relation to another, best witnessed in dialogue (*Zwiesprache*), is irreducible and primary, even though we depart from it over and over again by adopting a detached pose of observation and manipulation of others.

Buber's poetic prose is filled with powerful examples of I-you relations, but I want to focus on just one – that of pregnancy and its ambiguous bodily non-identity of mother and the other living off her body. "The prenatal life of the child is a pure natural bond, a flowing toward each other, a bodily reciprocity." (*I and Thou*, henceforth IT, 76). This intimate bond developed in utero remains pervasive throughout post partum life, not as a craving to go back but rather as an undying longing for one's true You. At birth the child breaks off from the primary bond (*Ich und Du*, henceforth ID, 33) and enters the domain of elemental relations sustained by the shared medium of air and subsumed in Buber's ontology under the notion of the spirit (*Geist*). This broken-off being retains, however, the intimately relational nature of the earliest stages of its prenatal life, and it remains a site of the a priori of relation, the yearning for an innate You (78).

I would like to suggest that Buber's remarks concerning the prenatal bond with the mother and its further elaboration in a longing for an innate you resonate profoundly with Aristophanes' speech about the originally twin-like nature of humanity and the desire for the other with whom one was

originally organically connected. Buber, like Plato's Aristophanes, situates the original human form in the complex duality of a congenitally conjoined being which is neither one nor many. In Buber's genetically accurate story we begin as unequal twins, growing in and off the nurturing and supportive body of the mother, in a relation too enveloping and intimate to be captured in rigorous phenomenological description. Only mythical discourse, like that preferred by Aristophanes, can serve to retrieve this ambiguous dawn of human life in its vital attachment to the other. Needless to say, to point to the similarity between Buber and Plato's Aristophanes: the shared notion of an originally conjoined being, the profound intimacy within the relation, the eventual breaking off and the longing for the intimate other, is not to oversee the differences. Buber's child is of woman born, while Plato's twin separated from either a male or female body. The focus in Plato's myth is on the origins of human desire in its multifarious forms, while the focus in Buber's account is on the originary connectedness to the You in the developmental and ontological primacy of relation. Despite these differences, Plato's and Buber's stories of twin-like nature of humanity share the grammatical and philosophical notion of unsurpassable duality as the vehicle of desire and speech. Combined with Humboldt's linguistic insights, they help us to venture beyond the limits of thought-based philosophy and its muted singular subjects into the world of inter-connected excitable vociferating and receptive bodies. They enable us to overcome the traditional metaphysical numerology based on the celebrated distinction between the one and the many, where the self can only be thematized as an individual one and sociality as an impartial collective of the many. Instead, they make it possible for us to get at the heart of I-you connectedness as the primary relational bond inscribed in our living flesh and enacted in my speech to you. Dear listener, I believe that these perspectives open up the space of dialogue at the limit of phenomenology.

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Dialogue à la limite de la phénoménologie

Dans ce travail, je souligne l'importance du phénomène de la parole vivante et de la dimension communicative de l'expérience dans la recherche phénoménologique. Spécifiquement, je considère de manière critique l'accusation de phonocentrisme adressée par Derrida à la phénoménologie, qui semble avoir discrédité toute tentative d'aborder le phénomène de la vocalité par peur de privilégier la présence et la subjectivité atomiste. Il est peut-être vrai que la phénoménologie classique de la conscience privilégie le point de vue de la première personne et qu'elle est coupable d'un biais subjectiviste, mais il y a des ressources riches dans la tradition dialogique, notamment chez Buber, de même que chez Humboldt et Platon, qui permettent de souligner la dualité fondamentale du soi et de l'autre, qui se déploie entre moi et toi dans la parole vivante et de corriger la position individualiste de la phénoménologie classique.

Dialogo ai limiti della fenomenologia

In questo saggio sottolineo l'importanza di recuperare il fenomeno del linguaggio corrente e di tematizzare la dimensione comunicativa dell'esperienza nella ricerca fenomenologica. Più nello specifico, intendo affrontare criticamente l'attenzione che Derrida rivolge al problema del fonocentrismo in fenomenologia, che sembra aver semplicemente screditato ogni tentativo di affrontare il fenomeno della voce per paura di privilegiare la presenza e la soggettività atomistica. Mentre potrebbe essere vero che la fenomenologia classica della coscienza privilegia la posizione della prima persona ed è colpevole di un pregiudizio soggettivistico, vi sono ricche risorse nella tradizione dialogica, in particolare in Buber, così come nei lavori di Humboldt e di Platone, utili a sottolineare la fondamentale dualità del sé e dell'altro che si dispiega tra l'"Io" e il "tu" nel linguaggio vivente e a correggere i presupposti individualistici della fenomenologia classica.