

body is present in the act of identification as an image, which we “have in mind”. The appearance and family relations are personal features, but when they are used by identity, i. e. to our social interface, they are invested with cultural values in circulation and thus they start to make sense. The same happens when we identify the others – it is a construction of uniqueness with socially codified “material”.

The *personal subjective memory* is the memory pre-eminently, the story of our life, elusive and never interpretable in the same identical way. It is the infinite access to subjectivity, possible only in interpretative mode. Asked “who am I?” this memory never returns the same answer because every lived moment and every new situation modifies it, as a snow ball, turning around itself, is growing. The Other, seen as his/her personal memory, is the absolute alterity, and the relation with him or her overcomes the modality of identification in the direction of an indeterminate temporal involvement.

This, of course, is a limit case, as well as cases of summary identifications and “collective sentences” on the basis of the fundamental appurtenances. The flexible identity, adequate to the contemporary social system (above all the western one) has a dynamic relation with memory. The memory, in all its aspects (collective and personal) is the palette where identity draws contents for the production of identifications in the growing number of occasions in which we need to adapt and to enter dialogue with others.

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## The body of free speech: risk and the rhetorical practice of *parrhesia*

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#### Introduction: a story

I shall begin rather abruptly, unconventionally, by recounting a very short story. In doing so, I must humbly invoke and in some small way honour the life of a young woman whose life and work were cut short. I would ask my reader to be mindful of this woman’s speech, of the possibility for her speech, or more precisely, of the impossibility of her speech; it is in such mindfulness that we might hear in her story the narrative conditions of her subjectivity and of her freedom.

On 29<sup>th</sup> September 2004, in Freetown, the capital of the West African country Sierra Leone, a woman by the name of FannyAnn Eddy was found dead in the office of the Sierra Leone Lesbian and Gay Association. The few brief, not-so-mainstream news reports concurred that this young woman had been repeatedly raped by as many as five men, stabbed in the head with a sharp object, and had her neck broken. A friend, a lover, a mother, a sister, a daughter, Ms Eddy was also an educator, a political activist, and a champion of women’s, lesbian, gay, and transgender rights in Sierra Leone and throughout Africa. She was the founder and leader of the Sierra Leone Lesbian and Gay Association, which provides support and community to LBGT persons in a country where homosexuality is not just a crime but also profoundly stigmatized. She worked tirelessly for the rights of persons with HIV/AIDS, through education and through improving government health programmes. In Spring 2004 she travelled to Geneva to address the United Nations Human Rights Commission, where she advocated supporting the Resolution on Sexual Orientation and Human Rights (known as the Brazilian Resolution, see <http://www.brazilianresolution.com/>).

I can only with great difficulty begin to imagine the context in which Ms Eddy lived and worked and spoke out. She would most certainly have known the risks involved in leading such a public life, not just as an out lesbian (however we define this term), but as a high profile woman in a culture that does not make a practice of recognizing or respecting the rights and dignities of their persons. Despite the nominal rights

accorded to women under Sierra Leone's Constitution, for instance, in practice there is little collective will, and even fewer resources, to enforce the rule of law, not to mention to begin to change public opinion. Consequently, according to Human Rights Watch, in Sierra Leone

Only [the] rape of a virgin is seen as a serious crime. Rape of a married woman or a non-virgin is often not considered a crime at all . . . there is often the belief that the woman must have consented to the act, or she is seen as a seductress ('We'll kill you if you cry' 2003).<sup>1</sup>

If this begins to offer a rough backdrop to daily life in Sierra Leone, what, we must ask, are the conditions for speech, and moreover, for being heard, in such a situation? I might mention Ms Eddy's own words here, the opening of her testimony in April 2004 in Geneva, delivered to the U.N. Commission on Human Rights: "Silence," she said, "creates vulnerability" ('Testimony by FannyAnn Eddy' 2004). Silence creates vulnerability. And yet we must pause here in astonishment, for, surely in Ms Eddy's case, it was refusing silence by speaking out that made her supremely vulnerable, and placed her very life at risk.

This, then, is the hardly imaginable condition for Ms Eddy's speech, just as it is the occasion for this essay. I end FannyAnn's story here, for the moment, and turn now to the reflection her story provoked in me, when I first heard it. What I offer is a discussion on subjectivity and freedom, prompted by the following rhetorical questions: How do we understand the self that risks itself and struggles to find the proper terms within which that self can live and be free? And what role does this language play in the ongoing stakes of our self-invention and self-narration? These questions lead me to a reflection on the difficult relation between the self and the ways in which that self writes or speaks itself into being, the ways in which it gives itself to itself, and gives itself to others. Specifically, this essay provides an analysis of the classical Greek virtue of free speech known as *parrhesia*, which roughly means the act of speaking freely and truthfully in the face of danger and great personal risk. Ms Eddy is an example of this. I shall demonstrate how *parrhesia* is a very special form of speech - a form that does not rely on our ordinary conceptions of truth and knowledge, but a kind of corporeal speech that creates its own possibilities for social and political transformation. The paper has three parts: First, I begin with a discussion of such

<sup>1</sup> To say the least, it is difficult to prove that you were a virgin after you have been raped. More disturbing still, for the 10 years of war ending in 2001, Human Rights Watch reported in 2003 that, until that time, there had not been one single prosecution of rape ('We'll kill you if you cry' 2003: [http://www.hrw.org/reports/2003/sierraleone/sierleon0103-11.htm#P1367\\_320306](http://www.hrw.org/reports/2003/sierraleone/sierleon0103-11.htm#P1367_320306), accessed 27 October 2004).

speech in the *public* sphere; second, I turn to the kind of *private* speech or dialogue we have with *ourselves* as ethical subjects; and third, I offer a literary example, from Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved*, before concluding with a brief reflection on my own written 'speech' in its public and private dimensions.

### The public: *parrhesia*

What is *parrhesia*? I began with the story of Ms Eddy because I believe that she practised what the Greeks called *parrhesia*, which means she practised 'free speech' or she 'spoke freely' in a rhetorical situation in which she was not altogether 'free' to do so, in which her speaking out placed her at risk and ultimately cost her her life. In his 1983 Berkeley lectures on free speech, Michel Foucault explains *parrhesia* in the following terms:

When you accept the parrhesiastic game in which your own life is exposed, you are taking up a specific relationship to yourself: you risk death to tell the truth instead of reposing in the security of a life where the truth goes unspoken. (Foucault 2001: 17)

So, when the truth-teller places her life at risk by telling the truth, this is a self-relation, an ethical decision about how she will live her life. For her, silence represents a kind of living death, and speaking the truth becomes the only way to live, the only life *worth* living, despite the grave risks.

The character of such a speaker impressed the Greeks tremendously. Significantly, in the Greek context, the one who spoke with *parrhesia* was somehow understood to be speaking the truth. But who, the Greeks asked, is a genuine *parrhesiastes*, and how can we tell? As Foucault remarks, if the audience is to accept someone's speech activity as an act of *parrhesia* - and therefore as truth - certain conditions must be met. They are the following: to begin with, the individual must speak out in a social situation that places him in danger or at risk because there is an imbalance of power between the speaker and his audience. Specifically, the one who speaks enjoys markedly less power or status than those who receive that speech; and moreover, the audience does not want to hear what he has to say because the speech contains a deep criticism or critique of the current order of things, for which those in power are somehow responsible. It forces those in power to account for themselves. It therefore takes great courage to speak out, and yet, despite the risks, the speaker feels he must nevertheless speak. To be true to himself and to those whose lives he will help or improve, he

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cannot do otherwise: he experiences this call to speak as a solemn duty, as an ethical injunction. This truth he knows and experiences with certainty because what he knows, what he believes, and what he feels coincide perfectly, not through some piece of *mental* evidence, but immediately, as it were, in his *body*. It is therefore not surprising to find bodily metaphors in speeches dedicated to free speech: but perhaps 'metaphor' is the wrong word here, because the speech itself *is* bodily, and the body *is* wagered in the struggle. The distinction between the body and the content of one's speech is blurred.

Here is one illustrative and dramatic example drawn from Berkeley's Free Speech Movement in the turbulent 1960s. It is December 1964, the speaker is Mario Savio and he is speaking to hundreds upon hundreds of fellow peaceful student protesters whose very bodies are fast becoming instruments of social, historical, and political change. He says to them:

There comes a time when the operation of the machine becomes so odious, makes you so sick at heart, that you can't take part, you can't even passively take part, and you've got to put your bodies upon the gears and upon the wheels, upon all the apparatus, and you've got to make it stop (quoted in Snapp 2004: 31)

Savio's speech is addressed to a 'you' - to a social subjectivity who cannot but be implicated - a social body and a subjectivity in which there is little room for an autonomous agency or 'I'. In a profound sense, then, there is no distinct 'I' who thinks or speaks or acts here - there is no 'I' that can readily be separated from my body and my language as these bear my speech and my actions - and as these, reciprocally, in their own way, also bear my body and my language, or bear me. Remarkably, this language and these bodies, this sickness at heart, the impossibility of remaining passive, and the whole theatrical scene, come together at a unique and propitious moment - what rhetoricians call a moment of *kairos*. Swept up in this moment, our ordinary worldview is suspended, and the rhetorical situation *itself* sets the conditions for reason and justice and truth. In other words, the speech and the situation *act* in such a way as to create *new* terms for our understanding. This is the kind of risk and half-mad aspiration of *parrhesia*. *Parrhesia* is speech activity that does not simply appeal to an outside or independent authority for its truth-value. Foucault reminds us that for the Greeks, similarly, the burden of 'proof' or the 'evidence' for something to be true did *not* rely on any of our recognizably modern and empirical requirements. So, our commonplace idea of a scientific or independent and repeatable test for truth, is, Foucault says, a uniquely *modern* invention that began roughly with Descartes. 'Truth' has its own history. The Greeks had no such requirement, and it is for this reason that

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Foucault remarks, somewhat polemically, "that *parrhesia*, in this Greek sense, can no longer occur in our modern epistemological framework" (14). Is this true? I take these words instead as a sort of Foucauldian challenge for us to imagine *parrhesia* in forms of speech and styles of life that break out from under the heavy hand of modern epistemology. This will require a certain openness to language, a rhetorical openness; indeed, to see *parrhesia* for what it is will require a momentary suspension of our insatiable will-to-knowledge.

So, when I speak about myself and about what it means to be a subject in the world, I cannot declare that I go about the world as an altogether independent mind who is in full rational control of his body and in control of his language; 'I' am not a wholly rational, autonomous, or free agent; 'I' cannot deploy my body or my language straightforwardly as 'tools' in the service of some knowledge or other. Instead, as Merleau-Ponty's works asserted, 'I' am as much caught up in and by them as they are in my life; they open me onto a rich world that is unimaginable any other way. In this sense, if I am to speak about myself, I must try to lay bare those often invisible ways that the world, my language, and my body all lay hold of *me*. What are my unexamined theoretical commitments, for example, or what silent discourses and practices contribute to the production of knowledge and identity? Moreover, what discourses and practices *foreclose* the possibility of certain knowledges and identities? This manner of critique examines the effects of language, what I would call its rhetorical dimensions, that is, those underlying and enabling conditions in language that determine *how* something will appear or how it will disappear; how it will be read as true or false, good or ugly, and so on. By performing such a critique, the hope is to offer a different view and an opening that will foster new forms of social and political activism. In short, I hope it points to a non-Cartesian subject who works to craft new possibilities for her being, who struggles to formulate *new* terms by which she will understand herself and her life.

I would like to offer a related example as I build my case for a kind of *parrhesiastic* agency that does not fall back on a traditional philosophical notion of the subject or on traditional epistemological appeals. Some might read in the act of *parrhesia* a kind of speech that is nothing more than confession. However, I am arguing that *parrhesia* is more radical still, and that confession remains rooted in a traditional subjectivity and a traditional epistemological framework. Foucault famously remarks in *The History of Sexuality* that "Western man has become a confessing animal" (1978: 59). Here Foucault argues that, in the West, since the Middle Ages confession has been a privileged technology for producing what we take as truth - a discursive 'truth,' produced through a confessional medium. Confession has become secularized -

sometimes more, sometimes less - and is pervasive. This technology of confession and its relation to truth and power is so pervasive, in fact, that it now seems natural to us; we no longer see confession as a constraint, nor do we see ourselves as subjects produced by it. Instead, because it has become 'naturalized', confession actually allows us to operate under the illusion that we confess freely, as autonomous, rational agents - in short, it shores up the illusion that the speaker or 'I' is a traditional philosophical subject who is in control of his body and his language. To counter this, Foucault works to show that confession is extracted by a socio-political injunction to speak; confession is produced by existing norms, and serves to bolster that power. I am not judging here whether this is 'good' or 'bad', but arguing that confession must be distinguished from *parrhesia* as a speech activity. In brief, this is because confession serves ultimately to shore up existing modes of truth-production whereas *parrhesia* risks creating new ones, and, in the process, new truths and new social relations: a new social subjectivity.

Consider South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) as a technology of confession. Although it may take great courage to speak about the heinous crimes committed under Apartheid, I would maintain that this is confessional rather than *parrhesiastic* speech activity. The confession is compelled by an authority who is invested with the power to forgive, to purify, and to redeem the speaker; the speaker speaks precisely so as to be forgiven, and speaks in a community that shares both his crimes and his confessional burden. The TRC operates as a kind of secularized Christianity. With *parrhesia*, on the other hand, there is no such promise of forgiveness. *Parrhesia* is not socially-sanctioned, but quite the contrary - the *parrhesiastes* speaks, her speech is a grave risk, and she is liable to be condemned, vilified, debased, sometimes expelled from the human community, criminalized, and pathologized; she risks being stripped of her dignity, left naked and vulnerable, reduced to a bare life whose brutal rape and murder can be a matter of social indifference. Who she is and what she has to say is neither 'true' nor 'false', strictly speaking, but falls outside the sanctioned norms that regulate social intelligibility and 'truth'. The *parrhesiastes* speaks in order to *make* something true and real, to have some material effect in the world. One might think here of Nelson Mandela's work in the many years of Apartheid, before the TRC was established.

More controversial still, juxtaposed with the confessional speech activity of South Africa's TRC stands a terrifying silence, an absence of any speech, surrounding that country's AIDS epidemic. The same confessional technology does not apply in this case. Whereas crimes under Apartheid are cast as public and communal, AIDS has become a private disease, deeply stigmatized. Statistics about the spread of the disease

are highly conjectural and unofficial. More difficult to establish, are the racial and class breakdowns of those infected - but we can be certain that much higher rates of infection are to be found in poorer, and largely black, communities (Posel 2003; cf. also Posel 1997). In 2001, the number of HIV-positive people in South Africa was estimated at between 4 and 5 million out of a population of approximately 44 million - almost 1 in 7 persons are infected. This number is expected to nearly double by 2010. Despite this data, AIDS is marked by a tremendous silence: death certificates often read "death by natural causes"; sufferers have been ostracized; one was murdered by an angry mob. With the notable exception of Nelson Mandela, who in January 2005 admitted that his eldest son, Makgatho Mandela, had died of AIDS, no ANC leaders have admitted to living with the virus or with AIDS. As Deborah Posel remarks, "To admit to being HIV positive, let alone an AIDS sufferer . . . becomes an act of public heroism" (2003). Thus, the truth of living with HIV/AIDS in South Africa cannot be spoken, shared, or understood through a confessional technology. To speak out in this context would not be a confession, but, I would argue, an act of *parrhesia*; if one feels compelled to speak out publicly, it will be with an agonizing uncertainty surrounding one's subject position and the perilous effects of one's speech.

#### The 'private': inner speech

Here I would like to focus very closely on the agony of this non-Cartesian sense of self, and in particular, the language of that self. Recall what Foucault says about *parrhesia*: "When you accept the parrhesiastic game in which your own life is exposed, you are taking up a specific relationship to yourself" (2001: 17). So this business (or game) of *parrhesia* does not just involve speaking out *publicly* under all the conditions I mentioned, but it involves the speaker's own seemingly private relationship *to herself*, the relation between *the self and the self*. Therefore, this business (or game) has to do with the very terms or language within which the self relates to itself. In one sense, when I speak, my audience is always myself; my relation to myself is a communicative relation; it takes place as a kind of speech activity that qualifies in some instances as *parrhesia*. This speech activity arises in my effort to stylize a life for myself, especially when I am faced with troubling and difficult decisions, when I am in crisis: then, I speak to myself even though it might be true that I do not want to hear what I have to say. I would call this 'inner speech'. 'Inner speech' of this nature is, I think, irreducible to that 'inner voice' that we commonly call the voice of conscience; I am arguing that inner *speech* is more radical still. I would argue that this inner speech is one way to understand what Foucault means in his late work on ethics, when he characterizes the self-self relation as the ethical

relation *par excellence* (cf. Foucault 2005). Here, ethics is often invoked as the 'care of the self'. This caring self-self relation is marked by a certain agony precisely because it is the crucible of my ethical life: again, this is *not* that little voice of conscience that parrots a received catalogue of moral virtues ("I should do this . . ."; "I shouldn't do that . . ."); no, here we are struggling with ethics, rather than with a moral code - we are struggling to *invent* the very terms of our situation and the very terms of our own self-understanding within it - these terms are not ready-made or ready-to-wear.<sup>2</sup>

Is this a sign of madness, this speaking to myself, this 'inner speech'? Given the presumptions of our modern epistemological framework, quite possibly, yes - Descartes would have us believe that his 'I' is unitary, that it coincides perfectly with itself, and is therefore rational.<sup>3</sup> Against this modern model of a unitary 'I', we can read of Socrates, whose inner life was quite vocal, Plutarch's and Seneca's work pays tribute to a kind of bipartite self and self-interrogation, and in more recent work once again we see this idea of 'inner speech' surfacing, from Freud to Foucault, and in others, most recently in Adriana Cavarero (2000) and Denise Riley (1989; 2000; 2004), two feminist philosophers who are each concerned with the terms by which the self gives itself to itself, and gives itself to others through various modes of address. And yet it remains true that we are unaccustomed to think in these terms, or to take seriously the idea that the self discourses with itself, and that this should be a subject of scholarly investigation rather than the concern of a good psychiatrist. What sort of communication can this inner speech be? It certainly does not adhere to a linear narrative model of communication; we seem more comfortable with the culture of print media rather than with the highly acoustic space of inner speech. We are made nervous to speak of our inner speech as a polyvocality that arrives as a kind of 'surround-sound', replete with inner auditors, impossible to ignore, and not clearly localizable. With inner speech, I cannot stop up my ears, and I cannot lie to myself. The 'I' here is not one, it is not a substance, it is not a stable site of knowledge and identity; rather, it takes place somewhere between he who speaks and he who is spoken, forever negotiating this space. This space between offers us a richly suggestive metaphor for subjectivity.

Judith Butler's recent work is extremely important in this regard. Butler interrogates the limits of the social norms by virtue of which the self will be recognizable or

<sup>2</sup> This is the classic distinction, as in Hegel, for example, between morality and ethics, *Moralität* and *Sittlichkeit*.

<sup>3</sup> There is no 'ethics' in Descartes, but there is morality. Descartes recommends that until such time as the *moral définitif* is fully worked out in its mathematical exactitude, we should follow a *moral par provision*. Curiously, Descartes believed that humans would arrive at a definitive morality in his lifetime.

intelligible. How, she asks, can I give a reliable account of myself when the very 'I' who speaks remains, in part, a stranger to itself, unable to master the very discourse by virtue of which it is able to appear? In this case, self-knowledge must hesitate when I realize that who 'I' am comports me outside myself, "in a convention or a norm that I did not make, in which I cannot discern myself as an author or an agent of its making" (Butler 2001: 23). I agree with Butler that this can be a productive, rather than a paralyzing, moment of self formation. And when I speak, I must be willing to "acknowledge the limits of acknowledgment itself" (28). Face to face with the Other who asks me, 'who are you?' I am called to give an account of myself in a manner that cannot resort to the communication of some abstract philosophical content; instead, 'I' am radically incomplete, exposed, vulnerable, and uncertain. In my terms, 'I' find myself in the space between he who speaks - he who says 'I' - and he who is spoken and taken up, addressed, by the Other. This distance cannot be collapsed: my exposure, she writes, "is not precisely narratable" (25-26), even as it remains the very condition of my address. "The 'I' cannot tell the story of its own emergence, and the conditions of its own possibility", she continues, "without in some sense bearing witness to a state of affairs to which one could not have been present, prior to one's own becoming, and so narrating that which one cannot know" (26). My self-narration must, then, act somehow as a testimony to the unknown, to my own incomplete uncertainty, and to run the very real risk of failure, of unintelligibility - a narration in whose wake and wakefulness I find myself. At the same time, despite this failure, I understand that I am accountable for my narrative account(s), I am responsible for the stories I tell, and to the ways in which they will circulate and even re-circulate publicly.

I began with the story of FannyAnn Eddy because she puts a human face on the problematic of narrating one's life-story, illustrating the real risks involved in one particular person's struggle to craft for herself an identity whose social and political terms might be liveable, and not a death sentence. FannyAnn's is a real story, or at least hers was a real life whose story has not justly been told. When we ask who she is, the answer is irreducible to this or that particular dimension of her being. However, until human rights discourse changes in a direction away from rights claims based on (1) epistemology - thinkable and recognizable ascriptions or 'recognition' and (2) ontology - metaphysical categories and stable identities or 'origins', then it seems we shall be stuck with a politics of identity and judge human rights claims on the basis of such abstract dimensions. Neither (1) nor (2) is, in my opinion, the basis of ethical life. Instead, I would see ethical 'substance' as an activity, and *parrhesia* is but one example. Although the *parrhesiastes* may speak out for 'recognition' or in the name of 'identity', I would argue that it is the activity of speaking out itself that is the basis of

the ethical relation. It is always future-oriented, a striving-towards what might count as 'recognition' or 'identity', when neither of these will be sedimented into a *fait accompli*.

There are of course more literary examples of such struggles, when we read, and when literature 'speaks'; I think it may even be fair to say that if literature 'acts' in this way, if it takes place, it is *as* a kind of inner speech, *as* the narrative - and narrativizing - struggle to find and to fashion the language within which the self will give itself to itself, the crucible of its ethical becoming. Paul Ricoeur characterizes literary space as "a vast laboratory for thought experiments" (1992: 148), and he does not hesitate to place narrative and ethics in close propinquity, as I am doing here. In this reading, the space of the novel is an inner space of sorts, a vast topography, or, in the more poetic words of Michael Ondaatje, "A novel is a mirror walking down a road" (1993: 91).

#### The 'public/private': the literary

I turn now to Toni Morrison's *Beloved* as a literary example of *parrhesia*. This novel is compelling on many registers, but I am interested in the ways that Morrison frames the self's relation to itself, and how that self struggles narratively to define the terms in and by which it will be spoken - what we might call a kind of *parrhesia* in the novel's pages. For the character Sethe, a freed slave, this is about 'claiming herself': "Freeing yourself was one thing", Morrison writes, but "claiming ownership of that freed self was another" (1988: 95). Freedom is more than a word here. And for Sethe the terms of such ownership are not ready-to-hand; these terms must be invented, not in so many words, but woven into the fabric of the narrative itself, stitched into the quilt of many colours - a patchwork - that becomes a recurrent metaphor in Morrison's text. Consider for a moment the early scene in the Clearing, where Baby Suggs 'calls' to the community of freed slaves, gathering them together, and leading them on a journey of self-possession:

'Here', she said, 'in this place, we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass. Love it. Love it hard. Yonder they do not love your flesh. They despise it. They don't love your eyes; they'd just as soon pick em out. No more do they love the skin on your back. Yonder they flay it. And O my people they do not love your hands. Those they only use, tie, bind, chop off and leave empty. Love your hands! Love them. Raise them up and kiss them. Touch others with them, pat them together, stroke them on your face 'cause they don't love that either. *You go to love it, you!*' (1988: 88)

Not so much in words, then, does Baby Suggs 'call'; not in words, and not by any schoolteacher's logic, but the terms of self-possession are in the flesh, in song, dance, weeping; in prayer; in deeds. It will not suffice, then, to submit her individual words to some kind of semiotic analysis, as if meaning could be wrested from them in such a way; no, Morrison refuses her reader the comfort of that position, her words resisting such violence. Instead, the words become flesh, and she offers us a non-linear narrative, and a fluid and shifting narrative voice, so that the position of the narrator - of the speaker - cannot comfortably be occupied, so that there is a vital difference between she who speaks and she who is spoken.<sup>4</sup>

This vital difference opens a difficult and insurmountable space of ambiguity - but an essential one. She who speaks is perhaps incommensurable with she who is spoken. Consider the chapters that each open with the sentence, "I am Beloved and she is mine": the narrative voice is never the same, the identity of the speaking 'I' is in question, and it is unclear who 'speaks' and who is 'spoken', whether it is Beloved, and whether Beloved is possessed, or whether the narrator is not rather possessed *by* Beloved, keeping the narrative 'I' from itself, unable to speak-for itself, dispossessed. In this state, she who speaks can never possess herself, can never fully *own* herself, and yet she speaks, and in speaking, struggles to *claim* ownership of herself. Owning and claiming are worlds apart. Claiming is a speech act that carries no guarantee of ownership or self-possession, but it is nevertheless an act - sometimes violent - that struggles to create the terms by which that ownership might one day be realized.

When we listen to how the words 'act', rather than to their conventional meaning, then we have begun to listen with a rhetorical ear. And when the text washes over us in this way, we begin to understand that the very form of the text, *how* it is narrated, inscribes a fleshly meaning into the reader's lived experience. Morrison writes: "In the beginning there were no words. In the beginning was the sound, and they all knew what that sound sounded like" (259). We glimpse this meaning at the end of the novel, when thirty neighbourhood women arrive at 124 Bluestone Road:

<sup>4</sup> I do not believe that Morrison is simply suggesting an alternative paradigm for meaning. "I do not want to alter one hierarchy in order to institute another" (1992: 8), she writes. Replacing one hierarchy with another would amount to no more than an "exchange of dominations" (1992: 8). As a critic, she is more interested in "what makes intellectual domination possible; how knowledge is transformed from invasion and conquest to revelation and choice; what ignites and informs the literary imagination, and what forces help establish the parameters of criticism" (1992: 8). *Beloved* performs an equally trenchant critique of domination and the production of meaning, albeit on a different register; here, by drawing on what "ignites and informs the literary imagination," she offers new forms for the possibility of revelation and choice, new ways to live.

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Some had their eyes closed; others looked at the hot, cloudless sky. Sethe opened the door and reached for Beloved's hand. Together they stood in the doorway. For Sethe it was as though the Clearing had come to her with all its heat and simmering leaves, where the voices of women searched for the right combination, the key, the code, the sound that broke the back of words (261).

In the act, in these voices, the back of words is broken, words and their body of meaning, broken by the sound that testifies to the flesh, to community, to belonging-together: "a wave of sound wide enough to sound deep water and knock the pods off chestnut trees. It broke over Sethe and she trembled like the baptized in its wash" (261).

In the end, Sethe's daughter Denver also begins to understand the terms by which she will claim herself, the hope of a new generation. Describing Denver, Morrison writes: "It was a new thought, having a self to look out for and preserve" (252). Denver meets Paul D in a Cincinnati street, as she is looking for work: "Take care of yourself, Denver," he says, "but she heard it as though it were what language was made for" (252). Morrison's ambiguity is telling: language is 'made for' conveying Paul D's care - a care that sounds deep in the soul, meaning more than the words themselves, breaking the back of words, perhaps. But Denver also understands that it is the kind of care that we have when we care for ourselves, what Foucault calls a properly ethical relation. In order to comprehend the terms of *this* care - of *this* kind of relationality - we must be attuned rhetorically: we must listen not just to the words, but to the sounds that break them, the ways they hold us in their care, and give me back to myself, whole. In the final pages, it is Paul D recalling Sixo's words that sends him back to Sethe: Sixo, in describing his feelings for the Thirty-Mile Woman, says, "She is a friend of my mind. She gather me, man. The pieces I am, she gather them and give them back to me in all the right order" (272-73). As he tells it, the remnants are recollected, gathered together again, stitched into the fabric of life. Returning to Sethe, Paul D will say, "You your best thing, Sethe. You are" (273). *She* is her own best thing, her own self as it relates to itself - a self whose terms are wide enough to embrace Paul D, too. And if her story, like Beloved's, "is not," Morrison repeats, "a story to pass on" (275), it is nevertheless a story that must have a witness, a story whose very terms, whose narrative force, offers some hope in the project of claiming ourselves. And it is for this that it must be told.

**Conclusion***The body of free speech: risk and the rhetorical practice of parrhesia*

This brings me to a conclusion of sorts, even as I have provoked an irresolvable crisis of the speaking subject. I have spoken or narrated several life-stories - FannyAnn's, Sethe's, Morrison's perhaps, or the life of Morrison's many narrative voices, even her readers' - and all of these lives, whether real or fictional, are incommensurable with my own life, although my life, too, is somehow told through my telling. I have not been interested in these characters as victims or as subjects dispossessed because of their gender, their sexual orientation, or their 'race' (although each of these represents a painful truth). Instead, I have focused on the power of their speech, how their speech struggles to invent the terms of the self and to create a space in which that self can be spoken, a space in which it might live and be free. Of course, the other side of this *parrhesiastic* risk is that their speech must be heard, must be received as a call.

In this final moment, it would be dishonest not to call my own speech into question. Whose narrative voice will circulate in these pages as he circulates the stories of those whose lives are very far from his own? How could I give an account of myself, of an 'I' whose authority would admit to its own ordinary desolation and solitude, even as it ardently refuses the desolation of those lives whose stories it tells? No act of rhetorical grace is kind enough to allow me to slip away unaware. And self-effacement soon becomes its own form of narcissism. But as Butler remarks, my own subjective inadequacy is not the first concern: "The ethical valence of the situation is . . . not restricted to the question of whether or not my account of myself is adequate" (2001: 31). Indeed, my narrative accounts are forever inadequate, and no meta-narrative will ever adequately convey this inadequacy. Rather, if I am to be judged, "One must also ask whether in giving the account, I establish a relationship to the one to whom the account is addressed. . . ." (2001: 31). My reader will therefore judge whether I speak *for* Ms Eddy, as a colonizing and exploitative force, or, on the contrary, whether I succeed somehow in speaking *with* her, *alongside* her. Moreover, I hope my reader is also drawn into this relation. In this case, she or he will judge me by the effects of my speech, judge whether my address gathers us together under the ethical injunction to look forward, to create new openings, new terms, and new conversations toward a speech that is free. This, in any case, is the risk. Such speech carries us together toward new possibilities for speaking and for being, and it nurtures new modes of social and political transformation in those places where such freedom has been foreclosed.

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## Semiosis and (target) groups: Peirce, Mead and the subject

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### Introduction

The aim of this paper is to give an overview, using Peirce's theory of signs to explain/describe the dynamics in (target) groups and to study how such groups form common interpretations of signs. Here, 'target groups' means those communities which can be formed, sometimes spontaneously, or, for example, virtually on the Internet, or loosely in society, bringing together people who share some attitudes, activities or world views. The concept also refers to the groups that are investigated by market research, especially in relation to different products or brands, which are designed for certain target groups. I will concentrate on the issue of what constitutes 'semiosis' and seek to demonstrate through an advertising image the ways in which semiosis can facilitate – or discourage – group understanding.

I do not seek to draw conclusions about the broader notion of groups constructed in society or society itself. However, it is impossible to avoid discussion of this by virtue of the fact that groups inevitably belong to society. The key idea suggested here is that sign action, i.e. semiosis, offers a more holistic view of the effect of the social environment/Umwelt on the interpretation of signs. In a sense, such an holistic view could overcome the gap between an individual and the society/group and show how semiosis can be used to explain the changing interpretations of signs.

This paper is therefore a preliminary foray, posing questions, finding connections and analogies between disciplines, without definitively establishing a new theory or a revision of social studies. Moreover, it is a part of a larger project where change of signs and changes in the interpretation of signs are the foci for analysing visual artefacts from the perspective of a certain target group.