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Presentation

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If the typical "academic" language scientist were asked to identify and define the object of their expertise, the chances are that their reply would be substantially the same as the one a nonexpert would offer. In other words, "language" is "a system of sounds and written symbols used by the people of a particular country, area or tribe to communicate with each other"[1]. I point this out to highlight one of the things that singularises the present volume. Namely the difficulty its contributors have accepting the premise that language is primarily a tool that *homo symbolicus* utilises to communicate purposively and productively with other human users for purely human needs. Of course, to view language in this light is a worthwhile, legitimate and necessary pursuit both theoretically and practically. Still, it has to be asked if it isn't doing a disservice to a full or even an adequate understanding of "language" *per se* to assume that it is little more than a means of communication of, by and for a particular acceptation of *homo loquax*.

To appreciate why this view seems questionable, problematic and ultimately untenable, just consider what Ethnolinguists have been telling us for decades about countless other-than-Occidental and pre-modern traditions of thought about the emergence, formation and evolution of language. If one does that, one cannot help but be

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1 See *Collins English Dictionary* (https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/language). See also *Wikipedia*: "[Language is] the primary means by which humans convey meaning, both in spoken and written forms", etc.

struck by the fact that for these latter, the utility that *homo sapiens* sees in language is a trivial, inessential and even unworthy aspect of speech when compared with what is given to it by other-than-human agencies, for example, "the Gods" or "Nature" or "the powers of creation". And as soon as one realises this, one is forced to ask oneself: what is the "scientific" status of "mythologies" such as these? Do they forsake the privilege of being considered "scientific" in their understanding of language simply by conferring upon other-than-mortal agencies a masterminding role in "glottogony" and in the "apophantic powers" of words? And if they do, *why*? *What* doctrinal shibboleths are infringed by their approach to understanding words and language? *What* tacit "hegemonic epistemic paradigm", *which* "foundationalist metaphysics", *whose* "onto-theological metanarrative" do they fail to subserve through their reliance upon concepts, frames of references, descriptive terms and explanatory models unlike ours? And isn't there something "ethnocentric" about the presumption that a science of language born out of a dialogue limited only to European intellectuals should be the only prism through which to understand and define even other-than-European "mythologies" about language?

Perplexed by all this, the editors of this special issue brings together scholars who can elucidate for their peers the reasons why so many communities believed that it made perfect sense to say that their speech was a "gift of the Gods to mortals". They ask: Why was such a conceit taken seriously? What "divinatory techniques" were involved in apprehending what counted as "the Sacred"? What hermeneutic and semiotic ingenuity was utilised to interpret what it betokened and in forging these interpretations into signs, significance and language? What rationale is at work in the assumption one encounters so often that, in some guise or another, the Divine itself is a living, breathing, pulsatingly resonant property of language and that its constituent words encode, mediate and reveal something "sublime" and even "eucharistic" about their denotata?

To supply these interrogations with answers, we have tasked selected Indologists, Orientalists, Hellenists, Arabists and Indigenous Studies specialists with the goal of explaining the "science" that is operative in the "exotic" theories of glottogony they have studied. But that isn't all. It also contains articles by literary theory specialists who look at the way obsolete *doxas* about the presumed "divine

origins" of speech have been rethought and repurposed and have undergone a rebirth in forms and in places one would least expect to find them. This would be particularly the case as concerns the theories of language defended by ostensibly "atheist" avant-garde thinkers like M. Blanchot, M. Foucault and J. Lacan as well by pioneering literary artists like S. Mallarmé, A. Artaud, J. Joyce, *e tutti quanti*.

Needless to say, the point of presenting studies like these is not to celebrate or rehabilitate "traditional belief systems" and their correlative "linguistics". Nor is it to be a recrimination of views on the nature, vocation and finality of words and language which belittle or revile the idea that anything "mystical" or "supernatural" should be involved in their study. The point is simply to enrich and vary the habitual acceptations and applications of linguistics, semiotics and the philosophy of language by exploring what could be significant or worthwhile about theories maintaining that language is an emanationist bye-product of other-than-mortal agencies, for instance of Gaia, Hermes, Vāk, Vé or of one of their counterparts.

A further, "metalinguistic" goal of this volume is to not merely "restate" but to, in some measure, *consummate* the challenge posed to conventional, "academic" language science by philosophers who reflected upon the "nature" or "essence" of language like F. Nietzsche, M. Heidegger, M. Foucault, J. Deleuze, *inter alia*. In other words, rather than merely point out the shortcomings of "orthodox" language science attributable to its "logocentric biases", its "rationalist" aprioris and organising principles and its uncritical subservience to a model of the link between "*les mots et les chose*" inherited from a now discredited "metaphysical tradition", the goal is to explore ways to *restore* words and language *to what they used to be*. Namely a resource for assuring a "co-naturing inter-inherence" between the meanings of words and the "Being" of their corelative denotata rather than allowing them to continue being what M. Foucault accused them of being – *i.e.*, a means for alienating their users from an experience of the *Becoming*, the *Dasein* and the "*Istigkeit*" of World, Things, Others, ourselves, our thoughts, emotions, imaginations and dreams.

Presentation of the Contributors

Our volume kicks off with the contribution of a colleague who deserves to be recognised as the Godfather of *HHHVVSS* colloquium hosted by the Université de Reims in 2023 and whose Proceedings are presented in this edition of the *Blityri* Revue. Here I refer to Professor Jean-Noël Robert who in addition to holding the Chair of Japanese Studies at the prestigious *Collège de France*, is a member of *l'Académie des Inscriptions et de Belles-Lettres* and Editor-in-chief of the Collection "*Hiéroglossie*". It was his inspiring research on the links between ideas pertaining to the divine and theories of language in various far-eastern traditions that played a direct and decisive role in the efforts that went into the production of this volume.

1. Professor Robert's contribution begins with a consideration of the challenges facing any scholar who makes so bold as to offer a hard and fast, all-purpose and definitive definition of "*hieroglossia*", and concludes with an audacious proposition: adverting to the ever-growing abundance of scholarly analyses of views on the onomaturgical links between language and numinous agencies in cultures all over the world, he asks if it isn't time to inaugurate a new, fully autonomous discipline dedicated specifically to federating research on this currently marginal area of research. Thereafter he passes on to his "*crux interpretum*", namely the question of what happens when the relationship between the divine and a language specific to one culture or tradition gets translated into the language of another culture or tradition. The question is intriguing because it is counter intuitive to assume that the "*caractère numineux*" that is supposed to be an integral part of one language can be reproduced when translated into a language whose forms, functions and expressive powers were not conditioned by the experience of the divine of the translated language. And yet, as Professor Robert demonstrates in his analyses of the way Japanese scribes translated sacred texts originally written in Chinese or Sanskrit, this is not the case. This is so because an acceptable translation of the latter into the former required of their translators a kind of divine inspiration sufficiently akin to that which went into the forging of the forms and meanings of the words of the original text that the resulting Japanese text was as impregnated with a "*dimension religieuse*" as

the original. Hence, in certain conditions and by observing certain hermeneutical protocols, what is presumed to be a divine property of one language does not lose its "*aura numinieuse*" when translated into an otherwise foreign language.

2. The second contribution to the volume is provided for us by our recently deceased and sorely missed colleague, Professor Gabrièle Wersinger. Her focus in the article she graces us with takes on the most daunting of all conundrums: to what extent is it licit to assume that any acceptation of language can ever in any form or to any extent reveal or relate anything of any relevance pertaining to the Sacred? To answer this question, she adroitly and with admirable lucidity reminds us of the hermeneutical aporias faced by all the leading figures in what is known today as the "apophatic tradition" or "apophatic theology". Apophatic theology assumes that the only appropriate way to address the divine is to recognise its inexpungible ineffability by avoiding the use of any form of language which supposes that it can be addressed the same way one would address any of its sub-creations. In other words, it can only be addressed "negatively". The problem this poses is that, in the final analysis, this stratagem doesn't work for, in the very attempt to avoid addressing the Divine inappropriately by doing so "negatively", one *ipso facto* makes legible one's intention to address the Divine. Having made all this clear the author then focuses on what she considers to be a solution. Namely the enunciative subterfuge that J. Derrida dubbed "*l'écart du nom*", *i.e.*, addressing and liaising with the Sacred without the assistance of the "logocentric" or name-focused linguistics that is operative in the signifying powers of all Indo-European languages. That an enunciative stratagem such as this can be considered a viable way of eluding the conundrum that faced Apophatic discourse from Damascius to Eckhardt will no doubt be viewed by critical readers of Derrida with some scepticism. Not just because of the things Derrida says in his article "White Mythology" about the "onomastic propensity of the sign" in the Occidental family of languages but also because of questions about the alternative mythology that is operative in the "grammatological" science of language Derrida espouses. Still, the point Gabrièle Wersinger makes is entirely valid: avoiding naming what one addresses when it is one's intention to address something as utterly unutterable as the Divine is a necessary prerequisite.

3. The Vedic studies scholar Marc Ballanfat is the author of the third article in this volume. The best way to describe his contribution is as a riddle addressed as much to philologists and semioticians as to philosophers and theologians. Such a characterisation seems apt when one considers what he relates in his presentation and analysis of the 7th century Vedic studies scholar Kumarila Bhatta, a leading figure of the influential *Mimamsa* school of thought. The problem Kumarila addresses in his hermeneutical analysis of the *Vedas* boils down to this: what exactly makes Vedic literature "sacred" and by what means is this sacrality conferred upon the texts containing them? Alternately, *who* was the "author" of the paramount message of the *Vedas*, which is the injunction to make the kinds of sacrifices that are indispensable for the preservation of "*l'ordre sociocosmique*". The conclusion Kumarila arrived at derives from the addition of two considerations: first, a Divinity could not have written the text of the *Vedas* for the Gods are just as much subject to the injunctions prescribed by this text as everything else in the cosmos. Second, if the *Vedas* were produced by an author, this would suggest that its injunctions were motivated by a form of self-interest comparable to the self-interest expressed by the average mortal pronouncer of an injunction. So, because it would be blasphemous to suppose that the *Vedas* are tarnished by any such defect, it has to be supposed, as Kumarila would have it, that the *Vedas* wrote themselves. Again, a riddling proposition that is as likely to confound modern semioticians and thinkers as much as it did Kumarila's contemporary commentators and critics.

4. With the contribution of Mariapaola Bergomi's the focus returns to ancient Greece. More precisely to the difficulty of defining the contribution made by "higher than human forces" to the signifying powers of words and language in Plato's enigmatic Dialogue the *Cratylus*. To this end her paper opens with a critique and a demonstration of the failings of John Lyon's attempts to elucidate assorted technical terms in Plato's philosophical writings by using a "structuralist" approach. The unstated but clear message of her critique is that, if "conventional" analyses of an author as accessible to the modern reader as Plato leave much to be desired, how much less adequate must they be when taking on the challenge of fathoming the complexities of ideas about "*onomatourgia*" and

the "correctness of names" ascribed to by a language theorist as "primitive" as Cratylus. To get around this limitation Mariapaola starts by making a clear distinction between two kinds of representation through language, one called "mimetic", the other "delotic". "Mimetic" representation limits the signifying function of words and language to the perceptible, "ontic" characteristics of its referents. "Delotic" representation, on the other hand, "reveals" its referents to the power of their "*physis*" and of the forces of creation. This is important to point out because in "archaic" ideas about the "correctness of names" and the "apophantic" powers of words and language, only words and language that were "delotic" were "truthful" while representations of things through language that was merely "mimetic" or "eikastic" were not. The readers of Mariapaola's account of how and why all this illuminates the role played by "*hieros logos*" in Cratylean onomastics will be richly rewarded for their attention.

5. Silvia Frigeni's paper looks at Indo-European ideas on the relationship between language and the Sacred through the prism of Emile Benveniste's structuralist analysis of the interplay between linguistic and cultural structures. In other words, she looks at the way the domain of ideas on the sacred and the domain of meaningful language can be viewed as ordered by a common set of polar opposites (*e.g.*, positive-negative, sacred-profane, raw-cooked, etc.) thereby making it possible to define how the structures pertaining to the Sacred and those pertaining to the language can be understood as being co-structured and as such understandable in terms of a common structurality. Needless to say, ethnolinguists may regret the fact that any sense of the Sacred as understood by the artisans of the family of languages Frigeni analyses is basically absent from this sort of approach. Others may question how qualified Benveniste is to comment upon and enlighten us as to the complexities of Indo-European religiosity. Still, it cannot be denied that Frigeni's structuralist approach in her analysis of hieroglossia in Indo-European languages is altogether pertinent to this volume's theme and moreover is executed with considerable flair.

The last two contributions have in common their focus on the way an avowedly 'post-theological' acceptation and experience of

the Sacred can be fashioned in such a way as to become a living part of the substance of the language of art.

6. The first, by Corentin Bouquet, introduces us to the literary experimentation of a little-known group of artists loosely linked to the Surrealist movement and who collaborated in the running of a literary review called "*Le Grand Jeu*". The inspiration for the art they wanted to produce derived from their use of the techniques of ecstasy practiced by clairvoyants, seers and shamans from time immemorial and make the art that resulted therefrom a means to revivify the way their readers experience their Being-in the world. This aspiration posed *Le Grand Jeu* artists with a translational double-bind: because they did not renounce the use of words whose 'dictionary meanings' are legible to the typical reader, while the intended object of their meaning is by definition 'ineffable', then *ipso facto*, their art could not consummate its stated goal, *i.e.*, accommodate the absolute otherness of the Sacred *in propria persona*. To overcome this challenge, *i.e.*, bridging the gap between (A) the limits of what normal speech is capable of communicating intelligibly and (B) the utterly unutterable character of this otherness that it was supposed to translate, these poets start by adding to the repertoire of techniques available to poets to extend and enrich the expressive powers of language. Thanks to these mostly para-semantic resources (varied tones, tempos, rhythms, evocative imagery, etc.), the resulting poetry gives the impression to the sensitive reader that what they are hearing/reading is interspersed with fissures via which it is possible for the imagination to egress to apprehend existence the way Vates, Mages, Prophets and Clairvoyants do, *i.e.*, as "a fundamental incompleteness of mystery that is to be discovered".

7. The final paper of the volume, provided by Joeri Visser, also looks at the way literature has been made into the scene and the means for a revolutionary 're-spiritualisation' of language. To be more precise, he tells the story of the way the controversial avant-garde artist Antonin Artaud claims to have, as it were, transformed language into a sort of tabernacle of the Sacred. The account begins with a reminder of the way that Artaud's lifelong struggle with health issues acted as a catalyst for his efforts to recast language and enrich its meaning-affording capacities with

a "zoological" language. Artaud considered this to be necessary because whilst trying to come to terms with his suffering by writing about it, he noticed that words were not merely incapable of expressing what he felt he had to say, they in fact played a key role in making him suffer as much as he did. That is to say, they were designed and function to, as it were, mummify everything they were supposed to represent by muting the roiling tumult of the *élan vital* that seethes, blazes and roars at the core of everything that words refer to. Convinced that his mental health problems were the result of living in a world resembling an existential morgue and that language as it was supposed to be used to communicate 'rationally' was responsible for this unbearable experience of Being-in-the-world, Artaud, naturally enough, made it his mission as a writer to come up with a new "religious language" to give a voice to the *élan vital* that "conventional" uses of language strangle into silence. The vocation, modalities, finalities and *raison d'être* of Artaud's new, salutatory and redemptive "religion of language" is the substance of what Visser sets forth in his paper.