

WHAT A WORD IS

*no one knows what a word is no one knows what a word is no one knows what a word is
no one owns what a word is no one owns what a word is no one owns what a word is*
—Robert Kocik, *E-V-E-R-Y-O-N-E*

“Suddenly I felt a misty consciousness as of something forgotten—a thrill of returning thought; and somehow the mystery of language was revealed to me. I knew then that ‘w-a-t-e-r’ meant the wonderful cool something that was flowing over my hand. That living word awakened my soul, gave it light, hope, joy, set it free!” — Helen Keller

*“Within the unspeakable mind itself
There appear words that have no basic topic.
They are called
“Those that go beyond the objects of speech and thought.”* — *The Six Spaces of the All Good*

In the 26th Canto of the *Paradiso*, Dante weighs in on the Adamic vs. vernacular language debate. His last meeting in the *Paradiso* is an interview with the very first person, Adam. Dante raises 4 questions (unvocalized, as Adam would “read” Dante’s mind). The final question concerns Adam’s language, thus setting up a firsthand account, a direct testament to the origin of words:

The tongue I spoke was all extinct before
the men of Nimrod set their minds upon
the unaccomplishable task; for never
has anything produced by human reason
been everlasting—following the heaven
men seek the new, they shift their predilections.

That man should speak at all is nature’s act,
but how you speak—in this tongue or in that—
she leaves to you and to your preference. (*v'abbella* "as you please.")

It's as natural for us to speak as it is to modify what we say. Again, the dualism ... not a problem. I've translated the end of the above canto as: *That you speak at all is due to nature, but how you speak prosodically she leaves entirely to your discretion.*

Today we live a frightening inversion of Canto 26: the disappearance of the earth's diversity of languages, not as a return to the garden, but further fall from grace through hegemonic languages and global capital. (Dante did attempt to gather up all the vernaculars into a centralized Italian (*De Vulgari Eloquentia*) as he fought for a universal monarchy (*De Monarchia*.) Our collective survival now depends on *listening* very carefully to the accumulated knowledge of all the sounds of the Earth.

Why would we perceive words gifted to humankind as evolutionarily incongruous? Things take time (sometimes). Evolution is a drawn-out giftedness, accepting of all the evidence and theories it animates.

Chomsky's single mutation hypothesis and Kashmiri Doctrine of Vibration are congruent with Dante's vernacularized digression from Nature (for which he could have been burned). Our babytalk, by means of which we individuate, is reiterated cosmogony.

Liberate contradiction! Beginning with "conventional" and "natural" language. Instinctual, revealed, learned, developed, divined, mutated, genetic, epigenetic, phylogenic, ontogenetic, cosmogenic, dreamed, awakened, gifted once upon a time, contrived, cried out, organic, effortful, munificent, mundane, dead—all reflected in each other are one, one interwovenness of living language. Prosody has all along been the integrative factor.

LIKE RIDING A BIKE OR BREATHING

"As many as were the types of work involved in the enterprise [of the building of Babel], so many were the languages by which the human race was fragmented; and the more skill required for the type of work, the more rudimentary and barbaric the language they now spoke." — Dante, De Vulgari Eloquentia.

"We can't grasp what language is because of our limited understanding of language."

The Hominin epiphany leading to modern fully-syntactical, recursive, hierarchical speech may have been the arbitrary assignment of sound to meaning and the capacity for infinite expression through the very finite set of "senseless" phonemes — while, at once, the emergence of language was being conveyed by the natural congruences of intonation, tempo, pitch and intensity. It is impossible for prosody to be arbitrary, (without deliberately attempting to deceive).

When we confer a name on a thing — anything — the sum of the contingencies involved are not at all arbitrary. All things arise through the chain of conditionality. A name is arrived at exactly as it's arrived at. There were infinite other-possibilities, none of which apply. The name is like a dream, as all things seem, once they are.

This is the great linguistic counterbalance: the association between sound and meaning in language is largely perceived as arbitrary while *sound/word/meaning/form/function* become consonant in prosody. At one extreme there is the absolute, uncreated, intrinsic bond between word and meaning (the *autpattika sambandha* of the *Mīmāṃsā Sūtra*). At the other extreme we have confused, contemporary linguistics and the narrow conflict between inborn and acquired language. Nativists hypothesize that language is an instinct and that we're hardwired with Universal Grammar. Universal Grammar explains how finite input received by limited cognitive ability results in infinite combinatorial expressivity. For empiricists, speech is an entirely learned skill, like riding a bike. This "conventional" view of language, held as an absolute, keeps us from knowing what words are, not in a fabled, folk or esoteric sense, but as embodiments in the organic, basic space of phenomena.

Words are self-arising, even as they are being learned. Words are not innate, they are the innate. With prosody as the pulsation of *sound/word/name/meaning/form/function/interaction/environment* congruence. Explaining things otherwise will tie you in knots. Each word is an avatar of all that it is and all

that exists, with the world seen as-it-is as the explicitness of wisdom. Wisdom as authorless direct audition of creation. We're entranced in a vast onomatopoeia of matter.

Heraclitus said that coincidence is even more wondrous.

Pulsation bifurcated into light and sound, once such audio-visual artifacts could be perceived—just as, (evolutionarily) prosody/pulsation split into speech, symbol and music shortly before or immediately after we broke from chimpanzee.

Words don't denote things, they denote what things are. Creation with and without a capital 'c.' Cosmophobic philosophers have long wanted to separate the mystery of cosmic creativity from our creativity (of course by means of words) while they are essentially congruent.

There's widespread agreement that the divine either exists or doesn't exist, i.e., exists through the need to declare its nonexistence. Original-Language adherents are forced to explain both the eventual diversification of tongues and their mutual unintelligibility. Is Logos and its myriad manifestations *bygone*? Logos as divine word, deep structure of reality, morphogenesis, formative force, underlying logic, demiurge, patterning, cohesion, harmonic animating principle, incarnate redeemer, the inscrutable made legible, messenger, angel, nature of awareness, Sophia, Mahadevi, created/uncreated rapport, vibratory being, speech cosmogenesis, and phoneme-based reality originating in Vedic hymns to reach its apex in Tantric scriptures and Jewish mysticism. This Logos? "Twenty-two letters: God drew them, hewed them, combined them, weighed them, interchanged them, and through them produced the whole creation and everything that is destined to come into being." (Sefer Yetzirah.)

We all speak the same language: *vowels* and *consonants*.

"The meaning of a word is its use." (Wittgenstein.) Who says what is, is what it means. "The word is a disincarnation of the world in search of its meaning; and an incarnation: a destruction of meaning, a return to the body. Poetry is corporeal; the reverse of names." (Octavia Paz, *The Monkey Grammarian*.)

The whole can never be encyclopedic. (You'll die trying.) Kukai's *ākāśagarbha* practice (boundless space) allowed him to read the world directly, as word, as insight. Kukai refers to this as "real words" (*shingon*). "True words are those that are aware that all words are real." "The esoteric is to unleash countless meanings from within each letter of a word." Each syllable stands for sound, word and reality. There is an exoteric reading as well as an esoteric reading. The esoteric reading is hyper-efficacious, like mantra, like poetic and allusive writing. Interestingly (from the point of view of prosody) Kukai did not discriminate between speech and writing in his approach to language as reliable source of truth.

Rudolph Steiner practiced a fully-embodied kinesics. From *Eurhythmy as Visible Speech*: "Now once more let us picture the eurhythmy movements for a, for b, for c, and so on. Let us imagine that the gods, out of their divine primeval activity were to make those eurhythmic movements which correspond to the sound of the alphabet. Then, if these movements were impressed into physical matter, the human being would stand before us. This is what really lies behind eurhythmy." "All the single letters of the alphabet are actually formed as images of what lives in the cosmos."

"Each of Sanskrit's vowels and consonants has a particular and inalienable force, which exists by the nature of things and not by development or human choice: these are the fundamental sounds which lie at the base of the Tantric seed mantras or constitute the efficacy of the mantra itself." (Śrī Aurobindo.)

"I deeply distrust language." Having been hurt, hurt back.

Alphabet pandemic?

The *nature* of language is indigenous (pristine)... not its *use*.

Allowing for different manifestations of language, Sanskrit has four stages, $\frac{3}{4}$ of which are concealed, known only to sages:

—vaikhari: common verbalization, fully differentiated words, grammar-ruled, conventional reality, throat-centered, waking state

—madhyama: thought constructs (*vikalpas*), internal discourse, self-referentiality, visualization, heart, dreaming state

—payŚanti: insight, non-lexical, visionary, the energy of thought, impressions (*samskaras*), witness-consciousness, navel, dreamless sleep

—paravāk: the abode from which all stages of the word arise as Vāk's harmonics, undifferentiated sound, uncreated state; cessation, perineal floor (*muladhara*), the *turiya* state.

Ultimately, Bhakti poet-saints pared-down thousands of years of hymned ritual and hierarchy into salvific syllabic bits and seed sounds, marking a shift from the primacy of word to the preeminence of sound, culminating in *nama-bhakti* (name-alone devotion). An indigenous shift.

"There is a language of the land and it has the vibration of those original sounds that created us. When you hear the language of the land, you will know that language, because all humanity comes from sound ... Tiwa, the language I learned at Picuris Pueblo when I was a child, isn't a "word language" it is a sound language. It is an example of the language of the land. It came not from the people's desire to communicate, but from their desire to stay as close as possible to Creator's gift of manifestation — life. To stay as close as possible to life in this realm was to sound whatever happened to exist at the moment. If you were standing, for instance, and you could get in touch with how standing sounds, then you couldn't possibly stray too far from wisdom: physical wisdom or intellectual wisdom, or emotional wisdom, or spiritual wisdom." — Joseph Rael (Beautiful Painted Feather) from Sound: Native Teachings + Visionary Art.

Beautiful Painted Feather somewhat inverts the 4 states of Sanskrit. Perhaps it's more accurate to say, in his case, all states interpenetrate. To speak from *turiya*, to pass into *turiya* with the world turning more vivid and vocal, is the pristine state of prosody as the vibratory speech of all things.

"Everything comes out of sound, and sound comes out of vibration. Sound was the deity that first said "yes" to life. Before that there was no life. Once Sound said "yes" to life, then everything began to flow out of that sound. And that sound was the sound of silence."

“If you go back to the original sound it will awaken the archetypal vibrations in you. We are like the top of the carrot. We need to go back down to the root, the very tip. That is where the Circle of light is. It exists at the subatomic level. We have to go down to it and bring whatever is there up to higher and higher levels of consciousness.”