WHAT A WORD IS

*“As the cool stream gushed over one hand she spelled into the other the word water, first slowly, then rapidly. I stood still, my whole attention fixed upon the motions of her fingers. 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! There were barriers still, it is true, but barriers that could in time be swept away.”* — Helen Keller

*“Long may I feel how much more good I could have done if I had acquired normal speech. But out of this sorrowful experience I understand more fully all human strivings, thwarted  ambitions and infinite capacity of hope.” —* Helen Keller

WOULD NOT

... originary language, Western Logos (if you will) that brought the world about, be the same as words gifted to Adam or by Amma to Dogon divinized through Ogo which, in the long view, is congruous with evolutionary unfolding inclusive of Chomsky's quickened single mutation hypothesis, all conceivably the same as indigenous noncontradictory Voice as current as initial, seamless with Kashmiri vibrational doctrine of light pulsation and perfectly in step with Dante's vernacularized digression from Nature (for which he could have been burned,) entirely reiterated as integrative cosmogonic phylogenic babytalk by means of which we each individuate.

I'll pick up where we left off last meeting, with the distinction between conventional and natural language (between arbitrary/invented and congruent/gifted) and then shift into evolutionary linguistics with prosody as proto-language, precursor of both music and language.

I'll just note at the outset: instinctual, intuited, revealed, learned, evolved, developed, mutated, phylogenic, ontogenetic, cosmogenic, dreamed, awakened, gifted from above from within from nowhere, learned, cried out, idea'd, phonological, semantic, as is, contrived, in the beginning, once upon a time, right now, miraculous, mundane, timelessly aware, tempo'd, organic, in spirit, worded, wondered — reflected in each other, are ONE interwovenness of Living Voice.

"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." This quote is from *Sound: Native Teachings + Visionary Art* by Joseph Rael (Beautiful Painted Feather.) *Sounding whatever happens to exist at the moment* simply solves everything. Original and phenotypic speech are one living voice. Whatever has ever happened is what is happening. Our nature is total attunement.

“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… Sound is powerful It is actually the polarities coming together, one hitting the other, like two hands clapping… 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. (Joseph Rael)

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*.

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 all the while the emergence of language would have been conveyed by the natural congruences of intonation, tempo, pitch and intensity. It is impossible for prosody to be arbitrary, without deception.

When we confer a name on a thing — anything — is the sum of the contingencies involved at all arbitrary? All things arise through the chain of conditionality. The name was arrived at exactly as it was 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 linguistic counterbalance: the association between sound and meaning in language is largely arbitrary while *sound/word/meaning/form/function* become consonant in prosody. At one extreme there is, say, the absolute, uncreated, intrinsic bond between word and meaning, the *autpattika sambandh*a of the *Mīmāmsā Sutra*. 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 a Universal Grammar that 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.

(In the first prosody course *Prosody Privatization Performance and Peace* I emphasized that "no one knows what a word is." I shouted this from the mountaintops and performed it with a chorus of thirty singers using complex Vedic *pathas* (mnemonic patternings.), In this iteration of the course, I'd like to follow up by stating *what words are*, beyond the conventional understanding of language which keeps us from knowing what words are, and not in a fabled, folk or esoteric sense, but as embodiments in the organic, basic space of phenomena

Words are revealed, learned and built-in. The process through which they have been bestowed on us is cosmogenic, phylogenic and ontogenetic, both evolutionary and developmental, genetic and epigenetic. They have been bestowed by grace and by effort, once upon a time and as we speak, interdependently and certainly miraculously. Imagine otherwise, if you can. And it is prosody that has been the integrative factor in this process.

Language is self-arising, even while it's being learned. How deep does the inherence run? Phenotypically, genotypically, elementally, luminescently? Words are not innate, they are the innate. Good luck explaining things otherwise.

This is why, phenomenally, while alive, every day, I can devote myself to prosody as *pulsation* — sound/word/name/meaning/form/function congruence. Each word is an avatar, of either all it is or all that exists, with the world seen as-it-is as explicitness of wisdom. By means of prosody, we tune to and entrain with, arché as word made manifest. As with the Rgvedic rsis, reception of authorless language is direct audition of creation. This is the sense in which Sanskrit is considered a "natural" language, *name/named/existence nondifference*.

We're entrance in a vast onomatopoeia of matter.

Coincidence is not less-wondrous, no less gifted (Heraclitus added *"therefore even more beautiful.")*

How is the question whether language is conventional or natural related to the question whether language in learned or inherent? Through *organic subtlety*. There is a distinct tendency to leave consciousness out of conditionality. Natural consciousness may not have all the answers, but it does pose the most helpful questions. Where do we get our energy, and in what sense can it be considered "ours"? Pulsation bifurcated into light and sound, i.e., once such audio-visual artifacts could be perceived; just as, evolutionarily, prosody/pulsation split into speech, symbol and music shortly before or after we broke from chimpanzee.

Words don't denote things, they denote what things are. This is creation with and without a capital 'c.' Thinkers 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.

Explain yourself, excluding any power of description beyond our own, cosmophobically. That's how we become pragmatic and master matter. It's a vicious circle: we can't understand what language is because of our limited view of language.

Adamic language (whereby God named things into existence with their real names) lasted right up until the time of Leibniz (although it was necessary for him to "reinvent" the original language.) Recall Jacob Boehme's word *Natursprache*, nature-speak. Original-Language adherents had, at once, an implicit need to explain the eventual diversification of languages and the mutual unintelligibility of tongues.

While all the while, riding into the sunset is the bygone Logos, in its myriad manifestations as (off the top of my head) divine word, deep structure of reality, morphogenesis, formative force, underlying logic, bonding, demiurge, patterning, cohesion, harmonic animating principles of existence, incarnate redeemer, savior, the inscrutable made legible, active principle, messenger, angel, patterning of awareness, divine word, Sophia, Mahadevi, God personified, rapport between created and uncreated (a logos certainly not unrelated to a the more elaborated, embodied, the common root of objects, experience and subjective artifact, vibratory, phoneme-based reality originating in Vedic hymns and reaching an apex in Tantric scriptures.)

Logos is, basically, speech cosmogenesis. But how is this truth embodiable, practiceable (such as the Sefer Yetzirah's “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.”)?

In the 26th Canto of the *Paradiso*, Dante weighs in on the original/vernacular language debate. His last meeting in the Paradiso is, naturally, with the first person, Adam. Dante grants himself the opportunity to interview Adam and pose his most burning questions. It's thus a firsthand account — not only *eye-witness* but direct testimony of the subject. Adam is presented with four questions (of course intuited by Adam) the last of which concerns his language:

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: the disappearance of the earth's diversity of languages, not as a return to the garden, but further fall from grace through hegemonic English 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 all the sounds of the earth.

Wittgenstein: “…the meaning of a word is its use.” What? Who says is what it means. Alan Davies: “You don’t have to know what words are you just have to know how to use them.” Living in fear. What’s the difference between? To keep the lid on.

Though we all speak the same language (i.e., vowels and consonants) we don't converse non-discursively, knowing each other's minds as do angels. Or do we? When body, speech and mind are indivisibly the great mystery. Every body is a language that vanishes at the moment of absolute plenitude; on reaching the state of incandescence, every language reveals itself to be an unintelligible body. 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 whole can never be encyclopedic. (You'll die trying.) Kukai's *ākāśagarbha* practice (boundless space) allowed him to read the world directly, as scripture, if you will. In this case, what are words, when experiential and resonant in this sense? From where do they issue? Kakai 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 and 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 full-blown 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. The human being as we see [him] in a complete form. But the form has been created out of movement. It has arisen from those primeval forms which were continually taking shape and again passing away.” “All the single letters of the alphabet are actually formed as images of what lives in the cosmos.”

As Śrī Aurobindo has stated: "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."

"I deeply distrust language. I DEEPLY distrust language. I DEEPLY distrust LANGUAGE. I deeply DISTRUST language. I must hurt it in return." (Anonymous.) Her justification for saying this is synonymous with the above statements; language pandemic with its cause in empire. The nature of language is indigenous. Not its use — where the actual grace is to be realized.

COMING FULL CIRCLE TO THE TERMS WITHOUT WHICH WE CONVENTIONALLY SAY THAT THE CONGRUENCE OF SOUND AND SENSE IS NONSENSE: HOW DOES IT WORK IN FACT: WORD-PATH

Again, the emphasis is on experience and practice; on *theoria* only as direct perception of existence. When Word Goddess, *Vāk*, (in the *Devīsūkta*) directly addresses poets by saying "Whoever eats, whoever sees, whoever breathes, whoever hears what is spoken, does so through me" how is she, as Para Vāk, embodied? Although there are four levels (or phases, manifestations) of speech and Vāk infuses them all, she resides only at origin.

*“The word is measured in four quarters. The sages know these four divisions. Three quarters are concealed (latent) and cause no movement. Only the fourth quarter is spoken.”* (RV .,125)

The four stages are, from bottom to top, embodiable as: paravac, payśanti, madhyama and vaikhari. Speech is the process of the four stages offering themselves to each other, with vocalization rooted and renewed in ParaVāk.

**Vaikhari** is verbalization; fully differentiated (as thus, like cell-differentiation from stem cells, a terminal condition,) objectified, grammar-ruled, opinionated, delineated, linearized, conventional reality. Vaikhari corresponds with the throat and the *waking* state.

**Madhyama** is thought; internal discourse; straddling subjective and objective, inchoate collage of parts of speech, half-formed ideas, thought constructs *(vikalpas),* visualizations; self-referentially as in the story one tells oneself about oneself. Madhyama corresponds with the heart (the middle) and the *dreaming* state.

**Paśyanti** is insight; undeveloped in terms of space and time; non-lexical; predominately subjective; visionary; the energy of thought; impressions *(samskaras)* and so conditionable, defensive, self-justifying to some extent; witness-consciousness. Paśyanti corresponds with the belly and *dreamless sleep*.

**ParaVāk** is the abode from which all stages of the word arise as her harmonics; undifferentiated sound; the uncreated state; self-reflective awareness in terms of contentless consciousness; expansive. ParaVāk corresponds with the root, the perineal floor *(muladhara)* and the *turiya* state.

Adding a few more terms for understanding nonconventional language and supporting word-path ***(śabda-marga)*** as liberatory: 5th century linguist Bhartrhari refers to grammar as ***dvaram apavargasya*** the door to salvation and “the best of all the austerities, the one that is nearest to Brahman.” Perhaps we've grown numb to the wonder of word order. He also used the term ***śabda-pūrva yoga***, roughly translatable as "union with the word in its undifferentiated primordiality." — a grammatical yoga that resonates with the word-yoga (*vāg-yoga*) of Patanjali. Bhartrhari referred to this salvific process as ***sphoțavāda***. *Sphota* means 'burst' or 'flash.' *Sphoțavāda* is thus the doctrine of sudden, superseding insight, as a summation or consummation of the sentence. It's in fact the *sphota* that communicates, by means of the words, not the words per se!

Bhakti poet-saints pared-down thousands of years of hymned ritual and hierarchy into salvific syllabic bits, seed sounds and name-avataras. There was a marked shift from the primacy of word to preeminence of sound, with a culmination in ***nama-bhakti*** (name-alone devotion.) (Bhakti is a flavor or perfume of the unstruck, if you will. As a movement that began circa 600 CE in Tamil Nadu and swept through all of India over the subsequent centuries, bhakti blends sweetness, poetry, liberation and love — a far cry from the *dolce stil nuovo* of thirteenth century Europe in which a besotted Dante would raise the praising of Beatrice to beatitude, her very greeting *(saluto)* his salvation *(salute)* through the sweetness it would release in his heart.)

15th century bhakta julaha Kabir Das: "Apply yourself, O friend, to the practice of *Śabd*. The *Śabd* from which even the creator came into being."

“The Name is a witness between the ***nirguṇ****a* (formless, without qualities) and ***saguṇ****a* (with qualities) realms; it is a clever translator through which both realms become illuminating.”— Tulsīdās (1532-1623).

The need that gave rise to name-devotion as the preeminent *sādhanā* in South Asia, concurs completely with our current global crises. A host of traditions — Epic, Puranic, Bhakti, Sikh, Sant and Gaudīya Vaishnava — all stress the primacy of recitation of the Name as the most direct and effective practice in the age of Kali Yuga (the final, most dissolute of the four ages.) It's literally too late for anything less immediately efficacious.

"Now, the Dark Age of Kali Yuga has come. Plant the Naam, the Name of the One Lord. It is not the season to plant other seeds. Do not wander lost in doubt and delusion." — Guru Granth Sahib (1185).

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Shaikh Farīd, twelfth century Punjabi Muslim and the lone Sufi poet included in the *Adi Granth*: "Those who forget the Naam, are a burden on the earth."

Bhakti, already a climax, reached an acme in the ***nama-prema-rasa-bhakti*** (utmost, sweetest sap of name devotion, the Mahabhava or entire softening of the heart) of Bengali Krishna-devotion begun by the person/saint/deity of Caitanya Mahaprabu (1486-1533 CE), a gender-fluid *avatara* of Radha and Krsna. Caitanya left behind only an 8-verse poem, the *Śiksāstaka*. It's at the end of the poem that Caitanya introduces the term ***prema-rasa bhakti*** (i.e. perfected or fully-blossomed, ecstatic love) as viscerally present, as sweat, goosebumps, hairs standing on end.

The name is the same as the deity (Īśvara" or "Krishna" Durga, Uma, Pārvatī, Devi, Kālī, Rādhā, Tārā, Sītā, Laksmī, Sarasvati, Gāyatrī, Mother, Ma, Śakti, Vishnu, Śiva or Rāma) because it is self-manifesting and imbued with the deity's ***svarūpa-śakti*** (inherent energy or perhaps "vibration" as distinct from the material *prākrta* or illusory energy of *māya-śakti*) and because being-consciousness-bliss is the form in which the Name consists. This name-soteriology is why the recitation of the name is most efficacious in our dissolute age: it's an immediately effective intimate intoning through the means nearest to us, inhering in us. *Svarūpa-śakti* is also key to the conventionally incomprehensible sound/form/name/meaning congruence central to the sound-primacy of Vedic and other indigenous cultures. With *svarūpa* and *śakti* there is energy given to —or issuing from — the intrinsic, without which nothing could manifest. *Svarūpa*, taken alone (before it bonds to manifesting energy as the Name which embodies deity) is simply innateness. One's intimacy with the divine may manifest in the mode of servant, friend, parent/child or lover (***dāyasa-rasa, sakhya-rasa, vātsalya-rasa, mādhurya-rasa***, respectively), as either or neither gender, or even as the *nameless name*.

Within the context of rasa-bhakti there is a crucial, kindred term ***alaukika***, translatable as "extraordinary sense perception," as against the usual desires of *kama* (*laukika* is literally *sense perception, emotion without insight*.) I'll leave you with the mere suggestion of this word, overwhelmingly, in wonder of what a word is.