
Abhinavagupta's Theogrammatical Topography of the One and the Many

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The unconscious is structured like a language.

--Jacques Lacan

Author’s Preface

For much of the world’s history, what happens to most of us (that is, the many, the people) has actually been dictated by the one--a singular person as ruler. Countries were ruled by kings and only one could rule; brutal wars were waged over which claimant to the throne could seize the right to rule the many. Moreover, the idea of one to rule the many, monarchy, found its justification in the divine order of things. Just as the model of only one God ruling over the world ensured the stable order of the cosmos, so a single king ruling a people ensured a harmonious society, just as, to use a commonly cited metaphor, the head was ruler of the body’s various parts. Even with the absolute sovereignty of a king, there was always, as with the body, a delicate interaction between the one and the many. The many, though ostensibly voiceless and subject to the will of the one, danced a dialectic waltz with the one ruler. A good ruler developed the skill to hear and address the needs of the many.
Yet, as our American forefathers intimately knew, the problem of kingship is that the one ruler too easily neglects the needs and subjective experiences of all those many others. The problem with one voice to rule us all is that no one voice is omniscient enough, expansive enough to address the subjective needs of the many. With this insight, something rather radical happened in the 18th century--the advent of democracy--the idea that all of us, the many, should in fact have a say over what happens to us. Yet even with that profoundly world-altering document of 1776 that stated that, we, the people have a right to a government, by us, for us and comprised of us, the structure of our lives has been slow to shift out of the older model. In most areas of our lives, power devolves to a single person. Not only are most governments structured this way, most corporations as well have a single head, a CEO who calls the shots from high above. The students and employees of schools also follow the dictates of that singular authority, the principal. Ships and platoons in the military demand the subservience of the voices of the many soldiers whose lives are legally forfeit in battle to a single ruling voice, the captain, the general, the admiral. And, although this is changing in the 20th and 21st centuries, historically the family has also been traditionally ruled by one voice, usually the father or patriarch of the family, the sole voice to decide the legal futures of his dependents. The abundance of vocabulary nodding towards the bodily head as authority reveals the indelible traces of our older world model.

Embedded underneath a vocabulary of heads and body parts as the relationship between the one and the many, a deeper drive is revealed, a desire to collapse the many within the one, the one somehow privileged as more true than the many. Perhaps
our theological models and monotheism in particular point to some subtle psychological wiring in the human brain to prefer the simplicity of the one over the messiness of the many. Too many voices, like too many cooks, will lead us astray, will spoil the broth. Or perhaps, we harbor within ourselves a deep-seated fear that any real dominance of the many will lead to an ethical paralysis; an unwieldy relativism will reign where universal values will be lost, abandoned. Indeed, it is just this criticism that is leveled by conservatives in America today against a perceived new multiculturalism, the plurality of voices making up the many that is America. The call for a return to a patriarchal world, railing against a public space for voices that were not traditionally heard, those of women, of minorities, reveals perhaps less a mean-spirited desire to silence the many very different others in our public space than a palpable yearning for a more secure, less messy rule by the one. In some sense, the democracies of the 20th and 21st centuries offer an experiment, a tumultuous rehearsal of the dialectical balance of power between the one and the many.

The question becomes then, how to find a way of integrating the voices of the many with our ineluctable pull towards the idea of the one. How might we derive a subjectivity for the many that can encompass both the lure of the one, with its clear simplicity, and the complex negotiations that the many demands?

Introduction

Resolving the conundrum of the one and the many has not only been a compulsive dialectical dance for the Western imagination. Indian thinkers have also struggled with the divine and the world as orbital reflections instantiating the pendulous
swing between the one and the many. In an Indian philosophical context this dialectic oscillates from the perch of a nondualism that sees only an absolute formless Brahman as the sole reality of all existence, to a celebration of the multiplicities of a Māyā brimming with a bodied life entangling itself and all of existence in a philosophical Trinity of qualities; again, alternatively, from a loving bhakti, or devotion that sees God as the essence and substratum of the creaturely jīva, the individual soul, to an irrefragable dualism that mirrors the ineluctable longing and separation of creature and God. Uniting this twain is the skilled provenance of only a few Indian thinkers; one of the most notable is the 11th century Indian philosopher Abhinavagupta. An unwavering nondualist, Abhinavagupta's philosophical speculations underwrite a cosmology that is nevertheless multiple in its iterations and dynamic via his use of the three grammatical persons to bridge the One with the Many.

This essay presents an analysis of the interpenetration of the immanent and transcendent as an instantiation of the problem of the One and the Many in the theocosmological mapping of consciousness that Abhinavagupta proposes. Particularly, I suggest that one finds the mode of interrelation between the transcendent and immanent expressed through a grammatico-theology. We see a structural template underlying this theological cosmology through the modalities of the first, second and third persons of grammar, "I," the "You" and the "It." This paper explores the trinitarian syntax modulating the interpenetration of grammatical person as a means for bridging the boundaries between the One and the Many.
I suggest that the grammatico-theology that Abhinavagupta offers gets to the heart of the problem of the one and the many because language is the very instantiation and genesis of the problem. Language functions as a code, not simply mapping reality, but magically generative of the world. Abhinavagupta's grammatico-theology encodes the dialectic between the one and the many and with this, entails a radical departure from our normal understanding of the relation between subjectivity and objectivity. In his system, subjectivity, associated with the first grammatical person, the "I," functions as the heart of all existence. As the subject shifts from the powerful originary participation in the sense of "I" into the mode of the other as "you" and then into the object as the third grammatical person, the "It," the multiplicity of the world ensues. Abhinava's prioritization of subjectivity as being more real than the mode of objectivity upsets our Western conceptions of the world as objective fact, as Abhinava offers a decentered, language-oriented map of reality.

After introducing the topic, I will give a very brief introduction to the thinker whose system I draw from, the 11th century Indian philosopher and mystic Abhinavagupta, along with a short account of the antecedents of Abhinavagupta's system in the grammar tradition. Following this, I will discuss Abhinava's use of dialogue and the grammatical three persons as a linguistic model for mapping the relation between the One and the Many.

It has become something of a truism since Benjamin Whorf first proposed the idea in 1941, to suggest that language structures the modalities of identity insofar as it sets boundaries on what we can think. Indeed, even in contexts like this, what we can
say about the divine, about the relationships between the One and the Many are limited
by the language that we use, with built-in predispositions that structure what we can
imagine. We have, on the one hand, an apophatic impulse to resist the boundaries that
language imposes when it comes to thinking about God, and in this, a tradition that
emphasizes that mystical experience and the divine remain ineffable, resilient against
the cataloging onslaught of language. Abhinavagupta, a mystic, nevertheless takes a
view that stands in contradistinction to the idea that the mystical experience eludes our
best attempts to trap it in language. Nor does he envision an idea of spirit as speaking
a divine language in and through the oracular possessions of bodies.

Abhinavagupta's vision of language and the divine is a mystical configuration,
enmeshing the two, language as divinity, language itself as the map of cosmos.
Language affords a mystical creation of cosmos through the word, a logos, which is
here vāc, speech, and a Goddess, Parāvāk, the Goddess of Speech. The Goddess of
Speech—as speech—does more than simply divide the chaos into being or order the
messy stuff of reality into a coherence. Vāc generates new life from within, in a favorite
metaphor, as secret code in the tiny seed of the banyan tree. Like this tiny seed as
code containing a vast proliferation, so language, especially as secret mantra contains
within it the entire vastness of the cosmos.²

In the oft-quoted phrase of Jacques Lacan's above, the unconscious is structured
like a language; in Abhinavagupta's system, the divine itself is structured like a
language. No doubt there are implicit homologies in our representations of the divine
and the unconscious; one could read much of Freud, especially his Future of an Illusion
as an attempt to make just this link and through it, reduce the idea of the divine to mere mapping of the unconscious. Yet, Abhinavagupta's system turns this reductionism on its head, suggesting that not only is the unconscious structured like a language, but also the conscious and all else in between, the world itself modeled on a vision of language, and language itself is the divine generative power of the universe. That is, not merely is the unconscious structured like a language, but reality itself is enmeshed in and exists as language.

Abhinavagupta

A little bit of background on Abhinavagupta: he lived, from the latter part of the 10th through the middle of the 11th century, in Kashmir in India. Abhinavagupta was a Tantric, and a left-handed Tantric at that, which means that he understood divinity to be immanent and transcendent, as something to be attained here on earth, by humans, as jīvanmukti, liberation while still in a human body. It means also that he practiced some transgressive rituals, involving the use of sex rites and illicit substances, such as wine and meat. Indeed, in one of the rare personal depictions of an individual writer in India, we find his pen portrait, penned by Kṣemarāja, his student, depicting him with a cup of wine and women on each side of him. As a Tantric, the sources that he relied upon as scripture were not India's classical Vedas. Rather, they were a new set of texts, called the Āgamas, a set of new revelations proposing to meet the new challenges of the kaliyuga, the age of darkness, an age that spans through the medieval period up to today as well.
While certainly not a requirement for a Tantric, and not even the norm for his Kashmir of the 10th and 11th centuries, Abhinava was a monist, understanding all of reality to be encompassed within a single and unified, though dyadic principle, Śiva-Śakti. His philosophy might best be understood as a panentheism articulated in evolutionary and emanationist terms. The element of Śakti in this dyadic principle is dynamic, involved in the specificity of life, and generative; the element of Śīva is transcendent and free from all change. The two are irreducibly entwined, inseparable, operating as modalities of each other. Abhinava's incorporation of both the elements of transcendence and immanence lends to it the framework of a panentheism.

His panentheism carries an evolutionary component precisely because his philosophy hinges on re-incorporating a dynamism into the notion of the divine via language as a generative principle. It is, in fact, this element of his philosophy that enables him to make a link between the absolute divinity as a purely transcendent being and the messy reality of becoming that ensconces our existence. That is, his panentheism is what allows him to go beyond the Vedantic nondualism of his earlier compatriot, the 8th century Śaṅkara, to devise a nondualism that can embrace both the One and the Many. His philosophy is complex, and I will not have the space to discuss some of the key ideas of his system, such as spanda, the vibratory essence of the cosmos, a kind of 11th century string theory, or his notion of the rapture of wonder, camatkāra, that transports us beyond mundane existence. For my purposes here, these other ideas, the vibrational throb of spanda and the capture of the transcendent through wonder reflect back on the notion of a fundamental identity between the
multiplicity of beings, from us ordinary individuals here at this conference, down to the merest insect, and up to the supreme divine. The glue in his conceptual framework that girds together the divine as One and us as the Many is the grammatology of a magical linguistic transformation that seeps through and links both One and Many through the Word.

**Bhartṛhari: The Earlier Theo-grammatical Tradition**

The grammatico-theological tradition that I will draw from here derives from Abhinavagupta's understanding of the mystical language of the *mantra*, the tradition of the secret, magical word. However, this tradition begins much earlier than Abhinavagupta and reaches an extraordinary level of sophistication as early as the 5th century CE, with the grammarian Bhartṛhari. In this tradition grammar takes on a profound soteriology, as the *summum bonum* of all spiritual endeavor. As Bhartṛhari tells us, "through recourse to the study of grammar, one attains the supreme state of liberation." Not a modest claim, for this school the study of grammar is salvific precisely because the supreme absolute, *Brahman*, is itself the word, *śabda tattva*. As Bhartṛhari puts it in the opening to his *Vākyā Padiya*, one of the definitive texts for this redemptive school of grammatology, "the word is the absolute, Brahman; it is without beginning or end. It is the imperishable essence of being." By understanding grammar, those rules that define the combinations of words, one is able to purify speech. That is, grammar is the cure for maladroit speech, and beyond this, it is through this cure that one finds the door to the final salvation, release from worldly existence.
Notwithstanding the enlightenment promised by Derrida’s science of "grammatology" as deconstruction, dismantling from within--one might venture, a metaphysical analogue of the movie *Alien*, nevertheless, in India at least, the enlightenment that grammatology promises is a constructive enterprise. Still, like Derrida’s understanding of identity as inextricably embedded within the grammatological structure that contains it, the idea of the word as essence in Bhartṛhari’s grammatology is also embedded within. It is immanently implicated in the construction of the world, via its articulation of the world. The word sets in motion the process by which the world is created. To continue on with Bhartṛhari’s opening of the *Vākyapadīya*, he tells us,

> through its existence as meaning it appears to manifest, and from this the world is set in motion. It [the word] is one alone. This is the teaching. Yet, different energies (fem.) reside in it. Even though it is indivisible, because of these energies it appears as divided.  

Language then, is both the essence and genesis of being. Moreover, even though it exists as a singularity, as "one alone," internally, the word contains within it different energies--and here these energies are understood within the tradition that Abhinavagupta elaborates upon as Goddesses to whom one would appeal for aid. The One contains within it the Many, as Goddesses who then generate the multiplicity of the many that constitutes the world. This grammatological formulation of the word encapsulates the paradoxical conundrum that we are charged with addressing here at this conference, the relation of the One to the Many.
Śabdatattva is literally the principle, or archetype (tattva) of the word (śadba). In this sense, one discovers a resonance with the Western idea of the logos, even as the multiplicity of gendered energies strikes a dissonant chord with the Western formulation of the logos. A plethora of Goddesses as energies, undifferentiated in the indivisible unity of the One might seem untoward, even blasphemous, in the framework of the logos, yet in this context, these energies function as the powers of the One, which enable its freedom and capacity to unfold into the diversity that is the world. In this, there is both identity of these energies and the One that is the word, and the elaboration, the sequential articulation of the word as it transforms into ordinary speech, enacting an evolution (parināma) of language and of the world.

Abhinavagupta’s Theo-grammatology

Abhinavagupta expands upon the earlier tradition of the Grammarians, to fit it into his own Tantric world, rife with the complex coding of mantras, magical words that are repeated over and over in a ritual context with the goal of granting the reciter supernatural powers. Mantras are foundational for Tantric rites, forming the central basis of nearly every ritual occasion. Mantras were understood to be the sonic body of the deity; functioning performatively, they instantiate the power of the divine to effect physical transformations in the mundane world, causing the rains to come, warding away illness, granting one wealth.

The text that I primarily draw from here, the Parātriśikā Vivaraṇa represents Abhinava’s synthesis of the grammar tradition into a theology that melds grammar and Goddess. This text is approximately a hundred pages in Sanskrit; it is a commentary by
Abhinavagupta on a very short Tantric scripture, the *Parātrishikā*, thirty-seven verses revealing the secret essence of the Trika, the three Goddesses. The root text of thirty-seven verses is framed as a dialogue between the fierce Tantric God Bhairava and the Goddess (*Devi*). In this root text, the Goddess asks Bhairava to teach her the highest secret (*mahāguhyam*), by which one achieves magical powers, through a particular Tantric teaching called the teaching of the Clans (*kaulika*). Bhairava gives her the teaching, the secret highest knowledge of enlightenment, known as "*anuttaram,*" literally, "the unsurpassed" including the secret *mantra,* the magical formula associated with this teaching of the *Trika.* Abhinavagupta relates this teaching of the *Trika,* literally "the Three," as the teaching of Parāvāk, the Supreme Goddess of Speech seen through a modality of three perspectives, where deity unfolds into the three grammatical persons of speech, the I, the You and the It.¹⁰

Abhinavagupta’s one hundred page commentary takes us far beyond what is apparent on the surface in this very short thirty-seven verse root scripture. He understands the text through the lens of language and he uses the dialogue as a way into his own profound philosophical contemplations on the interpenetrations of language in the world and the divine. Language in his exegesis is the intermediating link between the One as the divine and the Many as the world. In this he outlines four levels of language: 1) spoken words that we commonly understand as speech (*vaikhari*); 2) speech on a more subtle level, which is not spoken but which forms in the minds of speakers (*madhyama*); 3) speech that is not yet articulated, but rather seen (*paśyanti*), and which operates as a conceptual structuring modality. This level of
speech might be in some respects analogous to Judith Butler's understanding of language as structuring the very possibilities for our identities, or Benjamin Whorf's idea that language limits the possibilities for what we can think.\textsuperscript{11} 4) The highest and most subtle level of speech (\textit{parā}, also \textit{Parāvāk}, the Goddess), which is the essential condition for not only communication, but even for sentience.

Elsewhere\textsuperscript{12} I have argued that within an Indian context, \textit{mantras} operate as a powerful, primogenial and performative language, analogous in some respects to the performative coding functions of DNA, or computer code in our world. Like the transfer of information with DNA and computer code, this coding information acts as a template to effect the structures of our physical world. There is a performative aspect to the \textit{mantra}, which makes things happen. In Abhinava's view, it is, in fact, the articulation of language as it operates on the objective plane of physical reality that actually causes the physical manifestation of the world. Yet \textit{mantras} differ in one respect from binary and biochemical codes; they do not follow a merely impersonal operation of the laws of physics and biochemistry or mathematical computation. One finds, in addition in the idea of the \textit{mantra}, also an intentional agentive element. That is, language works because the Goddess of Speech, Parāvāk, Parāśakti, intertwines and penetrates into the essence of being and of beings, and generates the capacity for the transfer of information, for meaning to arise. As Abhinava notes,

that [Goddess] resides as the essence of what is known as hearing. By her own freedom she gives a sense of coherence as a meaningful whole to what is otherwise a collection of letters vibrating as a mass in a confused formless
sequence. Without that, even as one hears the particular words, the words are submerged in a confused noise causing one to say in common parlance, 'I don't hear.'

The Goddess as speech becomes the subject hearing speech and when she chooses, then words convey meaning; they have coherence. Not an automatic process, Abhinava's system entails a theological immanence at the heart of the process of communication.

This immanence is what makes it possible for the divine, as the One to reflect itself in a variety of positions, as subject and as object. The structure of language as grammatical system reflects the division of the one into the multiplicity that becomes the subject, the object and the relationship between them as the syntax of the sentence. Abhinava's idea of language, along with the dualisms imbricated in any linguistic system, itself undergoes a rich metamorphosis into the living performative language of mantra, the magical word. Language naturally expands and evolves into the multiple positions that make up grammatical syntax. As such it is both the essence and genesis of being. For our purposes, Abhinava's understanding helps us to rethink the relation between the One and the Many as a dialectic of language.

The Dialogue

As I mentioned earlier, as a nondualist Abhinavagupta's philosophy posits a single divine substratum for all of reality. Nor does he, like his earlier compatriot Śaṅkara, take the position that the multiplicity of the world is an illusion. Rather he uses language to mediate between the multiplicity and the One. In this case, the
context of his exegesis on these thirty-seven verses offers for him a way to unpack this apparent paradox of the singularity of the divine required by a monist world-view in the face of the multiplicity of the world. In fact, the very structure of his scriptural source, these thirty-seven verses framed as a dialogue, demands the incorporation of multiplicity, the other as conversation partner. That is, from the outset, revelation posits an unavoidable duality in the very mode of the revelation, the dialogue.

In his exegesis Abhinavagupta tells us that the form of language as dialogue is the unfolding of language through the four levels, evolving from its original unity within the Goddess as pure subjectivity, the "I" (aham). For communication to occur in conversation, in dialogue, there needs to be some point of contact, of unity. This point for Abhinava is the unity of consciousness as divinity, the "I" (aham) of the Goddess on the level of speech as parā, the highest, most primordial and undifferentiated level of speech. It entails a universality which is the essence of sentience and which is the secret link as Goddess that connects us all, allows us to communicate with each other. This speech, which is none other than a Goddess, evolves to the grosser differentiated levels of speech through an act of grace, to paśyantī down to vaikharī, the level of gross physical speech, allowing the actual words of the text's dialogue. Thus, the dialogue is the unfolding of speech to the mundane level as an act of grace, which becomes the context for revealing the scripture's secret teaching, the revelation of anuttara.14

With this explanation, Abhinavagupta plays upon a pun. The secret revelation is the doctrine of anuttara, the "unsurpassed." Meanwhile, the revelation itself takes the
form of a dialogue, of question and answer, as Abhinava notes, "praśna-uttara." The Goddess asks the "question," *praśna*, and the God Śiva replies with the answer, the Sanskrit "uttara." The answer is the revelation of the secret teaching, "anuttara."

Anuttara means the highest knowledge, and it also happens to be the negation of the word *uttara*, as the prefix */an* in Sanskrit negates the word it precedes, just as in English, the prefix "un" negates what it precedes, as in "unavoidable." Thus Abhinava points out that the pun in the word "anuttara" indicates that this secret teaching is in fact, literally a "non-answer." The "non-answer" to the dialogue, he tells us, signifies a shift to a nondualism. As Abhinava explains, both the question and its answer are contained within the Goddess, who is pure consciousness, an encompassing awareness. At the core, the give and take of dialogue gives way to a unity of the One that precludes the need for an answer; it is a "non-answer" since it contains within itself both question and answer.

At the same time, even as it remains the One, Abhinava points out that the use of "anuttara" as the idea of the supreme also carries with it the implication of two because the very form of the word is the comparative. Here, Sanskrit grammar forms the comparative by adding the suffix *-tara*, which we see at the end of the word "anuttara." It would have been possible to instead use the superlative, the *-tama* suffix, in the word "anut-tama," which would also mean the "unsurpassed," in the superlative. This is like the difference between the English words "greater" and "greatest," where the *-er* suffix is the comparative and the *-est* suffix is the superlative.
Abhinava discusses at some length the choice that the scripture of the Goddess of Speech takes to dub the highest secret teaching with a comparative form rather than a superlative form. This comparative form in the word "anuttara" indicates the presence of the other, since the very form by virtue of comparison inherently implicates the presence of a second, to whom the first is compared. Not so with the superlative form, he tells us. The superlative remains alone, the very form of the superlative lacks the other, as rival or counterpart. Even with this, Abhinava is at pains to make it clear that the singularity of the One that the superlative implies is in no way missing from the use of the comparative. In this way, the grammatical form of the word "anuttara" implicates both the idea of the One and of Two. Perhaps we might profitably use here a maxim that Abhinava employs elsewhere--the eye of a crow--to understand him here. The comparative form in a sense functions like the eye of a crow, which oscillates back and forth between two distinct representations. This, for us, odd figure of speech, derives from a bit of Indian folklore that supposes that a crow has only one eye, which moves alternatively from one socket to the other, back and forth, to encompass two very different perspectives via dialogue and comparison.

This sophisticated exegesis of grammar presupposes a kind of faith in the power of grammar to signify more than a merely conventional usage. In fact his use of a pun is not mere word play, but carries as well an instantiation of this doctrine of language as the structuring basis of the cosmos in this grammatico-theology. The pun demonstrates the power of words to reveal in their basic forms, as letters and syllables, the underlying order and meaning of the cosmos. Words are a template for reality, they
act to convey the code of life, a kind of linguistic DNA. Their forms, grammatical and syllabic, carry profound clues to reveal the underlying nature of the universe. More than this, by knowing the secret syllabic codes which map the universe, one is able to manipulate the topography, to effect changes in the universe, since this code is capable of generating the shape of our physical reality. We will see this play out more precisely later with his mapping of the cosmos onto the alphabet.

Generativity

We should note one more point in Abhinava's explication of anuttara. Even as this secret highest teaching, the "anuttara" is a "non-answer" to the question, since it signifies the singularity of the One, at the same time in an exuberant exegetical maneuver, Abhinavagupta demonstrates the generative power of language. In a gesture resonant of Barthes, indeed a kind of Barthean S/Z on steroids, Abhinavagupta gives us sixteen different meanings of the word "anuttara." These range from understanding "anuttara" as that perspective beyond which nothing is, because it is the unbarred, expanding, delight of wonder (camatkāra) in one's own self;\(^{18}\) to the understanding that there is no liberation, enlightenment, because the world itself is not really in a state of bondage; to understanding "anuttara" as embedded in the essence of the mundane existence of everyday affairs; to understanding "anuttara" as that which cannot be limited or separated; to understanding "anuttara" as a timeless state in which there is no suggestion of motion or sequence.\(^ {19}\)

For our purposes here, we can glean from his treatment of "anuttara" an idea of language in this grammatico-theology as affording a bridge, seamlessly shifting
between the one and the many, between a transcendent timeless vision and the mundane world. Language is inherently generative and perspectival, he demonstrates in his extravagant multiplication of meanings for words. Furthermore, he employs this technique throughout this text, again with the word "kaulikasiddhi" and with the word "mahābhāgā," the word "sadyah" among many others, indeed, even for the word "devi," "Goddess." There is no single right way of interpreting a word. Instead, he offers a prism of meanings, each reflecting a different perspective. Together they form a richly dynamic and ever expanding production of meaning. Language indeed, as Goddess, as we might expect from a Goddess, is profoundly generative. The Goddess of Speech multiplies things. She causes the world to unfold precisely because she contains within her a generative power. As Abhinava tells us, "the highest secret (anuttaram) is the one from whose womb billions of infinite creations flow forth. As it has been said, 'from which this whole proceeds . . . ." The Three Persons

The expansion from the One into the vast multiplicity, this infinite number of creations which is the universe, occurs through the generativity of language. Moreover, the structure of language mirrors in its grammar the structure of the cosmos. In the structure of language as three grammatical persons, the "I" the "You" and the "It," we find the whole of the universe contained. Quoting from the Tantrasamuccaya, Abhinavagupta tells us, "the whole universe exists always, in every way immersed in the three grammatical persons, in the activities of the all-knowing down to the daily
Describing the essence of the Trika philosophy, Abhinava explicates.

Indeed, everything in the world has the nature of the Three, of *nara* (the human), *Śakti* (the Goddess) and *Śiva* (the God). This is the form of the *Trika*, the Three. There, whatever is alone in its own nature situated solely in the form of insentience, that is chiefly the nature of *nara*, as for instance, in the statement, "a jar is standing [here]." This refers to the third grammatical person only, leaving aside (the first and second grammatical persons). When, however some thing is addressed with the word "you," even though it is still a thing, a "this," separate from the person calling it, then the feeling of "this" is veiled, covered over by the "I" feeling of the person addressing it. That is the form related to *Śakti*, the second grammatical person, as in "you are standing [here]." And here the meaning of the word "you," the second grammatical person is indicated in the process of address. That is, one gets the idea, "just as I am standing [here], so in the same way, this other also is here [hence, an idea of two]." With this, the freedom of wonder in the unbroken feeling of "I" is the form of the first person speaking. In the sentence "you are standing [here]," the one who is addressed assimilates to the wonder of the unbroken "I" of the speaker. This he points out by the second grammatical person with the meaning of "you." This is the Goddess Parāparā, the Goddess of differentiation. Again, when there is the unbroken sense of wonder in the apprehension of the "I," complete in its freedom, without any dependence on another, as in the sentence,
"I am standing [here]", that is the first grammatical person, which is the highest Goddess Parā.23

That is, Abhinavagupta’s conceptual framework for classifying the various entities in the world divides along three categories of Śiva, Śakti and nara, which are the grammatical first, second and third persons. Each of the three grammatical persons marks a degree of subjectivity, thus generating a scale from the pure subjectivity of the first person to the condition of being an object designated by the third grammatical person. Sentience or life itself in this framework is the function of the subject, the first grammatical person. In a sense, one can see a similar notion in Descartes' cogito ergo sum, "I think therefore I am." Descartes comes to be convinced of the reality of his own existence only by ultimately appealing to his experience of subjectivity. The "I am" derived from the subjective experience of hearing himself think is not such a far cry from Abhinavagupta's location of sentience in the unbroken sense of wonder that arises from the feeling of "I" (aham bhāva).

Yet the interesting irony of it is that Descartes' conceptual scheme, linked as it is with the scientific revolution then enabled a systematic shift to a prioritization of the objective pole of experience. The method of science is a reduction of the other to object. The “objectivity” that guarantees the universality of science works also to destroy the innate life of the other precisely by making it into object. In contrast, Abhinava's privileging of the subjective pole of experience, the "I" as the "highest Goddess Parā," generates a mystical science, of ritual symbolic identifications. In this perspective, language does not simply describe reality. Rather, it creates reality through
the power it engenders by subjectivity. The subjectivity inherent in the use of magical language of mantra is the method for a shift into the multiplicity, the multiple instantiations of empathy as the "I" takes on the perspective of a wider world, enlivening the self and the world through the generativity that language enables.

The sense of "I," the first grammatical person, is in fact for Abhinava the very essence of what it means to be alive, to be conscious. It is subjectivity writ large. This sense of the first grammatical person is more than our quotidian understanding of grammar. Here, it entails the rapture of wonder and is none other than the highest Goddess, the Goddess of Speech in her first stage as she evolves out of herself the creation of the world.

Grammar drives the system. In Abhinavagupta's formulation the linguistic comprehension of the world takes priority over any sort of non-articulated objective fact. That is, there is not a world "out there" to which language corresponds, a mapping of words onto a reality. Rather, the primary locus of reality stems first from the linguistic frame. Words are primary, the more real phenomenon, and the objective world of things--what we usually think of in our factually dominated and fact infatuated world as reality--this is for Abhinava less real, precisely because it drifts away from the sense of subjectivity.

Yet, even with this demarcation of subject and object, the positions are not fixed. When we refer to a jar as "it," the jar takes on the position of the object. However, as Abhinava notes above, when the other, whether jar or person, is addressed as "you," then that other takes on some of the life of the "I-feeling" of the
person talking. The "you" stands at an intermediate point, when differentiation is beginning, but where there is both the presence of subject and object. Nor is this process confined only to clearly sentient beings, humans, like ourselves. Abhinava tells us, "Even the lifeless third person, if it sheds its lifeless form can take on the first and second person forms. [For example,] 'listen, o stones' and 'Of mountains, I am Meru.'" Here the stones, by being addressed in the second person take on the life of second person address. The second example he gives, "Of mountains I am Meru" is spoken by the God Krishna to the warrior Arjuna in the classic Indian text of the Bhagavad Gītā; here Abhinava tells us, the mountain takes on the "I" feeling of the first grammatical person, transforming it from object to subject. With this, its essential reality shifts from lifeless object to sentient subject.

Even though the "you" indicates the duality of two and a degree of separation, it displays only a partial separation. It also partakes of a sense of the rapt wonder that is the condition of being the subject. As such, both the "I" and the "you" sustain a freedom that comes with consciousness, a freedom that resists relative distinctions of bigger or smaller. This innate consciousness of the "I" and the "you" affords them a measure of universality. "He," "she" and "it" of the third grammatical person encode a gender in their grammatical forms, but not the first and second grammatical persons. The "I" and the "you" are both genderless; that is, they can partake of both genders.

Elsewhere Abhinava notes that the first grammatical person also correlates to the singular. Unlike English, which contains only the singular and the plural, Sanskrit contains the singular, the dual and the plural. Following an intuitive logic,
Abhinavagupta explains that the second grammatical person, the "you," is correlated to the dual, and the third person is related to the plural. This classification again reflects the evolution from the One to the Many, with the singular associated with the One and the plural with the Many. Again, demonstrating the process that we saw above where the third or second person become absorbed in the rapt wonder of the "I" feeling of the first person, grammatically when the first person and the second or third person are together in a sentence, as in "you and I are standing here," the verb form (in Sanskrit) assimilates to the first person, (with "standing" in the 1st person in Sanskrit). That is, the "I" has the capacity to absorb into its own rapturous delight whatever it touches. As Abhinava reminds us again and again, "nevertheless, by contact with the strength of the Self, a person becomes equal to that [Self]." That is, the subjectivity of the "I" has the power to transform whatever it contacts, bestowing life on the mere object or stone, through a participation in the life of the subject. The power of the Self is in fact, its position of subjectivity.

In this context, one gets the sense that the operative paradigm is contagion. Like the epic story of Rāma whose mere touch, his toe stubbing the stone that is the cursed wife Ahalya, causing her to come back to life, the rapt wonder of the "I" feeling powerfully slides into anything it can reach, granting life in the process. This idea is pervasive in the Indian context, illustrated especially in the pan-India concept of darśana, or vision of the deity. In daily Indian religious life, one goes to the temple to take the vision or darśana of the deity or one takes the darśana of a holy person. The
mere vision entails a kind of contagious exchange by visual contact that transforms the person.\textsuperscript{28}

For Abhinava, the transformation from lifeless object to sentient subject is possible precisely because "everything has the nature of everything"\textsuperscript{29} This central maxim of his philosophy encapsulates the flow of consciousness, a flow that always proceeds from the point of grammatical subjectivity, which is the generative matrix. This map of the world is one where the "I" is the genesis that unfolds into the world. Language is what facilitates this, via the Goddess of Speech, Parāvāk.

Indeed, this Goddess of Speech, Parāvāk is herself the "I," as the powerful performative language of \textit{mantra}, in Sanskrit, \textit{aham}. So we see,

The powerful \textit{mantra} of this visible world is the Goddess of Speech, Parāvāk. She is the \textit{mantra} "\textit{aham}," ("I"). Her innate and spontaneous essence is the rapture of wonder (\textit{camatkāra}). As it is said, 'all visible phenomena rest in the Self, which is the "I"-feeling.' This is a secret beyond all secrets.\textsuperscript{30}

Encoded in the \textit{mantra} "\textit{aham}," the "I," which is the Goddess of Speech, is the grammatical architecture of cosmogony. A kind of linguistic DNA, each of the letters of \textit{aham}, the "\textit{a}," the "\textit{ha}," and the "\textit{m}" encapsulate, and indeed generate the unfolding of the world. The "\textit{a}," the first letter of the alphabet, signifies the power of transcendent Śiva, again recapitulating the first grammatical person. The "\textit{ha}" signifies the second grammatical person. The letter "\textit{ha}" in Sanskrit, called \textit{visarga}, literally means "emission" and in this theogrammatical cosmology points to the emission of the world.

This correlation derives from pronunciation. If one tries to say "\textit{ha}," one notices the
breath coming out, standing in as the microcosmic equivalent of the macrocosmic creation of the world. In this case, the "ha," which is the "you" designates the shift from subject as the subjective sense of I moves away from the self into the duality of the other, just as our breath, which is life, escapes our bodily form when one pronounces "ha." The letter "m" constitutes the third grammatical person, the objective pole of experience. In the "m" rests the objectified essence of the other, the crystallization of the many as inert object.

Moreover, the idea of "I" operates on more than one level. In its pristine consciousness as Goddess of Speech, the "I" enfolds within itself the whole that manifests as the world. It encompasses this whole as modes, the modes of subject, of subject as object in the notion of "you" and of mere object. The "I" exists as latent or manifest form in all of the three grammatical persons; whether the subjective pole or the objective pole predominates depends upon the mode.

On the level of the microcosm, within the individual person, the process also operates as a replication, a kind of fractal repetition of the cosmic creation. Each moment every individual divides up and maps the world using these three grammatical persons. When an individual rests within the rapture of the "I," there is the sense of the fullness of wonder, a state of bliss and a kind of momentary enlightenment.

On the less pristine level, the level of ordinary egoity, which is not in this system (and perhaps not in ours either) considered such a good thing, the merely egoic "I," (ahaṃkāra --"I-doing" rather than rather than ahaṃbhāva--"I-feeling") becomes a split self that mistakes the objective element, the third person in the letter "m" for the first
person in the letter "a." In this case, the small-minded egoity of the aham, the "I" is constituted through the transformation of the initial pure subjectivity of the letter "a" in through the duality of "ha" and then into the objectified condensation of self into the "m," as aham, resulting not in the whole as harmonious release of creative proliferation of the world as the multitude, but a constricted confusion of the subject and the object.

Thus, the word itself as mantra, mantra which is the Goddess of Speech, as the "I," aham, itself figures and effects the sequence of cosmogony, beginning with the first grammatical person and flowing outward into the proliferation of multiplicity that is the nara, the third grammatical person, the many that constitutes the world. The world is created essentially linguistically, as an expansion outward from the position of subjectivity into the multiplicity of the object that is the world. This happens on both a cosmic level, as the action of Gods and on the individual human level in every moment of thought, indeed, as we saw above, even for a mere worm. "Aham," spoken or recited, encapsulates and performatively re-enacts this process. This is a great secret for this Tantric tradition, one linked to a ritual and performative exercise. It is also a great secret because it gives a code, the underlying mechanism that explains the grammatical constitution of the world as subject and object, linking creativity and even sentience to the grammatical relationship between subject and object.

Mapping the Alphabet

The understanding of the alphabet as map and code of the cosmos figures all the way down to earth and water and the other elements, to sound and the ear, to the mind, the intellect, to time, and desire, up to the highest deity, Śiva. The letters of the
alphabet function as a kind of secret linguistic code of reality, a kind of DNA that can be manipulated through mental repetition--which is to tap into the subject mode--to then effect changes in the material world, which exists in the mode of object.

Mapping the alphabet onto the world is no doubt a structuralist venture; the quest for the master code that can explain and generate all of life. Interestingly, Abhinavagupta's understanding of the system entails an already sophisticated displacement of the hubristic reductionism implicated in a structuralist map of the cosmos. As he maps the alphabet onto the categories of what exists, earth or sound or time, he draws in again a perspectival approach, based upon the four levels of language. What on one level correlates a particular letter, the "la," for instance, with the limiting power of time, on another level corresponds to the sense of taste in a counter-reflection. This can occur because, as we saw earlier, "everything is the nature of everything." The very nomenclature, bimba, which means "reflection" and pratibimba which translates as "counter reflection" deflects away from a kind of positivist summary of the world. In this view, there are only reflections and counter reflections. This moves towards a perspectival appreciation where the mode of subject is the only real origin. As language evolves through the levels of speech, from the highest level to the level of gross speech, and as the mode of awareness shifts from subject to object, the perspective shifts, generating the multiplicity that is the world. Running through the whole as the thread giving life on every level as she shifts from mode to mode is the Goddess of Speech, who is the "I," the position of the subject. Conclusion
What does it mean to understand grammar as the template, the code defining reality? It places us in a very different relationship to the world than we are used to in a 21st century Western existence. It pulls us away from a positivist view of reality, into something more akin to a kind of virtual reality, where our mental states and mental constructions of reality lead the way. This grammatical metaphysics might be profitably compared with some postmodern thought, for instance, the post-foundational decentering of positivism that Derrida suggests. Yet, this view comes with an unexpected theological twist that reinstates a kind of structuralist, and incongruently magical view of the world. The priority that Abhinavagupta gives to the subjective pole of experience as a universal point of origin certainly offers a radically different center, yet it does not devolve into a relativism. We find instead a vision where speech begins as the One, as a Goddess whose essence is subjectivity, the "I," and yet this One is able to both generate and link to the Many through subjectivity, since as Abhinavagupta tells us, "there is no speech that does not reach the heart."
Notes


2. Abhinavagupta, *Parātrīṃśikāvivāraṇa*, downloaded from S.D. Vasudeva's Indology E-text webpage:


4. Abhinavagupta, *Īśvara Pratyabhijñā Vivṛti Vimarśinī* (IPVV), ed. Paṇḍit Madhusudan Kaul Shāstrī, 3 vols. (Delhi: Akay Reprints, 1985), IPVV 3:260: When those [beings] belonging to Māyā--even down to an insect--when they do their own deeds, that which is to be done first stirs in the heart." "Māyīyānāṁ kitāntānāṁ svakāryakaraṇāvāsare yat kāryāṁ purā hṛdaye sphurati."

5. Bhartṛhari, *Vākya Padiya*, 1:22: "tad vyākaraṇāṁ āgamya paraṁ brahmādāhigamyate." Downloaded from GRETIL - Göttingen Register of Electronic Texts in Indian Languages and related Indological materials from Central and Southeast Asia via "Yves Ramseier's page on Bhartṛhari and other South Asia and


7. Bhartṛhari, Vākya Padiya, 1.14: "tad dvāram apavargasya vāṇmalānāṃ cikitsitam." "That (grammar) is the door to the final state, the end of transmigration; it is the cure for the impurities of speech."

8. Bhartṛhari, Vākya Padiya, 1.1b-1.2: "vivartate ‘ṛthabhāvena prakriyā jagato yataḥ || 1.1 ||

ekam eva yad āmnātaṁ bhinnaśaktiyapāśrayāṭ | aprṭhaktve ‘pi śaktibhyāḥ pṛthaktveneva vartate || 1.2 ||." See also Padiya, 1.120, where Bhartṛhari tells us that the world evolves from the word--this the "wise" (amnāyavido) know.

9. The mantra here is "sauḥ."

10. These three levels are Śiva, the highest God, Śakti, the Goddess and Nara, the human.

11. Indeed this idea of speech is resonant with Bhartṛhari's understanding of speech as foundational to the identities and consciousness of beings, "the inner consciousness of beings, acting both inside and out . . . without the word, things would be like a stone or piece of wood, without life." See Vākya Padiya, 1.126-127. See also Natalia Isayeva's discussion of Bhartṛhari in Natalia Isayeva, From Early Vedanta to Kashmir Shaivism (Rochester, NY: State University of New York Press 1995), 110-119. It is, of course, the condition of sentience itself which
characterizes the highest level, \textit{parā} that makes the third level more consonant with the thought of Butler or Whorf.


13. Abhinavagupta, \textit{Parātrimśikāvivaraṇa}, downloaded from S.D. Vasudeva's Indology E-text webpage:


15. Abhinavagupta, \textit{Parātrimśikāvivaraṇa}, downloaded from S.D. Vasudeva's Indology E-text webpage:


16. Abhinavagupta, \textit{Parātrimśikāvivaraṇa}, downloaded from S.D. Vasudeva's Indology E-text webpage:

http://homepage.mac.com/somadevah/etx/ParTriViv.txt, page 196: evaṃ tāvat tu syāt, avivakṣite pratiyogiviśeṣe tamapprayogaḥ, pratiyogiviśeṣāpekṣāyāṃ tu tarap / "However, it should be understood in this way: the superlative suffix -\textit{tama} is used without a specific counterpart, an other that mutually defines it.
However, the comparative suffix -tara implies a counterpart, an other."


19. Abhinavagupta, *Parātrīṃśikāvivaraṇa*, downloaded from S.D. Vasudeva's Indology E-text webpage: http://homepage.mac.com/somadevah/etx/PaTriViv.txt, page 193-195. His exegesis on this single word, giving sixteen different meanings takes two full pages of Sanskrit text. The number 16 is also significant, symbolic of the full moon, and with this the idea of completion.


22. Abhinavagupta, *Parātrīṃśikāvivaraṇa*, downloaded from S.D. Vasudeva's Indology E-text webpage:
śrītāntrasamuccaye 'pi

Q: naraśaktiśivāveśi viśvam etat sadā sthitam /
Q: vyavahāre krimiṇām ca sarvajñānām ca sarvaśaḥ //

23. Abhinavagupta, *Parātrīṃśikāvivaraṇa*, downloaded from S.D. Vasudeva's Indology E-text webpage:

http://homepage.mac.com/somadevah/etx/PaTriViv.txt, pages 211-212:

naraśaktiśivātma kaṃ hidaṃ sarvam trikarūpam eva / tatra yat kevalam svatmany avasthitam tat kevalam jaḍarūpayogī mukhyatayā narātmakam ghatās tiṣṭhatītivat / eṣa eva prathamapuruṣaviśayah āṣeṣaḥ / yat punar idam ity api bhāsamānaṃ yadāmantryamāṇatayā āmantrakāhaṃbhāvasamacchādītatadbhinnadṛṣṭbhāvaṃ yuṣmacchaḥbhavapadeśyaṃ tac chāktaṃ rūpaṃ tvam tiṣṭhati / atra hy eṣa eva yuṣmacchaḥdārtho āmantrāṇatattvam ca / tathā hi yathāhaṃ tiṣṭhāmi tathaiva ayaṃ apīti tasyāpy asmodṛpāvacchinnāhaṃbhāvavacmatkārasvātantryam avicchinnāhaṃcamatkāreenaivābhimanvāna āmantrayate yuṣmadarthaṃ na madhyamapuruṣeṇa vyapadiṣati / seyaṃ hi bhagavati parāparā / sarvathā punar avicchinnacamatkāranirapekṣasvātantryāhaṃvimarṣe ahaṃ tiṣṭhāmite parābhāṣṭārikodayo yatraṭṭmatvam puṣasya /


jaḍā api tyaktatpūrvarūpāḥ śākṣaśaivarūpabhājo bhavanti, śṛṇuta grāvāṇah [\cf Mahābhāṣya 3.1.1; \cf Vākyapādiya 3 Puruṣasamuddeśa 2], meruḥ śikharinām aham bhavāmi [Bhagavadgītā 10.23].

25. Abhinavagupta, *Parātriṃśikāvivaraṇa*, downloaded from S.D. Vasudeva's Indology E-text webpage:
http://homepage.mac.com/somadevah/etx/PaTriViv.txt, page 212: vicchedito 'pi yuṣmadartha evam eveti / ata eva aliṅge yuṣmadasmadī gīte /. "Even though the meaning of "you" also contains an idea of separation, it is like [the "I"]. As it is sung, 'the you and the I are genderless.'"

26. Abhinavagupta, *Parātriṃśikāvivaraṇa*, downloaded from S.D. Vasudeva's Indology E-text webpage:

27. Abhinavagupta, *Parātriṃśikāvivaraṇa*, downloaded from S.D. Vasudeva's Indology E-text webpage:


29. Abhinavagupta, *Parātriṃśikāvivaraṇa*, downloaded from S.D. Vasudeva's Indology E-text webpage:
30. Abhinavagupta, Parātrīṃśikāvivaraṇa, downloaded from S.D. Vasudeva's Indology E-text webpage:


31. Abhinavagupta, Parātrīṃśikāvivaraṇa, downloaded from S.D. Vasudeva's Indology E-text webpage: