

DŽON ZERZAN  
SUVIŠE  
ČUDESNO  
ZA  
REČI  
NEKOLIKO  
ZAPAŽANJA  
O  
JEZIKU



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## Suviše čudesno za reči: nekoliko zapažanja o jeziku

*I večno pokret  
Ritmičko sudaranje školjki i ostriga i riđih zvezda  
U zelenorujnoj tkanini srećnih ostrva  
Mislim na jedan starinski putopis  
U kojem se priča kako je neki mornar napušten na  
nekom od tih ostrva*

*Do bezumlja zavoleo jednu urođenicu  
I isto tako ludo od nje bio voljen  
Pa je s njom o svim stvarima uspevao da razmeni utiske  
Često vrlo tanane  
Sporazumevajući se jedino milovanjem  
Kad tebe vidim nalazim u sebi tog čoveka  
Koji je vrlo rado zaboravio govor  
I smešim se kada mi jedan prijatelj opravdano prebacuje  
Što nisam pokazao dovoljno nepoverenja prema toj pesničkoj  
zamisli koja me proganja  
I kaže čak za to lažno tiransko predosećanje  
Da je u stvari nostalgija za zlatnim dobom (...)  
Varvarstvo civilizacija tu ne može ništa izmeniti (...)*

— André Breton, „Et mouvement encore“, *L'air de l'eau*, 1934 (na osnovu prevoda Nikole Trajkovića, Andre Breton, *Fata morgana*, Bagdala, Kruševac, 1965).

NA KORICAMA:

René Magritte, *Les merveilles de la nature* (detalj), 1953.

U ovom tekstu Zerzan se nadovezuje na esej „Language: Origin and Meaning“, iz njegove prve zbirke, *Elements of Refusal* (1988, 1999; prva verzija je objavljena 1984, u časopisu *Fifth Estate*). Prevod se može naći u zbirci John Zerzan, *Anarhoprimitivizam protiv civilizacije*, „Porijeklo i značenje jezika“, Naklada Jesenski i Turk, Zagreb, 2004, kao i u Anarhističkoj biblioteci.<sup>1</sup>

Pre nekoliko godina, sada pokojni filozof nauke i anarhista, Paul Fejerabend, bio je pozvan da potpiše peticiju koja je kružila među poznatim evropskim misliocima. Poruka peticije bila je da je društvu potreban doprinos filozofa koji se oslanjaju na „intelektualna blaga“ prošlosti. U ova mračna vremena, pisalo je u toj peticiji, „potrebna nam je filozofija“.

Derida, Riker i drugi liberalni autori tog dokumenta bili su šokirani Fejerabendovim negativnim odgovorom. On je naglasio da filozofska „blaga“ nisu služila kao podrška životu, već da su pre izražavala njegovu zamenu. „Filozofi su uništavali ono što su otkrivali, na sličan način kao što su drugi nosioci standarda zapadne civilizacije uništavali urođeničke kulture...“, objasnio je Fejerabend.<sup>2</sup> Pitao se kako je civilizovana racionalnost, koja je redukovala prirodno obilje života i slobode i tako obezvređila ljudsko postojanje, postala tako dominantna. Možda je njeno glavno oružje bila sim-

<sup>1</sup> <https://anarhisticka-biblioteka.net/library/john-zerzan-porijeklo-i-znacenje-jezika>

<sup>2</sup> Paul Fejerabend, „Concerning an Appeal for Philosophy“ (1994), *Conquest of Abundance: A Tale of Abstraction versus the Richness of Being* (University of Chicago Press, 1999), str. 270.

bolička misao, sa svojom ascendencijom u obliku jezika. Možda se taj pogrešni zaokret, koji smo napravili kao vrsta, može locirati kao prelomna tačka naše evolucije.

„Na pisanje... se može gledati kao na stvaranje nove realnosti“, kaže Ternes Houks i dodaje da jezik „ne dopušta ni jedan celovit pogled na stvarnost izvan njega samog. Na kraju, on tako konstituiše sopstvenu stvarnost.“<sup>3</sup> Beskrajna raznolikost stvarnosti zarobljena je ograničenim jezikom; on potčinjava prirodu svom formalnom sistemu.“ Ili, kao što kaže Majkl Beksandol, „Svaki jezik je... zavera protiv iskustva, utoliko što predstavlja kolektivni pokušaj pojednostavlivanja i preraspoređivanja iskustva u delove kojima se može upravljati.“<sup>4</sup>

U prvim danima dominacije i represije, na samom početku dugačkog procesa pražnjenja bogatstva živog sveta, napravljen je vrlo nesrećan izbor ka odvajanju od toka života. Sve što je nekada bilo slobodno dato, postalo je kontrolisano, racionisano, distribuirano. Fejerabend je govorio i o posebnom naporu eksperata da „redukuju obilje koje ih okružuje i zbunjuje.“<sup>5</sup>

Sušтина jezika je simbol. Uvek zamena. Uvek bleđa predstava nečeg što nam je na dohvata ruke, što nam se samo, direktno predstavlja. Suzen Langer je ispitivala tajanstvenu prirodu simbola: „Ako se reč 'obilno' zameni sa 'sočna, prava, zrela breskva', malo je onih kojih bi obratili pažnju na puko značenje reči. Breskve su suviše dobre da bi bile samo reči; suviše nas privlače one same.“<sup>6</sup>

Kod naroda Murngin iz severne Australije, na imenovanje i druge lingvističke eksternalizacije gleda se kao na neku vrstu

<sup>3</sup> Terence H. Hawkes, *Structuralism and Semiotics*, Methuen, 1977, str. 149, 26.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Baxandall, *Giotto and the Orators* (Clarendon Press, 1971), str. 44.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Feyerabend, *Killing Time*, University of Chicago Press, 1995, str. 179.

<sup>6</sup> Susanne K. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key*, Harvard University Press, 1942, str. 75.

smrti, gubitak prvobitne celovitosti. To je, u mnogo čemu, upravo ono što postiže jezik. Uopštenije posmatrano, Ernest Džons je pisao: „Simbolizuje se samo ono što je potisnuto; samo ono što je potisnuto stvara potrebu za simbolizacijom.“<sup>7</sup>

Svaki oblik simbolizacije je samo jedan način viđenja i povezivanja. Ako krenemo unazad, u svetlu onoga što je bilo progresivno poništavano ili izgubljeno, stiže se utisak da su pre nego što je simbolička dimenzija odnela prevagu, odnosi između ljudi bili suptilniji, neposredniji i čulniji. Ali, to je zabranjeno misliti. Uobičajene tvrdnje, kao što su, „verbalni jezik je možda najveći tehnički izum (!) ljudskog postojanja“ ili, „jezik omogućava ljudskim bićima komunikaciju i deljenje“, na neverovatan način osporavaju da komunikacija, deljenje i društvo nisu postojali pre pojave simboličkog, koje se na evolucionoj lestvici pojavilo relativno skoro. (Smatra se da se simboličko pojavljuje pre približno 35000 godina, posle dva miliona godina uspešnog ljudskog prilagođavanja životu na zemlji.) Takve tvrdnje savršeno izražavaju oholost, imperijalizam i ignorantstvo same simboličke misli.

Ne znamo kada je nastao govor; ali, čim je pripitomljavanje stavilo šapu na lovačko-sakupljački način života, pojavilo se pismo. Od 8500 pre n. e., izrezbarene glinene pločice, zapisi o poljoprivrednim transakcijama i inventaru, raširile su se Bliskim istokom. Pet hiljada godina kasnije, grčki izum alfabeta dovršio je prelazak na moderni sistem zapisivanja.

Naravno, izuzetnost modernih ljudi postala je temeljna dogma ideologije civilizacije. Ona, na primer, obuhvata i Sapirovu definiciju personalnosti kao sistematske psihološke organizacije određene rasporedom simbola.<sup>8</sup> Simbolički medij jezika se danas

<sup>7</sup> Ernest Jones, navedeno u Dan Sperber, *Rethinking Symbolism* (Cambridge University Press, 1975), str. 43.

<sup>8</sup> Edward Sapir, „The Emergence of the Concept of Personality in a Study of Cultures“, *Journal of Social Psychology* 5 (1934), str. 408–415.

sve više doživljava kao sveodređujuće utamničenje, a ne kao trijumf oslobođenja. Dobar deo filozofskih analiza iz prošlog veka gravitira oko tog saznanja, iako nam je i dalje teško da se oslobodimo tog ograničenja ili da čak jasno sagledamo njegovu prodornu prisutnost i uticaj. To je mera dubine osiromašujuće logike koju je Fejerabend pokušao da shvati. Zaista nije lako zamisliti kako su ljudi razmišljali pre nego što su jezik i simboličko okupirali najveći deo njihove svesti.

Gramatika je ta koja uspostavlja jezik kao sistem i podseća nas da simboličko mora postati sistemsko da bi osvojilo i zadržalo vlast. To je način na koji se opažani svet strukturira, a njegovo obilje procesira i redukuje. Gramatika svakog jezika je teorija nekog iskustva, ali i više od toga, ideologija. Ona postavlja pravila i ograničenja i proizvodi jednoobrazna sočiva kroz koja gledamo na sve. Jezik je definisan gramatičkim pravilima (koja nisu izabrali govornici); na ljudski um se danas obično gleda kao na gramatičku ili sintaksički navođenu mašinu. Već od ranog XVIII veka ljudska priroda počinje da se opisuje kao „tkivo sačinjeno od jezika“,<sup>9</sup> u čemu treba videti još jedan izraz hegemonije jezika kao određujuće osnove svesti.

Jezik, kao i simbolizam generalno, uvek je zamena i podrazumeva značenja koja se ne mogu izvući direktno iz eksperimentalnog konteksta. Tu nailazimo na prastari izvor današnje opšte krize značenja. Jezik podstiče i reprodukuje razlikovanje ili odvajanje, koje vodi ka sve jačem osećanju izmeštenosti. Otpor celom ovom osiromašujućem trendu mora voditi ka problematizaciji jezika. Fuko je primetio da govor nije samo „verbalizacija sukoba i sistema dominacije... već i sâm predmet čovekovih sukoba.“<sup>10</sup> Tu tezu nije dalje razvijao, iako

<sup>9</sup> Na primer, Johann Gottfried Herder, *Treatise on the Origin of Language* (Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache, 1772).

<sup>10</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, prevod A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1972), str. 216.

je ona važna i zaslužuje pažnju i produblјivanje. Koreni današnje globalne duhovne krize leže u udalјavanju od neposrednosti; to je zaštitni znak simboličkog.

Civilizacija je stalno preduzimala uzaludne napore da prevlada nestabilnost i eroziju supstance izazvane vladavinom simboličkog. Među najpoznatijim takvim naporima je i Dekartov pokušaj da postavi „temelje“ nauke i moderniteta. Njegov čuveni dualitet duh-telo nudi filozofski metod (zasnovan na potiskivanju tela, naravno) čiji teror trpimo i danas. Težio je da sistemu pruži izvesnost pomoću jezika i broja, što je izrazio u svojoj analitičkoj geometriji. Ali, taj san o izvesnosti bio je stalno razotkrivan kao još represivnija zamena: kao iluzorni temelj, s kojeg se sistem dominacije proširio u svim pravcima.

Jezik je konformista u najdubljem smislu; čak i objektivna stvarnost ječi pod njegovim pritiskom. Takozvano „činjenično“ dovedeno je do tačke rastakanja, zato što je oblikovano i sputano ograničenjima jezika. Pod njegovom redukujućom silom, zaboravljamo da nam simboli nisu potrebni za predstavljanje značenja. Stvarnost prelingvističkih društvenih praksi zaklonjena je više nego praktičnim, empirijskim ograničenjima u pristupanju prošlosti. Iskonsko postojanje je otpisano kao beznačajno, dok se urođenički načini života svuda nalaze pod opsadom, zbog uporne sklonosti civilizacije ka precenjivanju simboličkog.

Ipak, istraživanje društvenog života u ranoj epohi simbolizacije ne mora nužno biti preterano spekulativno i može ukazati na važne veze. Na osnovu arheoloških i etnografskih dokaza znamo da je u podeljenim društvima nejednakost bila utemeljena u ritualnom znanju: u tome ko ga je posedovao, a ko ne. Simboličko je već moralo biti veoma prisutno i uticajno; ili se treba upitati zašto nejednakost nije počivala na, recimo, znanju o biljkama?

Sasvim je moguće da je jezik nastao iz rituala, koji je, između ostalog, zamena za emociju. Odvojeni, simbolički procesi ritual-



ne aktivnosti podudaraju se s funkcijom jezika i mogli su ga pokrenuti: tu nailazimo na emocionalno izmešten izraz, apstraktne krike; ukratko, na jezik kao ritualizovani izraz.

Ritualno je od najranijih dana mistifikovalo odnose moći. Dikon je tvrdio da je jezik bio neophodan za nastanak ugovora na kojima počiva društvo.<sup>11</sup> Ipak, verovatnije je da se društveni život pojavio mnogo pre jezika. Ugovori zasnovani na jeziku mogli su se pojaviti samo kao odgovor na neke društvene izazove, kao što su počeci nestabilnosti ili neravnopravnosti.

U kasnijoj fazi, pojavljuje se religija, kao dodatni (i još neuspješniji) odgovor na probleme i tenzije prisutne u ljudskoj zajednici. I tu je jezik imao središnju ulogu. Reč „magija“ provlači se kroz celu istoriju religija; obožavanje imena i sâmo imenovanje postaju uobičajeni (istorija religioznog života drevnog Egipta je dobro dokumentovan primer).<sup>12</sup>

Problemi koje izazivaju prekomerna složenost ili hijerarhija nikada nisu mogli biti rešeni simboličkim sredstvima. Ono što se prevaziđe samo simbolično, ostaje netaknuto na nesimboličkom (realnom) planu. Simbolička sredstva izbegavaju stvarnost; ona su na strani svega onoga što je krenulo pogrešno. Na primer, podela rada je erodirala neposredne interakcije i sferu direktnih, intimnih odnosa između ljudi i prirodnog sveta. Simboličko je saučesnik u tom zločinu; ono intenzivira posredovanje stvoreno drugim društvenim praksama. Život postaje fragmentiran; veze s prirodom se zamagljuje i rastaču. Umesto da sanira taj prekid, simbolička misao okreće ljude na pogrešnu stranu, ka apstrakciji. Do izražaja dolazi „žudnja za transcendencijom“, što ignoriše izmenjenu stvarnost, koja je tu žudnju i stvorila. Jezik je u tome imao ključnu ulogu, tako što je preuredio i podredio prirodne si-

<sup>11</sup> Terrence W. Deacon, *The Symbolic Species* (W. W. Norton, 1997).

<sup>12</sup> Ernst Cassirer, *Language and Myth* (New York: Dover, 1953), str. 45–49.

steme kojima su ljudi nekada bili prilagođeni. Simbolička kultura zahteva odbacivanje naše „životinjske prirode“ u korist simbolički definisane „ljudske prirode“.

Naš današnji svakodnevni život odvija se unutar svetskog sistema koji još više insistira na simboličkom i na razdvajanje duha i tela. Čak je i ekonomija odlučno simbolička; za društvene veze (ili za ono što je od njih ostalo) govore nam da su suštinski lingvističke. Jezik je nametljivac koji je pokrenuo niz preobražaja u kojima smo izgubili svoj svet. Frojd je govorio da je „ceo svet nekada bio živ“,<sup>13</sup> dostupan svakome na pun, aktivan način. Totemsku životinju zatim zamenjuje božanstvo, znamen uznapredovale simbolizacije. (Poznato je da starci iz nekih urođeničkih zajednica često odbijaju da budu snimljeni na magnetofonsku traku ili kamerom i insistiraju da ono što imaju da kažu mora biti saopšteno lično, licem u lice.)

Jezik je moćno sredstvo tehnološke i društvene banalizacije. Kao i svako simboličko sredstvo, jezik je izum. Ali, on ne uspostavlja i ne generiše značenje, koje svakako prethodi jeziku. Pre će biti da jezik sputava i izobličava značenje pravilima simboličkog predstavljanja – arhitekturom logike kontrole. Pripitomljavanje takođe učestvuje u toj temeljnoj orijentaciji, tako što je na nekoliko ključnih načina doprinelo pojavi i razvoju dominacije. Jezik ima sposobnost standardizacije; ona se odvija uporedo s razvojem tehnologije, kojem toliko doprinosi. Štamparska presa je, na primer, potisnula narečja i druge jezičke varijacije i stvorila jedinstvene standarde za razmenu i komunikaciju. Pismenost je uvek bila u funkciji ekonomskog razvoja i težila da pojača koheziju bez koje nema nacionalne države i nacionalizma.

<sup>13</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism* (Mojsije i monoteizam, 1939), *Standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud*, London, The Hogarth Press, 1964, str. 114.

Jezik je proizvodna sila; kao i tehnologija, ne podleže društvenoj kontroli. U postmodernoj eri, jezik i tehnologija vladaju ruku pod ruku, ali oboje pokazuju znake iscrpljenosti. Današnje simboličko reflektuje samo naviku vlasti koja stoji iza njega. Ljudska povezanost i opipljiva neposrednost zamenjeni su za sve bleđe osećanje stvarnosti. Siromaštvo i manipulacije masovne komunikacije predstavljaju postmodernističku verziju kulture. Tu nas dočekuje kompjuterski, digitalni, virtualni glas industrijskog moderniteta, kao odraz njegovog pripitomljenog jezgra, samo jednog aspekta masovne proizvodnje.

Jezik ne omogućava prisutnost – on je potiskuje i narušava njenu transparentnost. „Osuđeni smo na reči“, kaže Marlen Nurbes Filip. Ona prilaže i divnu metaforu postanka:

„Boginja je prvo stvorila tišinu: celovitu, nedeljivu, potpunu tišinu. Sva bića – muškarci, žene, životinje, insekti, ptice i ribe – živeli su zajedno i srećno u toj tišini, sve dok jednog dana muškarac i žena nisu legli jedno kraj drugog i napravili prvu reč. To je veoma razljutilo Boginju, koja je u gnevu istresla punu vreću reči širom sveta, posipajući ga i polivajući svojim kreacijama. Njena ostava s rečima reči sručila se na sva bića, narušivši zauvek celinu koja je nekada bila tišina. Boginja je proklela svet rečima i zato se muškarac i žena od tada moraju boriti da se vrate u prvobitnu tišinu.“<sup>14</sup>

Dan Sperber je pisao o „epidemiologiji predavljanja“; njegova metafora pozajmljena iz patologije sasvim je prikladna. Pitao se zašto se simboličko širi kao epidemija i zašto mu podležemo,<sup>15</sup> ali je ta pitanja ostavio bez odgovora.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Marlene Nourbese Philip, *Looking for Livingstone*, Mercury Press, 1991, str. 11.

<sup>15</sup> Dan Sperber, „Anthropology and Psychology: Towards an Epidemiology of Representations“, *Man* 20 (1985), str. 73–89.

<sup>16</sup> Veliki porast slučajeva autizma nije metafora. Autizam, kao povlačenje iz simboličke interakcije, po svemu sudeći predstavlja tragičan komentar o nje-

U Dobu komunikacije, naši homogenizovani simbolički „materijali“ pokazuju se sve neadekvatnijim. Naša izolacija se samo povećava; ono što još imamo da podelimo, smanjuje se. Kako je došlo do toga da se svet i svest vide kao sačinjeni prevashodno od jezika i ograničeni njime? Da li vreme strukturira jezik ili jezik strukturira vreme? Toliko pitanja, među njima i ono najvažnije: kako prevazići simboličko, izmaći mu, osloboditi ga se?

Možda još uvek ne znamo dovoljno kako je došlo do takvog ishoda, ali znamo ponešto o razlozima. Kroz jezik, broj, umetnost i ostalo, u lošoj pogodbi, suština je zamenjena za simboličko. Ta nadoknada ne uspeva da nadoknadi ono što je žrtvovano. Simboličke transakcije stvaraju sparušenu, antispiritualnu dimenziju, koja sa svakim novim korakom postaje sve praznija i hladnija. To nije novost; to je samo žalosno okrutno i očigledno i nagriza nas sve više, za razliku od prave povezanosti, osobenosti i neprogramiranog života. To teskobno, nesrećno stanje stvari iscrpljuje našu vitalnost i sasvim sigurno će nas uništiti, ako ga nekako ne okončamo.

Predstavljanje izneverava čak i samo sebe. Boris Grojs je zaključio da „više nema 'prirodne' slike. Sve informacije su nestale u procesu digitalizacije. Ostaje nam samo da s pomirimo s činjenicom da više ne možemo verovati svojim očima i ušima. Svako ko je ikada radio s kompjuterom to dobro zna.“<sup>17</sup> Osiromašenje i atrofija čula idu zajedno s tim udaljavanjem od neposrednosti i opštom dekontekstualizacijom.

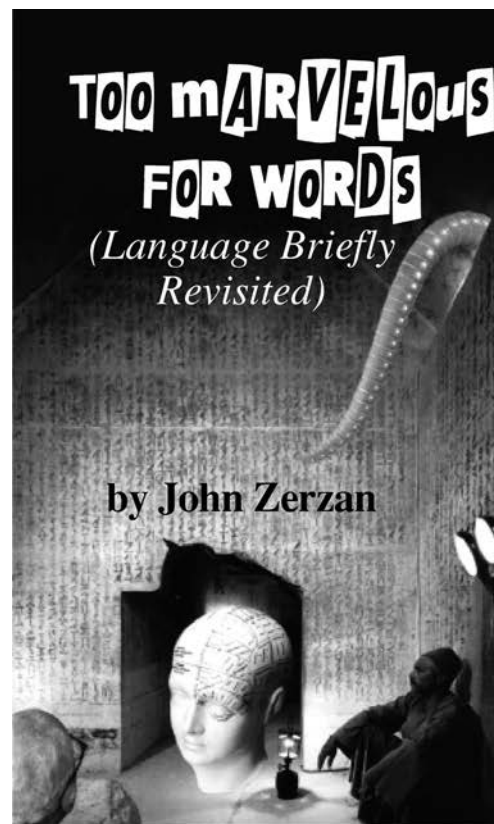
Džordž Stainer je govorio o „suštinskoj iscrpljenosti“, kao duhovnoj klimi današnjice. Taj umor su izazvali težina jezika i sim-

noj nezadovoljavajućoj prirodi. Možda nije slučajno to što se u medicinskoj literaturi autizam prvi put pojavljuje 1799, na početku Industrijske revolucije.

<sup>17</sup> Boris Groys, „The Insider is Curious, the Outsider is Suspicious“, Geert Lovink, ed., *Uncanny Networks: Dialogues in Virtual Intelligentsia*, MIT Press, 2002, str. 260.

boličkog; „senke se izdužuju“, a u „vazduhu se oseća rastanak“.<sup>18</sup> Tu je zaista prikladno reći zbogom. Sve veća nepismenost, jeftini simbolički kanali (email, na primer)... cela jedna dimenzija svedena na dronjke. Vavilonska kula, koja se ovog puta podiže u virtuelnom prostoru, nikada nije bila tako visoka, ali ni slabije utemeljena. Lakša za rušenje?

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**A few years ago** the now-deceased philosopher of science and anarchist Paul Feyerabend was invited to sign a petition being circulated by well-known European thinkers. Its thrust was that society is in need of input from philosophers, who draw upon the "intellectual treasures" of the past. In these dark times, the petition concluded, "We need philosophy."

Derrida, Ricoeur and the other liberal concocters of the document were no doubt shocked by Feyerabend's negative reaction. He pointed out that philosophy's "treasures" were not meant as additions to ways of living, but were intended to express their replacement. "Philosophers," he explained, "have destroyed what they have found, much in the way that the [other] standard-bearers of Western civilization have destroyed indigenous cultures...."<sup>15</sup> Feyerabend wondered how civilized rationality—which has reduced a natural abundance of life and freedom and thereby devalued human existence—became so dominant. Perhaps its chief weapon is symbolic thought,

the abundance that surrounds and confuses them.<sup>14</sup>

The essence of language is the symbol. Always a substitution. Always a paler representation of what is at hand, what presents itself directly to us. Susanne Langer pondered the mysterious nature of symbols: "If the word 'plenty' were replaced by a succulent, real, ripe peach, few people could attend to the mere content of the word. The more barren and indifferent the symbol, the greater its semantic power. Peaches are too good to act as words; we're too much interested in peaches themselves."<sup>15</sup>

For the Murgin people of northern Australia, name giving and all other such linguistic externalizations are treated as a kind of death, the loss of an original wholeness. This is very much to the point of what language itself accomplishes. In slightly more general terms, Ernest Jones proposed that "only what is repressed is symbolized; only what is repressed needs to be symbolized."<sup>16</sup>

with its ascendancy in the form of language. Maybe the wrong turn we took as a species can be located at that milestone in our evolution.

"Writing... can be seen to cause a new reality to come into being," according to Terence Hawkes, who adds that language "allows no single, unitary appeals to a 'reality' beyond itself. In the end, it constitutes its own reality."<sup>12</sup> An infinitely diverse reality is captured by finite language; it subordinates all of nature to its formal system. As Michael Baxandall put it, "Any language... is a conspiracy against experience in the sense of being a collective attempt to simplify and arrange experience into manageable parcels."<sup>13</sup>

At the beginning of domination and repression, the start of the long process of depleting the riches of the living world, is a very ill-advised separation from the flow of life. What was once freely given is now controlled, rationed, distributed. Feyerabend refers to the effort, especially by specialists, to "reduce

Any symbolic mode is only one way of seeing and connecting. By reversing our steps, in light of what has been progressively de-realized or lost, it appears likely that before the symbolic dimension took over, relations between people were more subtle, unmediated, and sensual. But this is a forbidden notion. Commonplace statements like: "Verbal language was perhaps the greatest technical invention [!] of human life" and "Language enables human beings to communicate and share with each other" deny, incredibly, that communication, sharing, society didn't exist before the symbolic, which was such a relative late-comer on the evolutionary scale. (It appeared an estimated 35,000 years ago, following nearly two million years of successful human adaptations to life on earth.) Such formulations express perfectly the hubris, imperialism and ignorance of symbolic thought.

We don't know when speech originated; but soon after domestication gained the upper hand over foraging or gatherer-hunter life, writing appeared. By about 8500 B.C. engraved clay tokens, records of agricultural transactions and inventories, became widespread in the Middle East. Five thousand years later, the Greek invention of the alphabet completed the transition to modern writing systems.

The singular excellence of modern humans has of course become a basic tenet of civilization's ideology. It extends, for example, to Sapir's definition of personality as a systematic psychological organization depending on constellations of symbols.<sup>7</sup> The symbolic medium of language is now widely felt as an all-defining imprisonment, rather than a liberatory triumph. A great deal of philosophical analysis in the past century revolves around this realization, though we can hardly imagine breaking free of it or even clearly recognizing its pervasive presence and influence. This is a measure of the depth of the impoverishing logic that Feyerabend sought to understand. Certainly it is no small endeavor to try to imagine what human cognition may have been like, before language and symbolic thought took possession of so much of our consciousness.

It is grammar that establishes language as a system, reminding us that the symbolic must become systemic in order to seize and hold power. This is how the perceived world becomes structured, its abundance processed and reduced. The grammar of every language is a theory of experience, and more than that, it's an ideology. It sets rules and limits, and grinds the one-prescription-fits-all lenses through which we see everything. A language is defined by grammatical rules (not of the speaker's choosing); the human mind is now commonly seen as a grammar- or syntax-driven machine. As early as the 1700s, human nature was described as "a tissue of language,"<sup>8</sup> a further measure of the hegemony of language as the determining ground of consciousness.

<sup>18</sup> George Steiner, *Grammars of Creation*, Yale University Press, 2001, str. 3.



Language, and symbolism in general, are always substitutive, implying meanings that cannot be derived directly from experiential contexts. Here is the long-ago source of today's generalized crisis of meaning. Language initiates and reproduces a distinction or separation that leads to ever-increasing placelessness. Resistance to this impoverishing movement must lead to the problematization of language. Foucault noted that speech is not merely "a verbalization of conflicts and systems of domination, but...the very object of man's conflicts."<sup>9</sup> He didn't develop this point, which is valid and deserves our attention and study. The roots of today's globalizing spiritual crisis lie in a movement away from immediacy; this is the hallmark of the symbolic.

Civilization has made repeated, futile efforts to overcome the instability and erosion of substance caused by the rule of the symbolic. Among the most well-known was Descartes' attempt to give "grounding" to science and modernity in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. His famous mind-body duality provides a philosophical method (based on suppression of the body, of course) that we have suffered from ever since. He claimed certainty for the system by means of the language of number, as expressed in his analytic geometry. But the dream of certainty has been consistently revealed as a further repressive substitute: an illusory foundation on which domination has extended itself in every direction.

Language is conformist in the profoundest sense; even objective reality yields to its pressure. The so-called factual is brought to dissolution, because it is shaped and constrained by the limits of language. Under its reductive force, we forget that we don't need symbols to be present to meaning. The reality of pre-linguistic social practices is screened from us by more than the practical, empirical limitations of access to time past. Primal existence has been ruled irrelevant, and indigenous life-ways are everywhere under siege, because of civilization's pervasive over-valuation of the symbolic.

Yet an exploration of social life in the early symbolic epoch need not be overly speculative, and may reveal important connections. We know from archaeological and ethnographic evidence that early on in divided society, inequality was often based on ritual knowledge: who possessed it, who did not. The symbolic must have already been very much present and determinant; or why wouldn't inequality be based on, say, knowledge of plants?

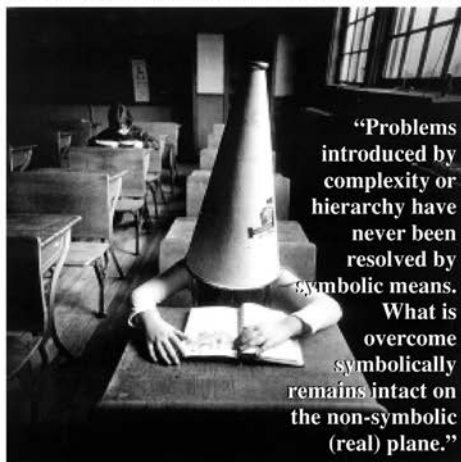
It could well be that language emerged from ritual, which among other attributes, is a substitutive form of emotion. The dissociated,

symbolic process of ritual activity parallels that of language and may have first generated it: emotionally displaced expression, abstracted cries; language as ritualized expression.

From early on, ritual has mystified power relationships. Deacon has argued that language became necessary to enable the contracts on which society depends.<sup>10</sup> However, it is more than likely that social life long predated language. Contracts based on language may have appeared to meet some challenge in society, such as the beginnings of disequilibrium or inequality.

At a later stage, religion was a further (and even less successful) response to problems and tensions in human communities. Language was central there, too. Word magic runs through the history of religions; veneration of names and naming is common (the history of religious life in Ancient Egypt is a well-documented example).<sup>11</sup>

Problems introduced by complexity or hierarchy have never been resolved by symbolic means. What is overcome symbolically remains intact on the non-symbolic (real) plane. Symbolic means sidestep reality; they are part of what is going wrong.



**"Problems introduced by complexity or hierarchy have never been resolved by symbolic means. What is overcome symbolically remains intact on the non-symbolic (real) plane."**

Division of labor, for instance, eroded face-to-face interaction and eroded people's direct, intimate relationship with the natural world. The symbolic is complicit; it generates more and more mediations to accompany those created by social practices. Life becomes fragmented; connections to nature are obscured and dissolved. Instead of repairing the rupture, symbolic thought turns people in the wrong direction: toward abstraction. The "thirst for transcendence" is initiated, ignoring the shifting reality that created that desire in the first place. Language plays a key role here, re-ordering and subordinating natural systems that humankind

was once attuned to. Symbolic culture demands that we reject our "animal nature" in favor of a symbolically defined "human nature".

Now we live our everyday lives in a world system that is ever more symbolic and disembodied. Even economies are decisively symbolic; and we are told that the social bond (what's left of it) is essentially linguistic. Language was an intrusion that brought on a series of transformations resulting in our loss of the world. Once, as Freud put it, "the whole world was animate,"<sup>12</sup> known by all in a full, engaged way. Later the totem animal was replaced by a god, a signpost of the advancing symbolic. (I am reminded that indigenous elders who are asked to make audio or video recordings often decline, insisting that what they say must be communicated in person, face to face.)

Language was a powerful instrument for technological and social disenchantment. Like every symbolic device, it was itself an invention. But it does not establish or generate meaning, which antedates language. Rather, it confines and distorts meaning, via the rules of symbolic representation—the architecture of the logic of control. Domestication also partakes of this underlying orientation, which has served domination in key ways. Language has a standardizing quality; this develops in tandem with the technological development it facilitates. The printing press, for example, suppressed dialects and other language variants, creating unified standards for exchange and communication. Literacy has always served economic development, and aimed to bolster the cohesion so necessary for the nation-state and nationalism.

Language is a productive force; like technology, it is not amenable to social control. In the postmodern era, both language and technology rule, but each shows signs of exhaustion. Today's symbolic reflects nothing much more than the habit of power behind it. Human connectedness and corporeal immediacy have been traded away for a fading sense of reality. The poverty and manipulation of mass communication is the postmodern version of culture. Here is the voice of industrial modernity as it goes cyber/digital/virtual, mirroring its domesticated core, a facet of mass production. Language does not bestow presence; rather, it banishes presence and its transparency.

Dan Sperber wrote of an "epidemiology of representations"; his pathology metaphor is apt. He questioned why the symbolic spreads like an epidemic, why we are susceptible to it,<sup>13</sup> but left these questions unanswered.<sup>14</sup>

*(continued on next page)*

## TOO MARVELOUS FOR WORDS

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In the Age of Communication our homogenized symbolic "materials" prove so inadequate. Our isolation grows; what we have to communicate shrinks. How is it that the world and consciousness have come to be seen as mainly comprised of, and enclosed by, language? Does time structure language or does language structure time? So many questions, including the key one: how do we transcend, escape, get rid of the symbolic?

We may not yet know much about the how, but at least we know something of the why. In language, number, art, and the rest, a substitution essence has been the symbolic's bad bargain. This compensation fails to compensate for what is surrendered. Symbolic transactions deliver an arid, anti-spiritual dimension, emptier and colder with each re-enactment. This is nothing new; it's just more sadly oppressive and obvious, more corrosive of actual connectedness, particularity, non-programmed life. This strangling, unhappy state saps our vitality and will destroy us if we don't end it.

Representation is unfaithful even to itself. Geert Lovink concluded that "there is no 'natural' image anymore. All information has gone through the process of digitization. We just have to deal with the fact that we can no longer believe our eyes, our ears. Everyone who has worked with a computer will know this."<sup>15</sup> Discounted, atrophying senses to go along with the distancing and decontextualization.

George Steiner has announced a "core tiredness" as the climate of spirit today. The weight of language and the symbolic has brought this fatigue; the "shadows lengthen" and there is "valediction in the air."<sup>16</sup> A farewell is indeed appropriate. Growing illiteracy, cheapened channels of the symbolic (e.g. email)...a tattered dimension. The Tower of Babel, now built into cyberspace, has never been taller—but quite possibly never so weakly supported. Easier to bring down?

### Notes:

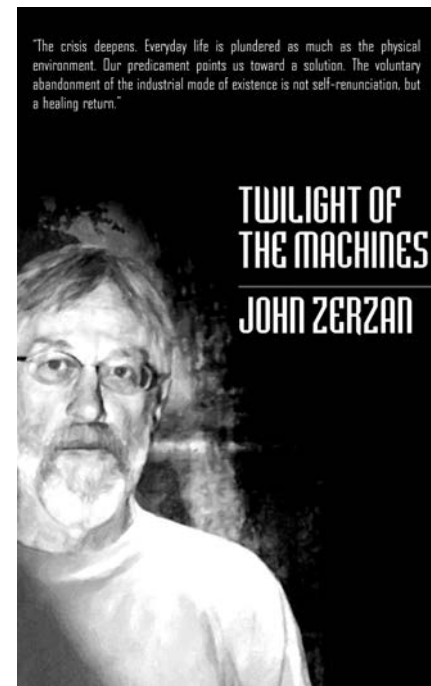
- <sup>1</sup> Paul Feyerabend, *Conquest of Abundance: A Tale of Abstraction versus the Richness of Being* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. 270.
- <sup>2</sup> Terence H. Hawkes, *Structuralism and Semiotics* (London: Methuen, 1977), pp. 149, 26.
- <sup>3</sup> Michael Baxandall, *Giotto and the Orators* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 44.
- <sup>4</sup> Paul Feyerabend, *Killing Time* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 179.
- <sup>5</sup> Susanne K. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1942), p. 75.
- <sup>6</sup> Ernest Jones, cited in Dan Sperber, *Rethinking Symbolism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 43.
- <sup>7</sup> Edward Sapir, "The Emergence of the Concept of Personality in a Study of Cultures," *Journal of Social Psychology* 5 (1934), pp. 408-415.
- <sup>8</sup> For example, Johann Gottfried Herder, *Treatise on the Origin of Language*.
- <sup>9</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, translated by A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1972), p. 216.
- <sup>10</sup> Terrence W. Deacon, *The Symbolic Species* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997), *passim*.
- <sup>11</sup> Ernst Cassirer, *Language and Myth* (New York: Dover, 1953), pp. 45-49.
- <sup>12</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Masses and Movements*, The Standard Edition of the Complete Works (London: The Hogarth Press, 1964), p. 114.
- <sup>13</sup> Dan Sperber, *Anthropology and Psychology: Towards an Epidemiology of Representations*, *Mind* 20 (1983), pp. 73-89.
- <sup>14</sup> The major rise in the incidence of autism is not metaphorical. Autism as a retreat from symbolic interaction seems to be a terrible commentary on its unfulfilling nature. It may not be coincidental that autism first appears in the medical literature in 1799, as the Industrial Revolution was taking off.
- <sup>15</sup> Geert Lovink, *Uncanny Networks* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2002), p. 260.
- <sup>16</sup> George Steiner, *Grammars of Creation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 3.

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