

**Speech Is the Body of the Spirit:
The Oral Hermeneutic in the Writings of
Eugen Rosenstock—Huessy (1888—1973)**

Harold M. Stahmer

All things were made by the Word. In the beginning there was neither mind nor matter. In the beginning was the Word. St. John was properly the first Christian theologian because he was overwhelmed by the spokenness of all meaningful happening.

Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy

The evolution of human society and the “hominization” of the world (man’s entering into possession of the world, filling it up, becoming the active focus of more and more of its operations) can thus be understood in a basic, although by no means an exclusive sense, as a triumph of voice, of the word, through which man comes to an understanding of actuality and through which he constructs human society.

Walter J. Ong, S.J.

The indicator or indicators of illocutionary force implant the meaning in the stream of social intercourse; they are what make speech take hold, and what make language more than the medium of information exchange that philosophers and linguists long seem to have thought it.

J. L. Austin

. . . it is significant that the emotional dynamics of the Gospel were always controlled by the meaningfulness of speech. To this, visionary and psychic phenomena were subordinated, and the language in question was not only the spoken word but personal address; it was not only in the indicative mode but in the imperative; it was not only in the third person but in the second and the first; it was not only a matter of declaration but of dialogue.

Amos N. Wilder

* * *

The Christian social philosopher, Eugen Friedrich Moritz Rosenstock-Huessy, lived most of his life under the “spell of language,” more specifically under the influence of the Incarnate Word as it manifests itself in and through human speech. Hence his

description of Man as “reverberating the Word”:

Man is reverberating the Word. How can he do this if he runs away from the first periods of life, in which he should acquire forever the resounding qualities of obedience, of listening, of singing and of playing? These first periods have made me. From them, the power has sprung of giving the slip to any one outdated later period of style or articulation and to grow up to one more comprehensive. . . . The pages of my *Sociology* may be those in which I have vindicated these four chapters of my life of the spirit as creating our true time, our full membership in society (1959:24).²

In 1958, at age seventy, Rosenstock-Huessy was awarded an honorary doctorate in theology by the theological faculty of the University of Münster and hailed as the new “Magus des Nordens” (“Magician of the North”), the J. G. Hamann of the twentieth century. Like Hamann (1730-88), Rosenstock-Huessy gnawed continually on the bone of language and for that reason is hailed in Europe as “Der Sprachdenker” (“The Speech-Thinker”).³ Although these two men addressed two radically different social and intellectual climates, the similarities in their writings with respect to the sacramental power of speech is striking. Compare, for example, the following statements by Hamann with one of Rosenstock-Huessy’s:

I know of no eternal truths save those which are unceasingly temporal. I speak neither of physics nor of theology; with me language is the mother of reason and revelation, its Alpha and Omega. With me the question is not so much; What is reason? but rather; What is language?⁴

And for Rosenstock-Huessy:

And this temporal character of my thinking is in fact the Alpha and Omega from which I grasp everything afresh. Speech reflects this mode of procedure, even for someone who has been influenced by philosophy. For that reason I prefer to talk about speech rather than about reason (1969:119).

For each, speech (or as Hamann put it, *verbalism*) constituted a *via media* between the Scylla and Charybdis of philosophical and theological discourse. Each regarded speech as sacramental and

each saw in language the answer to his age's obsession with artificial and abstract systems reminiscent of the Enlightenment and nineteenth-century German idealism, historicism, and positivism.

This paper will focus on the oral hermeneutic in Rosenstock-Huessy's writings and will attempt to give the reader an insight into the extent to which his lifelong preoccupation with the Incarnate Word and the spoken word, with "speech," dominated and shaped the substance and style of his written work.⁵

It is not uncommon to hear from those reading the writings of Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy that they find his style difficult, his selection of topics and themes unusual, and his method and approach to language, time, and history unconventional and hard to classify. These difficulties seem particularly acute for those trained in theology, analytic philosophy, and sociology or law. One reason for this is that the breadth of his knowledge exceeds that of most scholars trained in any one of these disciplines. Another is that his approach to each of these disciplines, coupled with his use of concepts like "Grammatical Thinking" (*Grammatisches Denken*) and "Cross of Reality" (*Kreuz der Wirklichkeit*) and terms like "speech-thinking" (*Sprachdenken*) and "speech-letters" (*Sprachbriefe*), is unfamiliar not only to most American scholars, but to those trained in Europe as well.

Rosenstock-Huessy admits that his style and writings are as unconventional as was his life. He stated this publicly in one of the last works to be published before his death in 1973, *I am an Impure Thinker* (1970a). In his foreword to that work, the poet W. H. Auden said that although normally "'A good wine needs no bush,' I should warn anyone reading him for the first time. . . he may find as I did, certain aspects of Rosenstock-Huessy's writings a bit hard to take. At times he claims to be the *only* man who has ever seen the light about History and Language. But let the reader persevere, and he will find, as I did, that he is richly rewarded. He will be forced to admit that, very often, the author's claim is just: he *has* uncovered many truths hidden from his predecessors." Quoting Rosenstock-Huessy's motto, "*Respondeo etsi mutabor!*" ("I respond *although* I will be changed"), Auden concluded, "Speaking for myself, I can only say that, by listening to Rosenstock I have been changed" (1970a:vii).

In a review in *The Modern Schoolman* of one of

Rosenstock-Huessy's major writings, his two-volume *Sociology* (1956 and 1958), Walter Ong described him as a member of that group of philosophers whose concerns are with the "human life-world" and whose writings, quoting Rosenstock-Huessy, were directed "against the decay of time-sense and of the power of speech." Of his writings, Father Ong admitted that they "are difficult to classify." He then added:

And this is as it should be, for a dissatisfaction with all classification because of the disability it unavoidably entails is a mark not only of Rosenstock-Huessy's thought but of contemporary philosophy generally. If it is true, as those who are intelligently ill at ease in the presence of classification well know, that we can never avoid it, however industriously we may conceal it, it is also true that man can never again be so smug about classifying things as he rather consistently has been in the past. Philosophy today is spilling out of its old containers, not shrinking but growing, developing a social dimension and cast which is personalist and even poetic and literary. Under these circumstances, it is hard to see how the practicing philosopher can fail to pay attention to Rosenstock-Huessy's work (1960:139).

Before his conversion to Christianity at age 18 or 19, Rosenstock-Huessy had become aware of the fact that "Language is wiser than the one who speaks it. The living language of people always overpowers the thinking of individual man who assumes he could master it" (1921:114; 1968:62-63). In 1902, at age 14, it was apparent to Rosenstock-Huessy that language—philology, grammar, writing dictionaries, compiling indexes, translating and studying history—had special meaning for him ("all linguistics intoxicated me"), although he lacked at the time the inspiration and insight into the powers inherent in speech that permeated his later life and writings. In a lengthy autobiographical essay he stated that from 1902 until 1942 "speech made me the footstool of its new articulation—since 1902 I have lived under the banner of speech" (1968:63). An early sign of Rosenstock-Huessy's departure from his early preoccupation with traditional linguistics was occasioned by the refusal of the law faculty at Leipzig in 1912 to accept a chapter of *Ostfalens Rechtsliteratur*. Nevertheless, as he put it, "I had braved them, printing the chapter—*based on my recognition of*

speech as creating us—just the same.” In retrospect, it took World War I to end what he called “departmental scholarship.” “The war taught me that professional squabbles were not enough—that the whole world of the educated was embodying a spiritual lag” (1959:17).

In 1914 Rosenstock-Huessy’s life and style changed dramatically. The onslaught of World War I affected him profoundly. His experiences as a German officer at the Western front transformed him from a brilliant Privatdozent into an inspired Christian revolutionary. He described this change in his major work on history, *Out of Revolution: The Autobiography of Western Man* (1938): “Any real man behaves in the volcanic hours of his own life as people behaved during revolutions” (708). In his “Post-War Preface” to this work and in the chapter “Farewell to Descartes,” Rosenstock-Huessy outlined his new orientation and the task and challenge that he had set for himself:

The idea of this book originated in an experience we went through in the trenches. . . . The attempt to found a new future for the united soldiers of Europe, that is, for its manhood, on the common experience of the World War can only be successful if this generation that was killed, wounded, weakened, decimated, by the War can bequeath a lasting memory of its experience to its children. Scholars cannot demobilize until the World War has reformed their method and their purpose in writing history (5).

Its topic, “the creation of humankind,” owes to “the World War its daring to be simple and general. It owes to events that far transcend our individual judgment its rediscovery of what is important and what is trifling in the life of mankind. This book owes to the sufferings of millions and tens of millions its ability to treat the history of the world as an autobiography” (6). And in a concluding manifesto he stated:

We post-War thinkers are less concerned with the revealed character of the true God or the true character of nature than with the survival of a truly human society. In asking for a truly human society we put the question of truth once more; but our specific endeavor is the living realization of truth in mankind. Truth is divine and has been divinely revealed—*credo ut*

intelligam. Truth is pure and can be scientifically stated—*cogito ergo sum*. Truth is vital and must be socially represented—*Respondeo etsi mutabor*” (740-41).

According to Rosenstock-Huessy it was during the first of the war years, 1914, that he wrote his “first totally inspired book” and “broke away from antiquarianism” (1959:16). The book, *Königshaus und Stämme in Deutschland zwischen 911 and 1250*, represented his break with traditional scholarly ways of treating medieval legal history, just as his later work, *Vom Industrierecht, Rechtssystematische Fragen* (1926), represented his break with the then prevailing norms in the field of industrial legal scholarship.

Two Rosenstock-Huessy scholars, Konrad von Moltke and Eckart Wilkens, have traced the interrelatedness of Rosenstock-Huessy’s lifelong preoccupation with language and law, which they document using an unpublished nine-page letter which he wrote while at the Western front on military service in 1915. This letter reveals that in 1915 Rosenstock-Huessy had begun to develop his “Grammatical Method” and “Cross of Reality” which are based upon a recognition of the power of speech and which constitute the methodological framework for his two-volume *Sociology (Soziologie)*, I:1956; II:1958), a work that appeared earlier in a limited edition under the title *Cross of Reality*. According to Konrad von Moltke, “Even without giving a name to the Four as a form of orientation, of revelation, Rosenstock-Huessy puts the grammatical method to work in the area most readily accessible to him in law, . . . in writing under the pressure of the situation in the field of battle.”⁶

The historic oral foundations of the Germanic as well as common law traditions fitted in quite well with Rosenstock-Huessy’s early preoccupation with language. It should be noted that his interest in law did not arise originally out of his interest in language, inasmuch as he took up the study of law at his father’s urging in order that he could be independent and self-supporting. Nevertheless, the centrality as well as the evidentiary role of the spoken word and oral tradition in law fascinated him. Again, quoting von Moltke:

In the Germanic legal tradition—as in common law tradition—the *spoken word* occupies a very special place. Indeed, originally the written word had not evidentiary value without *oral* confirmation. Thus, the

spoken character which is so typical of Eugen's work can also be seen in terms of his legal training. It is even evident in the most academically oriented of the seven works discussed by Eckart Wilkens, *Vom Industrierecht, Rechtssystematische Fragen* (1926) (*On Industrial Law, Issues in Legal Systematics*). The themes which were already audible in the sketch of 1915 and in the article of 1918, the application of the Four, the Cross of Reality, to unexplored domains of law, are also evident in this work (von Moltke and Wilkens 1982:4).

Already in 1910 a group of young intellectuals, one that included Franz Rosenzweig (1886-1929) and may have included Rosenstock-Huessy, had come together in Baden-Baden out of concern about the "spiritual lag" in German universities and their fear that these concerns were signs that all of Europe was facing an impending catastrophe, a fear which, in Rosenstock-Huessy's words, was at the time "communicable to a few friends only." For many who shared these concerns, the problems they faced had to do with speech and the inability of individuals and professional and social groups and organizations to communicate with one another. It is therefore not surprising that between 1910 and as late as 1930 many of those who shared these convictions produced a variety of works that dealt with language, especially the spoken word, the interpersonal, and programs and possibilities for the restructuring and re-creation of more human and humane communities and societies.

For example, there was the Patmos group (1919-23) and those who edited and contributed to the periodical, *The Creature (Die Kreatur, 1926-30)*. The original members of the Patmos group included Leo Wiesmantel, Werner Picht, Hans and Rudolf Ehrenberg, Karl Barth, Rosenzweig, and Rosenstock-Huessy. The editors of *The Creature* were Joseph Wittig, Martin Buber, and Victor von Weizsacker (Catholic-Jew-Protestant), and the journal included among its contributors, in addition to Rosenstock-Huessy, Rosenzweig, the Ehrenbergs, Weismantel, Picht, Florens Christian Rang, Rudolf Hallo, and Nicholas Berdyaev. And while only a few of the authors of *The Creature* were identified with the earlier Patmos group, they nevertheless shared many of the group's concerns.⁷

Although they may have first met in 1910 in Baden-Baden,

and again in 1912, it was not until the night of July 7, 1913 that Rosenstock-Huessy and Rosenzweig met again and engaged one another in an intensely personal dialogue. Thereafter, they began a close yet often stormy and antagonistic friendship that lasted until Rosenzweig's death in 1929. In a letter to his old friend and occasional enemy shortly before he died, Rosenzweig said, "I learn from no one so naturally, so inevitably, so effortlessly, as from you" (10.4.1929).⁸ Rosenzweig's "encounter" with Rosenstock-Huessy on July 7, 1913 and their famous correspondence on Judaism and Christianity in 1916 decisively shaped the lives and thinking of both men.⁹ Rosenzweig later credited their encounter in 1913 as having provoked in him the seeds of a spiritual journey that caused him to shed his gnawing agnosticism and embrace Revelation, first as manifest in Christianity, and then subsequently as revealed in his "reaffirmed" Judaism. Both men admitted afterwards that they had been under the "spell of speech" during these encounters, and each subsequently looked back on these events as living examples of "speech-thinking" and "grammatical-thinking." What each later wrote about and referred to as his "system" or "method" *reflected the actual process by which most of their significant theoretical writings had evolved*. Based on their own terminology and reflections, their encounter in 1913 was a "speech-encounter" or "speech-event" (*Sprachereignis*) and the twenty-one letters exchanged in 1916 were "speech-letters" to one another. Without that correspondence and their previous encounter in 1913, it is doubtful that Rosenzweig would have written from the trenches and while on leave his *Star of Redemption* (*Der Stern der Erlösung*, 1921) (8.22.1918-2.16.1919), or that Rosenstock-Huessy would have written in 1924 the cornerstone of his hermeneutics, his *Applied Knowledge of the Soul* (*Angewandte Seelenkunde*).

In an essay entitled "The New Thinking" (1925), Rosenzweig states that "Speech-thinking" is the method he employs in his new way of philosophizing and that it was central to writing his *The Star of Redemption* eight years earlier (Glatzer 1953:198-99). In a letter to Rudolf Hallo (2.4.23) two years before he wrote his essay, Rosenzweig said that "without Eugen I would never have written the *Star of Redemption*." Similarly, Rosenstock-Huessy said of his 1916 correspondence with Rosenzweig: "This exchange . . . turned the rhythm of life of both writers inside out. Both had to live quite differently than they had before" (1968:70). He

compared their significance to that of “love letters” which have the same effect. The writer of love letters realizes that in the writing of the letter something “new” is learned; “namely, that between him and the recipient of the letter there exists a gaping abyss. The letter is, in fact written to close this abyss.” Thus when Shakespeare’s Romeo cries out, “It is my soul that calls upon my name,” Romeo “senses that he already in the past was called Romeo, that first through Juliet’s calling of his name the one half of his soul can become whole.” The division within us, powers “that drag us *backwards*, drive us *forwards*, paralyse us from *without*, excite us from *within*,” are overcome and united, that is, our soul and our name grow together, are united, when “the soul speaks aloud our name.” This unity is achieved by a surrender to the voice that addresses us and a simultaneous “forgetting about ourselves”:

As often as this happens, the person becomes the one that he should become. Because neither can we nor should we become ourselves. We can only achieve our destiny by forgetting “ourselves” (1968:169).

Rosenzweig himself had experienced the meaning of Romeo’s “It is my soul that calls upon my name” perhaps as deeply as anyone. He also knew what “speech-letters” were all about. On January 16, 1920, ten days after his engagement to Edith Hahn, Rosenzweig wrote to her:

Do you know why you were unable at that time to know “the meaning of love?” Because one only knows it when one both loves and is loved. Everything else can, at a pinch, be done one-sidedly, but two are needed for love, and when we have experienced this we lose our taste for all other one-sided activities and do everything mutually. For everything can be done mutually; he who has experienced love discovers it everywhere, its pains as well as its delights.

Believe me, a person who loves will no longer tolerate anything dead around him. And since love teaches him “not to run away,” there’s nothing left him, whether for good or ill, but to love. . . . We never awaken for our own sakes; but love brings to life whatever is dead around us. This is the sole proof of its authenticity. *You see, I can no longer write a*

“book,” everything now turns into a letter, since I need to see the “other.” That is how I feel now in writing the piece on education. Since today I am really at it. Every once in a while I have a fit of laziness because it is mere “writing”—I had rather speak—but I go on all the same and make my pen shout (1937:384-85, emphasis added).

“Speech-letters” are letters that are wrung or even wrenched from the soul out of a desire for wholeness and unity as well as by the need, according to Rosenstock-Huessy, of “every healthy person. . . to get rid of himself, as often as possible.” “Franz” realized this secret when he observed in 1913-14, the time when “Eugen” was writing his “Professorenbuch,” that “Eugen spewed forth this book like a volcano.” And similarly, in Rosenzweig’s life,

Little did Franz realize, that the same “spewing forth” would apply equally one day to his own evolving major work, *The Star of Redemption*. Franz “spewed forth” this encompassing work between the end of August 1918 and February 1919; for which he paid dearly with his subsequent life-shortening illness. . . . For the trance of inspiration tore him out of his powerful body and he was never able thereafter to find his way back into his body (Rosenstock-Huessy 1968:169).

Their influence on one another was not something either man could have been “aware” of, for “awareness” is, in itself, “a very superficial form of spiritual address or communication” that does not “penetrate very deeply under the skin.” The process of change, the “metamorphosis” that occurred to each, was the result of the power of speech that forced each partner to rid himself of his old self and to become united and strengthened in his powers in ways that completely changed the quality and direction of their respective lives. Rosenstock-Huessy summarized what occurred to each fifty years later, after half a century of living under the spell of his fascination and preoccupation with speech. To paraphrase the German title of his essay on the “Origin of Speech,” “Im Prägstock eines Menschenschlags oder der tägliche Ursprung der Sprache,” the periodic renewal of speech occurs as new types and forms of creatures are “coined” and “stamped” (1964:II, 451):

It is clear to me today, fifty years later, that in

1913 I planted the *germ* of the *Star* in Franz; and conversely the metamorphosis of my own esoteric works, from a kind of St. George-and-the-dragon approach into the worldly form of revolutions, was promoted thanks to Franz's grounding in the methods of scientific historical investigation. But neither one needed to have known or been aware of such an influence if it had occurred. For awareness is, in itself, a very superficial form of spiritual address or communication. Its messages do not penetrate very deeply under the skin. What is supposed to get under the skin should be able to penetrate as if by subcutaneous injection. . . . It is perhaps all for the best. This is why our duel which can be dated—in the written one of 1916 and the more oral one of 1913—should be seen as a step away from the brink of the insanity of European humanity, to which humanity had been condemned in 1890, and as a step back to spiritual recovery (1968:172).

In his essay “The New Thinking” (“Das Neue Denken,” 1925), Rosenzweig elaborated on the qualities of “speech thinking” and stated “When I wrote the *Star of Redemption*. . . the main influence was Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy; a full year and a half before I began to write I had seen the rough draft of his now published *Applied Knowledge of the Soul*,” which Rosenstock-Huessy had sent to Rosenzweig in the winter of 1916 after their correspondence on Judaism and Christianity in the form of a lengthy “speech-letter” (Glatzer 1953:200). In his “Prologue/Epilogue to the Letters—Fifty Years Later,” Rosenstock-Huessy referred to the drama that began in 1913 as a series of acts in the course of which Franz and Eugen were, to use his words, “existentially transformed” (1969:72). Quite accurately, the correspondence was cited by the late Fritz Kaufmann as a veritable model of “existential” dialogue. “True co-existence,” Kaufmann wrote, “in the consummation of face-to-face relationships is no less intensive and forceful for being unobtrusive, a model of non-violence.” Such, he asserted, was the quality “alive in the highly charged controversy between Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy and Franz Rosenzweig in 1913 and 1916” (1957:214-15). In retrospect, Rosenstock-Huessy made the following comment about their first significant encounter in 1913 in his introduction to the 1935 edition of Rosenzweig's *Letters*:

“Much to their own surprise the two partners found themselves reluctantly put under the compulsion to face up to one another in a struggle with no quarter given or asked. . . . For only in this last extremity, of a soul in self-defense, is there hope to realize the truth in the questions of life” (Rosenzweig 1935:638). His published remarks, those in *Judaism Despite Christianity* (1969) and *Ja und Nein: Autobiographische Fragmente* (1968) confirm Rosenstock-Huessy’s convictions that their “speech-letters” altered the direction and rhythm of their lives:

Thus, the biographies of the two correspondents can best be understood as a junction, the one provoking the other. That this is so could be documented very fully indeed, but it is doubtful that any amount of documentation could convince modern humanists, so accustomed as they are to treat biographical facts in a completely individualistic fashion, of the thesis that two men, Eugen and Franz, exchanged life rhythms in the course of their encounter from 1913 to 1918. The arsenals of modern historiography and biography have not yet developed tools for such an interpretation.

However, this lacuna in the inventory of modern thinking does not impress Eugen very much. After all, the twelve apostles, the four evangelists, St. Francis and St. Dominic, and many, many other groupings represent examples of the interpretation of “individual” lives. Even Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville got under each other’s skins. Franz and Eugen did exchange with each other certain fundamentals of their life rhythm, in mutuality, and—must it be added?—quite unintentionally, in total unconsciousness. Individual purposes or intentions were subordinated to a large extent to a process of re-creation or transformation brought about by a most unwanted, even abhorred, exposure to each other.¹⁰

The evidence that these letters shaped their lives suggests that “speech-letters” deserve special consideration as a form or genre not simply of “existence communication” or “dialogue,” but rather as media or vehicles of “autobiographical” or “existence transformation.” Traditionally, letters become interesting and worthy of editing and publication as a means of shedding light on

the personalities or published writings of individuals. Letters are seen as a report of some event that has taken place or is in process *independent* of the letter itself. Seldom, if ever, are letters themselves seen as the forces of transformation not only for the recipient but for the author as well. The influence of letters viewed as “speech-letters” on the recipient may also account for works written or produced resulting from the impact of the perceived, appropriated, or interiorized meaning of such letters for the recipient’s existence, whether or not discernible linkages or signs of indebtedness are acknowledged or can be detected. Rarely have letters been considered the kernels or germs of major writings which may or may not have influenced the intended recipient, but which nonetheless profoundly affected the direction and focus of the author’s life in ways that the recipient as well as the author of such “speech-letters” were unaware of. Those involved with theological, philosophical, and literary hermeneutics may one day add to our appreciation of letters as a unique genre of autobiographical or existence transformation. And most certainly Rosenstock-Huessy’s own insights should be viewed not simply as autobiographical commentary, but as an example of the application of his own “grammatical method” to this phenomenon. Consider, for example, his numerous autobiographical references to his relationship with Rosenzweig in *Ja und Nein*.¹¹ Fifty years after his correspondence with Rosenzweig, the period during which his own version of “speech-thinking” as “grammatical method” matured, Rosenstock-Huessy stated that something that he was unaware of in 1916 came to his attention that “bears upon the meaning of all our letter writing” and “eliminates the false doctrines in the literature about conversation (dialogue) and letters.” For “. . . the prevailing teachings about letters seem to expose the nonsense of our teachers of linguistics in a most devastating way”:

In the letters between Franz and Eugen lofty matters were discussed about Judaism and Christianity. However, it may be more important for further generations, what this exchange of letters in itself reveals. Behind the fashionable words “dialogue,” “existentialism,” “involvement,” the main issues always remain unsaid, namely, those which grasp the event in these letters. I ask: what has happened as a consequence to the writers of these letters? What

meaning do these letters have on their life histories? (1968:168).

In the introduction to volume one of his *Sociology*, Rosenstock-Huessy states that his style or method is based on the outgrowth of conversations with “friends,” arising out of the “services of friendship.” This approach differs from an individual producing a “system based on first principles” on the one hand and the “essay” approach *à la* Emerson or Nietzsche on the other. He refers to his sociological method as a “third style” that has resulted in the fact that many who read his writings “stamp me as unsystematic.” Quoting Goethe, Rosenstock-Huessy refers to his sociology as “*fragments of a confession*.” “The highest work of art must remain incomplete, if the mask on the face of its creator is not to turn to stone” (1956:11).

The importance of the concepts “speech-thinking” and “speech-letters” to Rosenstock-Huessy’s oral hermeneutic have been noted, but attention must also be given to the concepts “grammatical thinking” and “Cross of Reality,” which are equally central to his oral hermeneutic or “speech-thinking.” As early as 1916 in his “speech-letters” to Rosenzweig and then subsequently in his two-volume *Sociology*, his two-volume “speech-book,” *The Speech of Mankind (Die Sprache des Menschengeschlechts*, 1964), and *Speech and Reality* (1970b), Rosenstock-Huessy refers to “Grammar” as “the future organon of social research.” The complete breakdown of the German language between 1933 and 1939 made Rosenstock-Huessy more convinced than ever that “language” in the form of “articulated speech” is the “lifeblood of society” and that it “should be exalted to the rank of social research.” The originality of “grammatical thinking” as a method for creating social unity lies in the fact that “it is stolen neither from theology nor from natural science” and that by using it Roman Catholics and Protestants and Free Thinkers can be united in a “common enterprise.” “Without such a unity,” he maintains, “the revolt of the masses must find the various intellectual groups in a helpless division, as helpless as in the new war. . . . We must discover a common basis for social thinking” (1970b:8-11).

In chapter five of *Applied Knowledge of the Soul*, Rosenstock-Huessy attacks those “false grammars” which reflect the dominance of the perceiving “I”—those beginning with “I,” as the origin of experience, rather than, as our experience proves, with “Thou” Not *amo, amas, amat*, but rather *amas, amo, amat*

should constitute our grammatical posture. It is through the external address early in life in the form of vocatives and imperatives and our response in the form of the grammatical second person that “I” is shaped, and through this process that we become conscious of our “names.” Only after utilizing the grammatical forms “Thou” and “I” do we employ the third person, “he,” “she,” “it.” While the second person is our primary grammatical form, the complete grammar of the soul “appears as an inflection of its grammatical configurations” (1964:756). These grammatical moods are the media through which our grammatical persons are expressed. They are the garb of the soul in each moment of its existence. All grammatical moods and tenses manifest the “soul’s possibilities. . . the soul can swing to the melody of becoming just as it may resound with existence’s tune of the rhythm of transformation” (761).

Two of Rosenstock-Huessy’s essays in *Speech and Reality*, “In Defense of the Grammatical Method” and “Articulated Speech,” are especially useful since they illustrate the interrelatedness of his “grammatical method” and his Cross of Reality. Within the framework of the Cross of Reality, the traditional subject-object distinction represents the “inner” (subject) and “outer” (object) vectors of the spatial axis, while “past” (trajective) and “future” (prejective) are the vectors of the temporal axis. The quality or health on each front or vector of life, whether it can be that of the individual or society, is determined by our use of articulated speech: “Through speech human society sustains its time and space axes. . . it is we who decide what belongs to the past and what shall be part of the future. Our grammatical forms in our daily speech betray our deepest convictions. . . . Society lives by speech, dies without speech” (1970b:16).

We speak out of need and out of fear; out of fear that decay, anarchy, war, and revolution will destroy the time and space axes of society which give direction and orientation to all members of society. In order to prevent social disintegration, men reason, pass laws, tell stories, and sing. In so doing “the external world is reasoned out, the future is ruled, the past is told,” and the unanimity of the inner circle is expressed in song:

Without articulated speech, man has neither direction nor orientation in time and space. Without the signposts of speech, the social beehive would disintegrate immediately. When speech is recognized as

curing society from the ills of disharmony and discontinuity in time and space, grammar is the most obvious organon for the teachings of society (*idem*).

By means of this method, we become conscious of our “place in history (backward), world (outward), society (inward), and destiny (forward).” The grammatical method constitutes “an additional development of speech itself,” which fulfills itself in our new powers of “direction and orientation.” Thus, “Grammar is the self-consciousness of language just as logic is the self-consciousness of thinking” (1970b:18).

Without articulated speech, men neither have one time nor mutual respect nor security among themselves. To speak has to do with time and space. Without speech, the phenomenon of time and space cannot be interpreted. Only when we speak to others (or, for that matter, to ourselves) do we delineate an inner space or circle in which we speak, from the outer world about which we speak. . . . And the same is true about the phenomenon of time. Only because we speak are we able to establish a present moment between past and future (20-21).

Rosenstock-Huessy’s style is personal; he is “confabulating” with the reader, extending an invitation, giving thanks to friends who have made this occasion possible. His written style is typical of that of “speech-letters” as he and Rosenzweig experienced and described them—unsystematic, incomplete, unpredictable. Like Rosenzweig, Rosenstock-Huessy is always “speaking” to you when he writes, always attempting to get the reader’s attention, to engage the reader in a dialogue or conversation. Quoting a line from a letter of Friedrich H. Jacobi to J. G. Hamann, (11.18.1784), Rosenstock-Huessy is saying, “Speak that I may see thee!” Rosenstock-Huessy’s “written” style is controlled by his “voice”; his mind and thoughts are at the mercy and service of “articulated speech.” Whatever difficulties the reader may have in understanding the complexity of the grammatical method or the Cross of Reality of this “impure thinker,” the problem is often compounded and complicated by Rosenstock-Huessy’s constant attempt to treat the written word as a form of “oral address” :

Sound calls forth sound, song calls forth song and innumerable books given to friends bear witness by their

often lengthy poetical inscriptions to the infectious character of confabulation. I mention this so the reader may see, from this underpadding, that the printed word was not radically different to me from the words spoken or written between friends. *Fittingly, letters have played an immense role in my life. The letters printed in Franz Rosenzweig's volume of letters are a good example of their role in my own existence. Many good books got started as letters* (1959:22-23, emphasis added).

In this connection there are many students of Rosenstock-Huessy and also his son, Dr. Hans R. Huessy, who believe that Rosenstock-Huessy comes through best in his recorded lectures when one can actually listen to his voice. His son has said repeatedly that the best and perhaps only way “to really understand my father is to listen to him when he is speaking,” as for example, in the recorded lecture “History Must Be Told,” or in the more than 150 lectures recorded by his students.

For Rosenstock-Huessy, the truly inspired individual, the “enthusiastic” creature in whom God dwells and through whom God speaks, is the God who “looks at us and looked at us before we open our eyes or our mouths. *He is the power which makes us speak. He puts words of life on our lips*” (1946:94, emphasis added). In *Out of Revolution*, Rosenstock-Huessy proposes a sequel of Michelangelo’s painting of God creating Adam in the Sistine Chapel in Rome. God, in the upper right-hand corner, is shown creating Adam, reclining naked and helpless, in the lower left-hand corner. In the beginning, all of God’s angels were on God’s side, contained in the folds of his robe. Rosenstock-Huessy’s proposed sequel would portray the angels as having left the Creator and descended to man, “keeping, strengthening, enlarging his being into the divine. In this picture God would be alone while Adam would have all the Elohim around him as his companions” (1938:727-28). This is consistent with Rosenstock-Huessy’s Johannine millenarian portrayal of Christianity. In the third millennium, the Age of the Spirit, “the New Jerusalem” is envisioned as “a healing of nations without any *visible* Church at its center.” “I believe that in the future, Church and Creed can be given a new lease on life only by services that are nameless and incognito” (1946:127). In another place he states that, “In the third epoch, beginning today, Christians must immigrate into our workaday world, there to incarnate the Spirit in unpredictable

forms,” since “. . . each generation has to act differently precisely in order to represent the same thing. Only so can each become a full partner in the process of Making Man” (124). Early in *The Christian Future: Or the Modern Mind Outrun*, in a section entitled “Let us Make Man,” he elaborated on this theme:

Hence the third article of the Creed is the specifically Christian one: from now on the Holy Spirit makes man a partner in his own creation. In the beginning God said, “Let us make man in our image” (Gen. 1:26). In this light, the Church Fathers interpreted human history as a process of making Man like God. They called it “anthropurgy”: as metallurgy refines metal from its ore, anthropurgy wins the true stuff of Man out of his coarse physical substance. Christ, in the Center of history, enables us to participate consciously in this man-making process and to study its laws (1946:108).

Rosenstock-Huessy’s style, his oral hermeneutic, is totally consistent with Professor Amos Wilder’s statement that “the founders of Christianity used the language and idioms of the people: not a sacred or holy language, nor a learned language, nor did they encourage an ecstatic language. . . . The common language of men was itself the medium of revelation” (1964:26-27). Shortly after this passage, Professor Wilder states:

There is, indeed, such a thing as a rhetoric of faith, the language of the Spirit; one can recognize that the early Christians were endowed with new tongues; but all such heavenly discourse remains rooted in the secular media of ordinary speech. Pentecost, indeed, we may take as a dramatization of the fact that there is no peculiar Christian tongue (28).

For Ernst Fuchs, the Gospel, the “Good News,” is fundamentally a “speech-event” (*Sprachereignis*). According to Fuchs (1960:261), “Jesus wrote nothing and adds that even Paul wrote reluctantly. When he and other authors of our New Testament writings *did* write or dictate, their speech still has a

special character, since the new depth and freedom of speech perpetuated itself even in the written productions. *The voice of the writer is the voice of the speaker to a remarkable degree.*"

University of Florida

Notes

¹Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy was born the son of a Jewish banking family in Berlin, Germany on July 6, 1888. He was educated at the universities of Zurich, Berlin, and Heidelberg and received his doctorate in law in 1909 (Heidelberg) and his Ph.D. in 1923 (Heidelberg). He converted to Christianity at age 18 or 19. From 1912 until 1914 he was lecturer in law at Leipzig and served in the German army as an officer from 1914 until 1918. In 1919 he edited a factory newspaper for Daimler Benz and in 1921 directed the Academy of Labor in Frankfurt. In 1923 he was appointed professor of law and sociology at Breslau, where he served until January 31, 1933. From 1933 until 1936 he taught at Harvard, and from 1935 until his retirement in 1957 he was professor of social philosophy at Dartmouth. In 1927 he founded the German School for Adult Education and in 1929 was elected Vice President of the World Association for Adult Education. In 1940 he helped found Camp William James in Vermont, an experimental leadership training center for the CCC. He is the author of more than 450 essays, articles, and monographs, including 45 books. About 150 of his lectures were recorded. He died on February 24, 1973 in Norwich, Vermont.

²A discourse on Rosenstock-Huessy is a fitting contribution to a celebration of the life and work of Walter J. Ong, S.J. Both men responded to the power of speech and dedicated their own lives, albeit in different ways, to revealing for humankind the mysteries of the Incarnate Word. I have been privileged to know both men and wish to express my indebtedness to Father Ong, whom I first met in 1957 and whose research and generous spirit have provided me with a constant source of intellectual and spiritual nourishment.

³Cf. Rohrbach 1973 and Stahmer 1968.

⁴Hamann to F. H. Jacobi (11.14.1784); Hamann to Herder (8.6-10.1784); Hamann to Jacobi (3.4-10.1788). Cf. Alexander 1966:133-34: ". . . Hamann's use of the term 'language' (*Sprache*) is sometimes highly figurative: frequently he has in mind not only human expression, but the divine self-expression (the LOGOS) which lies at the ground of it. We use 'word' for the self-expression of God by which man communicates with his fellow-man (on which human society and even human existence itself rises), and for the mediating organ between our invisible souls and our visible bodies. For Hamann this is not a semantic accident but a clue as to the place to investigate the divine mystery of man, both the nature of his powers and the misuse of these powers."

⁵My use of the phrase "oral hermeneutic" in Rosenstock-Huessy's writings will focus on the first of at least three possible meanings of the term "hermeneutic." The first of these is "to profess," "to say," "to assert," "to express aloud," "to announce," and is derived from the Greek *hermeios* in connection with the priest at the Delphic oracle and the wing-footed

messenger-god Hermes who by tradition “mediated,” “transmitted,” or “interpreted” that which did not heretofore exist into a form that humans could understand. This mediating or interpretative process also expressed itself as an “explanation” of a situation and, thirdly, as “translation” (Palmer 1969:2-32). The emphasis in Rosenstock-Huessy’s writings on his “oral hermeneutic” is quite similar to Walter Ong’s definition of “interpretation” as “... to bring out what is concealed in a given manifestation, to make evident what in the manifestation is not evident to the milieu in which the interpreter’s audience lives” (Ong 1986:147).

⁶von Moltke and Wilkens 1982. The reader may also be interested in a recent work by one of Rosenstock-Huessy’s first students at Dartmouth College, Professor Harold Berman, whose ideas were significantly influenced by Rosenstock-Huessy’s work on revolutions.

⁷Rosenstock-Huessy 1947:209-10. Cf. also Stahlmer 1984:61-62. The works that Rosenstock-Huessy and Rosenzweig produced during this period were actually responses to the fundamentally human and social issues which they experienced. Hence, Rosenzweig’s remark, “The dialogue which these monologues make between one another I consider the whole truth.” Other related works produced during this period include Buber 1923, Ebner 1921, Ehrenberg 1923, Litt 1919, Gogarten 1926, Lowith 1928, Grisebach 1928, and lastly Marcel 1927. Two additional works that deal with some of these same concerns, but from a nonreligious and more philosophical perspective, are Scheler 1923 and Heidegger 1927.

⁸Made available to the author by Mrs. Freya von Moltke.

⁹Cf. Rosenzweig 1937, 1984; also Glatzer 1953, Martin 1970, Rosenstock-Huessy 1969, and Stahlmer 1968:106-82.

¹⁰Rosenstock-Huessy 1969:172, also 71-76, 171-77; 1968:70-72, 107-18, 166-72.

¹¹Rosenstock-Huessy 1968:70-72, 107-18, 161, 166-72.

References

Alexander 1966

W. R. Alexander. *Johann Georg Hamann: Philosophy and Faith*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.

Buber 1923

Martin Buber. *Ich und Du*. Leipzig: Insel-Verlag.

Ebner 1921

Ferdinand Ebner. *Das Wort und die geistigen Realitäten*. Innsbruck: Brenner-Verlag.

Ehrenberg 1923

Hans Ehrenberg. *Disputation: I, Fichte*. Munich: Drei Masken Verlag.

Glatzer 1953

Nahum Glatzer. *Franz Rosenzweig: His Life and Thought*. New York: Schocken.

Gogarten 1926

Friedrich Gogarten. *Ich glaube an den dreieinigen Gott*. Jena: E.

- Diederichs.
 Grisebach 1928
 Eberhard Grisebach. *Gegenwart*. Halle: M. Niemeyer.
 Heidegger 1927
 Martin Heidegger. *Sein und Zeit*. Halle: M. Niemeyer.
 Kaufmann 1957
 Fritz Kaufmann. "Karl Jaspers and a Philosophy of Communication." In *The Philosophy of Karl Jaspers*. Ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp. New York: Open Court. pp. 210-95.
 Litt 1919
 Theodor Litt. *Individuum und Gemeinschaft*. Leipzig: B. G. Teubner.
 Lowith 1928
 Karl Lowith. *Das Individuum in der Rolle des Mitmenschen*. Munich: Drei Masken Verlag.
 Marcel 1927
 Gabriel Marcel. *Journal métaphysique*. Paris: Gallimard.
 Martin 1970
 Bernard Martin. *Great 20th Century Jewish Philosophers*. New York: Macmillan.
 Ong 1960
 Walter J. Ong, S.J. "Philosophical Sociology." *The Modern Schoolman*, 37:138-41.
 Ong 1986
 _____. "Text as Interpretation: Mark and After." In *Oral Tradition in Literature*. Ed. John Miles Foley. Columbia: University of Missouri Press. pp. 147-69.
 Palmer 1969
 Richard E. Palmer. *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
 Rohrbach 1973
 Wilfred Rohrbach. *Das Sprachdenken Rosenstock-Huessys*. Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer.
 Rosenstock-Huessy 1921
 Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy. *Ostfalens Rechtsliteratur unter Friedrich II*. Weimar: H. Bohlau's Nf.
 Rosenstock-Huessy 1924
 _____. *Angewandte Feelenkunde*. Darmstadt: Roether-Verlag.
 Rosenstock-Huessy 1938
 _____. *Out of Revolution*. New York: Morrow.
 Rosenstock-Huessy 1946
 _____. *The Christian Future*. New York: Harper.
 Rosenstock-Huessy 1947
 _____. "Rückblick auf die Kreatur." In *Deutsche Beiträge*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. pp. 209-10.
 Rosenstock-Huessy 1956
 _____. *Soziologie*. Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer.

- Rosenstock-Huessy 1959
 _____. *Bibliography/Biography*. New York: Four Wells.
- Rosenstock-Huessy 1964
 _____. *Die Sprache des Menschengeschlechts*. Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider.
- Rosenstock-Huessy 1968
 _____. *Ja und Nein: Autobiographische Fragments*. Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider.
- Rosenstock-Huessy 1969
 _____. *Judaism Despite Christianity*. University: University of Alabama Press.
- Rosenstock-Huessy 1970a
 _____. *I am an Impure Thinker*. Norwich, VT: Argo.
- Rosenstock-Huessy 1970b
 _____. *Speech and Reality*. Norwich, VT: Argo.
- Rosenzweig 1935
 Franz Rosenzweig. *Briefs*. Berlin: Schocken.
- Rosenzweig 1937
 _____. *Kleinere Schriften*. Berlin: Schocken.
- Rosenzweig 1984
 _____. *Zweistromland. Kleinere Schriften zu Glauben und Denken*. Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff.
- Scheler 1923
 Max Scheler. *Wesen und Formen der Sympathie*. Bonn: F. Cohen.
- Stahmer 1968
 Harold M. Stahmer. "*Speak That I May Seer!*": *The Religious Significance of Language*. New York: Macmillan.
- Stahmer 1984
 _____. "'Speech-letters' and 'Speech-thinking': Franz Rosenzweig and Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy." *Modern Judaism*, 4:57-81.
- von Moltke and Wilkens 1982
 Konrad von Moltke and Eckart Wilkens. "On Law and Language." Unpubl. paper delivered at the conference on "Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy: His Life and Work" at Renison College, Waterloo, Canada, June 6-9, 1982.
- Wilder 1964
 Amos Wilder. *The Language of the Gospel*. New York: Harper and Row.