

DEAREST CHOIR

[An email sent to the members of the Commons Choir, the day after flying to NYC to join the intensive rehearsal schedule, in preparation for a performance of Re-English at the Harlem Stage in September, 2010.]

Dearest Choir,

First—thanking everyone for the bright energy and focus you’re bringing to the choir! Merci infiniment.

At this point, as we begin to put the pieces completely together, as it becomes a living creature, I’d like to list the elements (like ingredients in a recipe) so everyone can have a fuller sense of this work’s wholeness.

This work is called ‘Re-English.’ The premise is: the English language has never been the speech of a free people. It has been a duplicitous, mercenary, and commercial tongue from the get-go. Furthermore, in that English has been the hegemonic language of globalization, Re-English atones for this by imbuing the language with new inherences: tones, meanings, moods, subtleties, compunctions.

There are 4 elements running throughout the work:

1) *Emanation*: generation of the world from sound, in particular the saying of the phonemes as cosmogony. This puts the world in place.

2) *Narrative*: a series of stanzas that locate key moments in the consistently duplicitous history of English. This is the ‘commoning’ aspect of the work. (Some might narrowly say ‘political,’ but it’s really about widening the wealth on all levels. It’s the asymmetrical battle of our tiny choir up against superpower English, and we plan on winning, if winning must exist).

3) *PPNIE*: Our veritable, homespun science of sound that links specific biochemical processes (hormone secretion, neurotransmission, cell-signaling, chemical cascading) with precise phoneme sequences. The closest possible bearing for this practice within the Western understanding of the body is the new, unwieldy field known as Psychoneuroimmunoendocrinology, hence PNIE. To Psychoneuroimmunoendocrinology we preface ‘prosody.’ So: Prosodopsychoneuroimmunoendocrinology [PPNIE]. PPNIE is carried out by the singers as intoned words are far more efficacious than mere speech or prose. (Here we’re looking ahead to the ‘next’ medicine, the real stuff.)

4) *Optative*: this is a more or less ‘lost’ grammatical mood or modality. It’s the mood of wish, prayer, exhortation and sorrow. English can accomplish the optative with a lot of help from auxiliary verbs such as ‘would’ and ‘could’ (“would that I were rich”), ‘may’ or ‘might’ (“might I be of service”), or ‘had’ (“had I only . . .”).

A FEW KEYS

The manifestation of the body is always the microcosmic analog of the macrocosm. Our bodies are formed by the phonemes as they arise in us, just as the phonemes are the waveforms (the vibes) that bring the universe about. The ‘nothing’ (the who-knows-what), the silence, the nondifferentiation, or darkness everything comes from, arises (physiologically) from the perineum. That’s the root, the unlimited pulsating light, including the sacrococcygeal plexus and mulhadara. What we call the crown, of course, is the top of the

head, which includes the aural, aureolar area as well as the pineal gland, cranial sutures and sahasrara.

Fundamentally, Re-English is about sound and words as protection, regulation, balance, abundance—in brief, all that's beneficial. This property of protection is part of poetry's profound past (being recovered in Re-English).

The acoustic field we create with our voices salubriously acts back on us, influencing mood and body functions.

The last key I'd give with regard to the choir's practice: we work with nine stages in the manifestation of the phonemes:

1) *Sound as Unstruck*: Uncreated sound. Silent throbbing. Undifferentiated sound, or sound as only potential. Not even forming a sound. The Sanskrit word for 'unstruck' is *anahata*, which also means 'unhurt.' It's the sound that is made without striking two things together. Hearing soundlessness. Hearing the absence of sound (may even be deafeningly loud). Because it's uncreated it is ceaseless—always sounding—and can't die out as all created sounds must. Still sound. Plug your ears with your thumbs, to tune in.

2) *Sound Pronounced Silently Within*: Instilling and ingraining the sound. Sound sounded in mind without externalization. Going through all the motions of making the sound without actually moving. Awareness of the sound. Sound as awareness. Unsounded sound a thousand times more potent than the spoken.

3) *Sound Out Loud*: Sound made audible by means of the local vocal apparatus (teeth, tongue, jaw, oral cavity, larynx, lungs, diaphragm, respiratory muscles, etc.). Verbalization. Striking the air.

4) *Hearing With the Whole Body*: As both producer and recipient of the sound, feeling its resonance throughout the entire body, not only physiologically but emotionally and mindfully as well. Here the sonic field includes the soles of the feet, the pelvic floor, belly, diaphragm, local vocal apparatus, skull and crown as well as the air around the body in which the sound resounds and acts back on the body. Skin as tympanum. Every cell a resonator sending out, accepting, selecting frequency.

5) *Prosody as Part of the Sound*: Musical and expressive qualities included in the sound: for example, pitch, stress, pause, loudness and cadence as augmenting and enhancing the movement of the sound.

6) *Gesture of Sound*: The extended expression of the quality of the sound as hand and facial gesturing. This is usually understood as the limit of prosody.

7) *Sound as Entire-Body Gesticulation*: Sound unifying the body as one form or posture. Here the body does not move from its place. It's a stationary figure, like forming the sound's effigy, icon or essence.

8) *Sound as Movement Through Space*: Sonic character acted out. Following along the resonances. A sound as its own drama. This is the basis of *choreoprosodia* (the fusion of dance and poetry); including gait, muscular attitudes, giving up self, kinetic gesture. Phoneme/movement concomitance.

9) *Chorus and Movement*: Moving in space in relation to others who are also moving under the impetus of the sounds. Entrainment that includes the movement of bodies in space. Full awareness of the phonemes.