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Between Babel and Pentecost: Imaginary Languages in the Middle Ages[1]

In one of the more famous passages of his *Philosophical Investigations*, Ludwig Wittgenstein turns away for a moment from his demonstration that it is impossible to construct a genuinely private language or private sign system to recall an earlier argument in which he had proposed that the meaning of a sign cannot be fixed through a private act of naming (or «a private ostensive definition»). Anyone who claims that an individual is capable of forging a truly private and autonomous system of symbols, Wittgenstein writes, «forgets that a great deal of *stage-setting* in the language is presupposed if the mere act of naming is to make sense»[2].

It is perhaps worth pausing for a moment to explore the metaphor of «stage-setting» in human language. Why, after all, must a name's meaning, its ability to «make» sense, be dependent upon theatrical props which have already been put in place? Is it not enough for a word to mean in the privacy of one's home? For Wittgenstein,

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[1] This essay has benefitted much from the invaluable comments of many colleagues and friends, among whom I should like to single out Anne Wilson, John Winkler and Charles Méla. Any errors it contains are of course my own.

[2] The full passage reads: «'What would it be like if human beings shewed no outward signs of pain (did not groan, grimace, etc)? Then it would be impossible to teach a child the use of the word *tooth-ache*.' — Well, let's assume the child is a genius and itself invents a name for the sensation! — But then, of course, he couldn't make himself understood when he used the word. — So does he understand the name, without being able to explain its meaning to anyone? — But what does it mean to say that he has 'named his pain'? — How has he done this naming of pain?! And whatever he did, what was its purpose? — When on says 'He gave a name to his sensation' on forgets that a great deal of stagesetting in the language is presupposed if the mere act of naming is to make sense. And when we speak of someone's having given a name to pain, what is presupposed is the existence of the grammar of the word *pain*; it shews the post where the new word is stationed.» Cited from *Philosophical Investigations* § 257, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, (3rd ed.; New York, 1987). The argument returns to Wittgenstein's presentation in paragraph 26ff. of private ostensive definitions.

as for the modern skeptical tradition as a whole, the answer is «no». A true *Geheimsprache* — a «private» or «secret» language — is not possible because meaning is not an event that simply «happens» when an individual imposes a name upon a given sensation or object for which he or she claims to find no existing proper noun. Such a private act of ostension can, in Wittgenstein's view, serve as only the most preliminary of linguistic *hors d'œuvres*. This is because the mere act of naming already presupposes a complex set of cognitive operations; operations which, in turn, ensure that words cannot occur in such an unproblematic one-to-one relation to their referents. The event of meaning begins to «happen» only when words are used in relation to other words, when they give up their claim to a subjectivist referentiality. For ou neologism to «make» sense, then, it will have to be placed in circulation. It will have to be sent away from the private scene of naming and cast in a new public role. The stage-setting into which it is thrust is at once the theater of other words, a cognitive grammar and an intersecting social world. There it will figure as differential sign within the larger language game: the system of rules and regulations that permit both the training of a community of speakers and the consensual verification of proper and improper use.

Wittgenstein's argument against the existence of private languages, as acute interpreters such a Kripke and Fogelin have pointed out, may not be convincing on every count[3]. Yet, putting these objections to one side, what is immediately striking about the «private language argument» is the extraordinary pervasiveness of the notion that Wittgenstein is attempting to debunk. At least since the Enlightenment, Western philosophy has sought to found the edifice of knowledge on some sort of ineradicable private ground: whether the subjective self-certainty of Descartes's *cogito ergo sum*, the positive evidence of the senses or some fundamental set of human «givens» which can subtend all logical propositions.

Moreover, in the Western literary tradition the urge to forget the cognitive-linguistic «stage-setting» and to identify writing with the

[3] Saul A. Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language: An Elementary Exposition*, (Oxford, 1982); and Robert J. Fogelin, *Wittgenstein*, (2nd. ed.; London and New York, 1987). The bibliography on this topic is considerable, but see Fogelin's notes for the major entries.

return to a pure act of naming and/or the pursuit of certain lost original names has proven nearly irresistible. Caught up in a world of warring tongues, a public world of shifting signs with shifting meanings, a world in which the wordsmith does not so much possess actual power as hover nervously around power's perimeter, writers have continually dreamed of a language before the decline into history, politics and theater. Altough hardly «private» in a restrictive technical sense, such utopic languages or *uglossias* remain firmly rooted in the metaphysics that subtends the myth of linguistic privacy. As such they cannot be viewed as a mere extension of that localized form of verbal invention which Horace identified with the poet's special license to «issue words [neologisms] stamped with the mint-mark of the day»[4] — a call to assume on own evanescent contemporaneity in the face of perpetual flux. Rather, the deeper urge behing uglossias is supratemporal. Haunted by the dream of a transcendental (or demonic) signifier so deeply woven into the very fabric of being that it is invested with physical and supra-physical powers, their inventors seek out a sign that would collapse every binary opposition (between interior and exterior, subject and object, private and public, creator and created, phenomenon and noumenon).

The enterprise has assumed a great many forms, some literal-minded and some strictly figurative. It overlaps to differing degrees with Western speculations on hieroglyphic writing form Plotinus to Annius of Viterbo to Vico and Kircher, with the metaphysics of etymology practiced from Plato's *Cratylus* through Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies*, with the speculations of Renaissance magic, with the ongoing attempt from the Middle Ages through the Baroque to reconstruct Adamic language, with Fenollosa's theory of the Chinese ideogram and even with the Romantic valorization of metaphor over and against allegorical discourse. But its most palpable manifestations are to be found in the vast array of imaginary and artificial languages which dot the Western landscape from Montanist glossolalia to the *zaum* or trans-mental language formulated by the Russian Futurist Velimir Klebnikov to aUI «the language of

[4] «Licuit semperque licebit / signatum praesente nota producere nomen. / ut silvae foliis pronos mutantur in annos, / prima cadunt; ita verborum vetus interit aetas, / et iuvenum ritu florent modo nata vigentque» (*De arte poetica*, vv. 58-62).

space», a contemporary pictographic language which comes complete with its own exercise program[5].

This essay, which is in truth a sketch for a full-length monograph, offers a speculative account of one of the most extraordinary but little studied cases of invented languages in the medieval period: Hildegard of Bingen's *Lingua ignota* (or «unknown language») — the one thousand word vocabulary which the celebrated abbess of Rupertsberg elaborated in the mid-twelfth century. Since the essay's broader concern, however, is with the matter of how the Middle Ages construed its own modernity, instead of proceeding directly into the analysis of Hildegard's secret tongue, it begins instead with the setting of a tripartite frame whose elements are: a general typology of imaginary languages, a brief mapping of the contours of «the imaginary language project» as it stood at the end of the nineteenth century and, finally, the recontextualisation of this «project» in a canonical work of fourteenth century literature — Dante's *Commedia*. In its second half, the essay moves from Dante to a detailed description and analysis of the *Lingua ignota*, examining the latter's structure, its morphological attributes, its possible models, and the pivotal position it occupies between Hildegard's naturalistic and mystical writings. The essay is followed by a two-part appendix which furnishes an analytical outline of the *Lingua ignota* and, for comparative purpose, an outline of the so-called «Leiden *hermeneumata*: a medieval Greek-Latin word list whose structure and word-distribution may provide a clue as to how the *Lingua ignota* may have been produced and organized.

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Before proceeding further, then, I wish to put forth seven general propositions which describe the nature of imaginary languages as they are understood here:

> **First proposition** — there are two general categories of imaginary languages: the *expressive* and the *analytical*. The former, founded on a performative concept of the invented sign, is exemplified by the mediumistic languages of spiritists and practitioners of speaking in

[5] The best general survey of the subject is Marina Yaguello's *Les fous du langage: Des langues imaginaires et de leurs inventeurs* (Paris, 1984). As for aUI, its evangelist/ — creator is John W. Weilgart (see his *aUI: The Language of Space*, 4 th ed. [Decorah, Iowa, 1979]).

tongues and «nonsensical» incantation. The latter, founded in logic and/or philology, is exemplified by the *a priori* combinatory philosophical metalanguages of the Enlightenment and by *a posteriori* nineteenth century creations such as Esperanto. As distinct as they might seem, these two categories necessarily intersect and overlap. Between them there exists no fundamental break; rather, they represent two *limits* between which extends a continuous spectrum of admixtures.

Second proposition — whether analytical or expressive, *a priori* or *a posteriori*, whether its materials are numerical, pictographic or musical, every imaginary language is a *bricolage*. This is to say that imaginary languages are produced by appropriating elements from a subset of existing natural language systems and subjecting them to a series of condensations and displacements. The result is almost always an impoverishment of the natural languages: a language reduced to a limited set of open vowels, prone to syllabic reduplication and to excessive syntactical parallelisms and symmetries.

Third proposition — All «expressive» imaginary languages make some claim to be «private» but this assertion of privacy founds an all the more aggressive claim to be public or universal; «analytical» imaginary languages do the inverse: that is, advance a claim to universality which founds a counterclaim to be secret and/or private. Let me explain. Every imaginary language, whether the creation of a philosopher (Leibniz), a schizophrenic (Wolfson), a hermeticist (Bruno) or a mystic (Hildegard) is engaged in an elaborate game of hide and seek. It asserts itself, paradoxically, as both open and closed, as social and anti-social, as both immediately available to all and restricted to an elite. This is true on the linguistic level (where elements from the natural languages are encrypted to conceal the inventor's mother tongue), on the hermeneutic level (where the reader — or, in the case of glossolalia, the spectator — is emphatically positioned as either insider or outsider), and on the sociocultural level (where speakers constitute themselves over and against the larger community).

Fourth proposition — the urge to return to an orginary act of naming and to suppress the «stage-setting» of language almost always overflows into a parallel impulse to reform the means by which words are transmitted. Imaginary languages thus appear in tandem with imaginary writing systems, imaginary body languages (Bulwer's *Chirologia*), reforms of the alphabet (Maimieux's *Pasigraphie*) and/or appeals for pictographic writing (aUI, medieval acrostics) or musical speech (Sudré's *Solrésol*). Hildegard's *Lingua ignota*, for instance, is accompanied by her *Litterae ignotae*, a secret alphabet which she employed in a number of inscriptions.

Fifth proposition — imaginary languages are inextricable from the fantastic. Every imaginary tongue is elaboratel in tandem with a fantastic temporal or spatial locus which it claims as its «natural» origin. Since this site cannot be found in the here and now, it is created via an act of projection, either spatial (the language of an exotic people is approximated), temporal (the future kingdom is prefigured or an originary

order is reconstructed) or epistemological (an analytical «stage» outside of time and space is erected). Example: the uglossia written and spoken by Moore's utopians.

Sixth proposition — imaginary languages are spoken in the name of an-Other. Just as the «natural» locus of an imaginary language is necessarily distant from the here and now, so the language itself occurs in a displaced relation to its originator. The latter writes and speaks as a ventriloquist, literally «throwing» his or her voice and claiming to be *spoken through* by an external agent: God, nature, the body, the object world, demons, science, rationality, a utopian subject or a fictive double. This internal dislocation is mirrored externally in the supplementary cast of characters which is called upon to validate the thrown voice: in the case of female mystics such as Hildegard, a male retinue of scribes and confessors[6].

Seventh proposition — the further one moves towards the «expressive» end of the spectrum, the more an invented language is likely to be structured by a tension between fantasies of linguistic regression and of linguistic otherness. Glossolalias and other prophetic tongues, Hildegard's inclued, in the act of disfiguring the materials which they appropriate from natural languages, also move in the direction of infantile speech. They are drawn to the pulsional, repetitive and incantatory semiosis characteristic of infantile babble (what Kristeva calls the «semiotic»). Hence the predominance of simple vowel/consonant / vowel/consonant patterns and the tendency for words to be bisyllabic. Into this regressive linguistic fantasy-world, however, *alien* phonetic matter is systematically inserted as the emblem of the language's otherness and distance from the always concealed mother tongue(s). Hence the very striking preponderance of exotic consonantial blocks in glossolalias — multiple *k*'s, *g*'s, *x*'s and *z*'s — which structure and disrupt the vocalic flow[7].

These propositions may be briefly illustrated by examining two types of imaginary languages which prevailed at the turn of the century:

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[6] On this matter see Hildephonse Herwegen, «Les collaborateurs de Sainte Hildegarde», *Revue Bénédictine* 21 (1904), 192-203, 302-315, 381-403.

[7] On glossolalia in the Middle Ages see Paul Alphandèry, «La Glossolalie dans le prophétisme médiéval latin», *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* 104 (Nov.-Dec. 1931), 417-436; but for a more general overview one may consult John Kildahl, *The Psychology of Speaking in Tongues* (New York, 1972); Felicitas D. Goodman, *Speaking in Tongues: A Cross-Cultural Study of Glossolalia* (Chicago/London, 1972); William J. Samarin, *Tongues of Men and Angels: The Religious Language of Pentecostalism*, (New York, 1972); and David Christie-Murray, *Voices from the Gods: Speaking with Tongues* (London/Henley, 1978). A general bibliography is found in Watson E. Mills, *Speaking in Tongues: A Guide to Research on Glossolalia*, (Grand Rapids, 1986). Also worth noting is Michel de Certeau's «Utopies vocales: Glossolalies», pp. 611-631 in *Oralità: Cultura, Letteratura, Discorso*, eds B. Gentili and G. Paioni, (Urbino, 1980).

first, the mediumistic languages of the spiritist «Hélène Smith» which included a pseudo-Sanskrit, Martian, ultra-Martian and Uranian; and second, the artificial languages such as Volapük and Esperanto propounded by advocates of a new global order.

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In the year 1900, Catherine Elise Müller, alias Hélène Smith, became a celebrity when Théodore Flournoy, a professor of psychology at the University of Geneva interested in paranormal phenomena, published a study of her activities as a medium entitled *Des Indes à la planète Mars*[8]. Having scrutinized Mrs. Smith for a period of six years, Flournoy analyzed the three exoticist narratives which she had produced in her nightly séances: an Indian narrative in which she was reincarnated as a fifteenth century Hindu princess, a Martian narrative in which she communed with exiled human souls; and, finally, an historical narrative in which she played the role of Marie-Antoinette. Only the first two need concern us here, for to each of them corresponded an invented tongue: a pseudo-Sanskrit in the case of the first; a Martian language in the case of the second. Each has the advantage of having been studied by a noted linguist: the former by Ferdinand de Saussure and the latter by his contemporary, Victor Henri, whose research concerned the role of subconscious processes in ordinary speech[9].

While Saussure and Henri endep up at loggerheads over Henri's use of fanciful etymologies to explain certain attributes of Martian,

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[8] The work's full title is *Des Indes à la Planète Mars: Etude sur un cas de somnambulisme avec glossolalie* (Paris/Geneva, 1900). Its success was such that a third edition was already in print within the year along with an impassioned rebuke entitled *Autour «des Indes à la Planète Mars»* (Basel/Geneva, 1901) by the Société d'Etudes Psychiques de Genève, a spiritist society. Flournoy returned to the topic in his «Nouvelles observations sur un cas de somnambulisme avec glossolalie», *Archives de psychologie de la Suisse romande* (1901): 102-255.

[9] As reported in *Des Indes à la Planète Mars* (316-329), Saussure first entered the Smith case in order to advise Flournoy on the Sanskritoid tongue which corresponded to the spiritist's Hindu cycle. Henri, professor of Sanskrit and Indo-European grammar at the University of Paris, authored *Le Langage martien: Etude analytique de la genèse d'une langue dans un cas de glossolalie somnambulique* (Paris, 1901). This work approaches Smith's languages as «l'œuvre spontanée d'un sujet absolument inconscient des procédés qu'il emploie à cet effet» (6) and hence a perfect case study of a linguistic unconscious whose operations are thought analogous to what Freud would later term the «dream work».

both clearly situate Mrs. Smith's languages on the «expressive» side of the divide. «Expressive» because both pseudo-Sanskrit and Martian can only be spoken in trance-like state, have a battery of corporeal gestures which accompany them and are linked to the practice of automatic writing. Both are, likewise, linguistic *bricolages* generated via a system of metaphoric/metonymic transformations and phonetic re-encodings. Saussure, for instance, found that pseudo-Sanskrit contained a core group of actual Sanskrit words (culled from a grammar manual) which had been spun out, via the filter of French, German and English, into a limited but relatively coherent linguistic system.

In his study of Martian, Henri found a similar procedure, but postulated that at the language's core stood Hungarian: the language of the medium's dead father, which she did not claim to know, but which Henri believed was the subject of subliminal linguistic fantasies. The unintelligibility of these languages to the participants in Mrs. Smith's séances was remedied by the invention of male «translator» spirits (named Leopold, Esenale and Alexis). These figures would «interrupt» her performances to transcribe the alien messages for a public which was constantly reminded of their secrecy and profundity. Yet, despite the hyperbolic claims, it is worth noting that Mrs. Smith's effort to render her languages «other» by suppressing any surface links to her mother tongue fails (as was inevitable) at a deeper level. Because Martian grammar turns out to closely parallel that of French and Martian words often follow the gender and morphology of their French cognates, it was all too easy for Henri to discover the generative devices by means of which, for example, the French phrase *nous comprenions si bien* could be turned into the Martian *nini triménêni ii adzi*. The infantile phonetic character of the utterance immediately suggested that a simple principle of alliterative doubling was at work, such that *si*, for instance, becomes *i-i* and the pronoun *nous* becomes *ni-ni* via the agency of the German first person plural pronoun *wir*. The same transparency characterizes much of Smith's Martian vocabulary, elaborated via the use of simple metonymies, phonetic distortions, semantic reversals and contaminations. The Martian word for child is thus *chiré*, in which it is hard not to glean the French *cher* (or dear), whereas the words for mother and father, *modé* and *mané*, are clearly modelled after the German *Mutter* and *Mann*. But the link to French remains predominant, as in the words for paper, blue and rose, respectively, *Cheké*, *ziné* and *épin*,

derived from the French *cheque* (check), *chine* (China) and *épine* (spine).

Now, it may seem a bit perverse to compare these sorts of inventions with analytically constructed artificial languages such as Volapück and Esperanto, yet there are perhaps more similarities than differences. Secular heirs to the *a priori* universal writing and language schemes proposed from the midseventeenth onward by figures such as Leigniz and Condorcet, both Volapük and Esperanto were the creations of a single individual who had been inspired by a prophetic vision of an Eden of universal monolingualism, brotherhood and peace[10]. While Volapük is a mixed *a priori* and *a posteriori* language and Esperanto is strictly *a posteriori*, each failed in its quest to become humankind's universal language because contemporaries were quick to perceive that, in the end, each was only slightly more scientific than the Martian of Mrs. Smith. Elaborated on the basis of a palette of Indo-European languages, Volapück and Esperanto are indeed rather eccentric philological creations. Johann Schleyer, the author of Volapük, for instance, opted to privilege English and German morphology over that of the Romance languages, whereas Zamenhof (or *Doktoro Esperanto* [Doctor Hope], as he was known), did precisely the inverse. Schleyer eliminated all R's from Volapük so as to assist native Chinese speakers, but replaced them with L's, to the detriment of native speakers of Japanese. Zamenhof for his part paid no heed to either Chinese or Japanese speakers. He actually added two letters to the standard alphabet and made awkward but extensive use of consonants with the circonflex. One could continue such a listing of oddities at length, but the failure of these two enterprises was due also to factors beyond their linguistic faults. The evangelical movements which they spawned found themselves increasingly caught between the claim that Volapük and Esperanto were living linguistic organisms — the property of humankind as a whole — and the reality of an ever more possessive charismatic founder. Efforts at reform, accordingly, tended to give rise to schismatic movements:

[10] On this general topic one may consult Andrew Large, *The Artificial Language Movement* (Oxford, 1985) and James Knowlson, *Universal Language Schemes in England and France 1600-1800,* (Toronto/Buffalo, 1975).

in the case of Volapük, linguistic progeny such as Balta, Dilpok and Veltparl; in the case of Esperanto, Ulla, Ido and Romanal.

I have dwelt on these modern products in order to suggest that, although the terms may appear different, they remain remarkably close to their medieval counterparts. The metaphysical framework characteristic of the *fin de siècle* — taking the form of utopian visions of universal monolingualism, of ideal fusions of *ratio* with *oratio* and of communication with extraterrestrial spirits and with the dead — tends, during the Middle Ages, to tilt overtly in a Christian theological direction. As a result, the imaginary languages of the medieval period situate themselves, horizontally, between Adam's private act of naming and the pleromic tongue of the eschatological city and, vertically, between the babble of Babel and the prophetic wind of Pentecost. Yet, despite the explicity biblical coordinates, an identical linkage continues to obtain between imaginary languages and otherworldly or utopian discourse, between visionary modes of cognition and scientific knowledge. As for the generative mechanisms already alluded to, they remain largely unchanged. Metaphoric and metonymic displacements, phonetic substitutions, reversals and encryptions, are but some of the characteristic devices by which, from the medieval to the modern periods, natural languages were reinvented as uglossias.

It should be noted that such continuities draw our attention to the inaugural role played by the Middle Ages with respect to modern attitudes towards language. For, despite Horace's call for poets to «issue words stamped with the mint-mark of the day», ancient Greek and Roman doctrines of verbal and linguistic invention were, on the whole, quite conservative. In antiquity neologism was considered a figure of diction consisting in the «artificial» — which is to say risky — combination of already existing verbal materials for a strictly local ornamental purpose. So Aristotle puts forth the standard view when he argues that «strange words, compound words and invented words must be used sparingly and on few occasions ... [because]... they depart from what is suitable in the direction of excess» (*Rhetoric* 1404b29-32). Consequently, sustained verbal invention in ancient texts — at least before the second century a.D. — is rare and nearly always meant as comical: a matter of unnatural prefixation and suffixation associated with oratorical presumption, lack of control, and/or with barbaric speech, like that of the female barbarian chorus in the anonymous *Charition* fragment (Oxyrhynchos Papyrus 413)

who intone the mostly nonsensical chant: «pan oumbre ti katemanou ambre tou eni...»[11] The principal exceptions to this rule take the form of distant myths, as in the two passages in the *Iliad* where allusion is made to the secret names employed by Homer's gods[12].

So it was the trimph of Christianity's theology of the incarnate natural-supernatural word and the sharpened split between the medieval vernaculars and the so-called «grammatical» languages which accampanied it, that carved out for neologism — and, by extension, for the more sustained forms of verbal invention — a new place in the poetic/philosophical edifice: a central place which, apart from such manifestations as Macaronic poetry and Renaissance dabblings in hieroglyphics, they would not regain until the Baroque. The Midlle Ages may thus be viewed as something of a golden age of neologism and verbal invention. From the wildly hermetic verbal parlor games of the so-called «Hisperic» literature of the late seventh century to the hellenizing polyglossia of the court of Charlemagne to the cosmological fictions of the Chartrian writers and beyond, the medieval period not only expanded upon the legacy of late Latinity, but went on to elaborate a theory of verbal play which conferred upon everything from the most traditional and localized forms of verbal invention to full-fledged imaginary tongues, both a wider expressive range and a deeper set of ideological motives[13].

The point is confirmed in Dante's *Commedia*, whose three-tiered structure will have to stand here for the later medieval literary system as a whole. Dante's first canticle, the *Inferno*, is a realm of linguistic ruin, where natural languages are fractured and meaning is dispersed.

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[11] The passage, which occurs in vv. 91-94 of an anonymous actor's second century script, includes several dozen verses of similarly nonsensical or quasi-obscene cries. See *Greek Literary Papyri*, ed. D. L. Page, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, 1930), vol. 3, 336-349. I am grateful to John Winkler for this reference.

[12] I cite from the Lattimore translation: «he sat... in the likeness of a singing bird whom in the mountains the immortal gods call *chalkis*, but men call him *kymindis* (*Iliad* 14.289.291); «... the great deep-eddying river who is called *Xanthos* by the gods, but by mortals *Skamandros*» (22.74-75). The passages are crucial to Socrates' argument about the natural origin of names in *Cratylus* 391d ff.

[13] On the Hisperic craze, see Michael W. Herren's two volume *The Hisperica Famina: A New Critical Edition with English Translation and Philological Commentary*, Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies: Studies and Texts 31 (Toronto, 1974, 1987); on its background and larger impact on subsequent authors such as Eriugena, see Michael Lapidge, «The Hermeneutic Style in Tenth Century Anglo-Latin Literature», *Anglo Saxon England* 4 (1975), 67-111.

The pilgrim's descent begins with his encounter of a simulacrum of speech: a silent black-on-black inscription which purports to be the voice of Hell's stony mouth. The descent continues with an accompanying shift from an elevated latinate stylistic register to an ever more particularized comic register of dialects and micro-dialects. Dense networks of warring consonants come to stand both for the move from persuasion to violence and for the obtuse materiality of the fallen word. Within this declining semiotic landscape the reader encounters two signal cases of «expressive» private languages each produced by a monster: Pluto, who in *Inferno* 7.1 cries out «pape Satàn, pape Satàn aleppe!»; and the giant Nimrod, who in *Inferno* 31.67, shouts «Raphèl maì amècche zabì almi». In the former it is not difficult to glean the ruins of Greek, in the latter, the ruins of Hebrew[14]. But the point worth underscoring here is neither the specific origin of Dante's invented tongues nor the obvious link between monstruosity and disfigured speech, but, rather, it is Dante's participation in the pervasive medieval practice of associating imaginary alien tongues with transgressive forms of discourse such as magical incantation, malediction and sacred parody. Three examples will have to suffice, all from the medieval theater. In Rutebeuf's *Le miracle de Théophile*, the Jewish sorcerer Salatin summons up the devil by intoning the pseudo-Kabbalic chant «lamac lamec bachalyos / Cabahagi sabalyos»[15]. In Jehan Bodel's *Jeu de Saint Nicolas*, it is instead a stony Saracen idol who curses his vanquishers in Arabo-Hellenic couplets: «Palas aron ozinomas / Baske bano tudan donas...»[16] Finally, in the medieval *Cornommanía* or «Feast of the

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[14] Dante's earliest commentators (and among them Boccaccio) were quick to identify Pluto's *pape* as the Greek exclamation *papaí*, *aleppe* with the Greek *alpha* or Hebrew *aleph* — the first — and *satan* with the name of Satan. Hence the standard translation: «Oh Satan, oh Satan [my] God.» Other hypotheses for Pluto's language have included English, French and various vernacular dialects. As for Nimrod, Benvenuto and Buti were the first to insist that Nimrod's words are explicitly presented by Dante as nonsensical. But authorial denials have not discouraged a zealous crux-cracker like Henri Guiter, who proposes in «Sur deux passages obscurs de Dante et Jehan Bodel» (*Revue des Langues Romanes* 77 [1967]: 179-186) that Dante's Nimrod and Jean Bodel's Tervagant are speaking Basque (!).

[15] The incantation occupies vv. 160-168 of the play and is cited from *Œuvres*, eds E. Faral and J. Bastin (Paris, 1959-1960), vol. 2, 185. On this passage, with particular reference to Jehan Bodel, see Gilbert Dahan, «Salatin, du *Miracle de Théophile* de Rutebeuf», *Moyen Age* 83 (1977), 445-468.

[16] Vv. 1512-1515, ed. A. Henri (Brussels/Paris, 1962), 174.

Ass» celebrated on the Saturday after Easter, a horned sacristan would travel from house to house chanting the parodic blessing «Iaritan, Iaritan, Iararisti, / Raphayn, Iercoyn Iararisti...»[17]

Like Dante's infernal babble, these disfigured languages mark their speakers as marginal figures excluded from linguistic intercourse. Yet their non-communicative character permits them to mobilize certain cthonic, pulsional and incantatory linguistic resources which are firmly lodged in the demonic[18]. It is precisely the asocial and demonic aspects of such «expressive» private languages which are remedied in the *Purgatorio*, where the rehabilitation of human nature coincides with the rehabilitation of man's natural tongues. The process is rendered textually by poetic devices such as the integration into Dante's poem of complete passages in Provençal and Latin[19]. But at the *Commedia*'s discursive margins the return to Eden is also associated with a practice which insists upon the iconic power of the word: namely, acrostic writing. In canto 10, a twelve-tercet-long list of emblems of human pride is reeled off, yielding in the text's margin the acrostic «uom» or «man». While hardly commensurate with the systematic elaboration of a new tongue, acrostic writing, as employed from the Sibylline oracles to the *carmina quadrata* of Hrabanus Maurus to *Purgatorio* 10, represents a parallel mode of invention. By superimposing upon the horizontal axis of reading, with its *seriatim* listing of historical examples, a vertical axis which unveils in an instant the master-signifier which underwrites the text of history, acrostic writing reaches backward towards Eden and

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[17] *Le Polyptique du Chanoine Benoît*, ed. P. Fabre (Lille, 1889), 23. I am much in debt to Peter Dronke's *Dante and Medieval Latin Tradition* (Cambridge, 1986), 46-48 and 136, for this and the prior two references, as well as for first stimulating my interest in Hildegard's imaginary language. Dronke and Dahan both also allude to a section of the *Officium Stellae* of Rouen, in which each of the Three Kings speaks in an unknown tongue (see K. Young, *The Drama of the Medieval Church* [Oxford, 1933], vol. 2, 70).

[18] The enumeration of demons' names is a not infrequent motive for verbal invention in medieval texts, on which subject one may consult Robert Garapon, *La fantaisie verbale et le comique dans le théâtre français* (Paris, 1957), 16ff. and Dahan's «Salatin», esp. 461-465.

[19] To this practice one might link the various polyglossic or macaronic poetics found in such textual traditions as Eriugena's hybrid Greco-Latin poetry and the extravagantly hellenizing poetics of neologism found in the «Hisperic» and «Hermeneutic» styles. On this subject see Lapidge, «The Hermeneutic Style», esp. 67-76.

forward towards the Apocalypse. It reaches «backward» in the sense that it institutes an order in which, instead of being opaque and resistant, phenomenal signs disclose their essence instantaneously and transparently (in this case, their belonging to the species «man»); it reaches «forward» inasmuch as the vertical master-signifier pretends to impose an absolute hermeneutic closure in an anticipatory enactment of the end of time.

If in Purgatory the powers of the natural *logos* are restored, Dante's *Paradiso* attempts to reach out beyond nature towards a universal linguistic community founded in a purely supernatural *logos*. Three forms of liminal discourse come into play in this context: intralinguistic hybrids, poetic neologisms and apocalyptic skywriting. The first must be categorized as «expressive» and is associated with one of the commonplaces of medieval mysticism: the phenomenon of «xenoglossia» or speaking in (and understanding) unknown tongues. In *Paradiso* 7, the Emperor Justinian, above whom hovers the cleft flame of Pentecost, intones the hymn: «Osanna, sanctus Deus sabaòth, / superillustrans claritate tua / felices ignes horum malacòth» (*Par.* 7.1-3). This hymn of praise to the god of hosts is xenoglossic inasmuch as it fuses Latin with «Hebrew» — a language which the historical Justinian could not have known. Dante's attribution of Hebrew to Justinian is, functionally speaking, not at all unlike the xenoglossia of Hildegard's friend, Elizabeth of Schönhau, who was reputed to speak in a distorted Latin during her frequent trances. In each instance, the miraculous alien tongue is not a symptom of alienation (as it would have been in the *Inferno*), but rather serves to empower both the speaker and the spoken. Justinian's Hebræo-Latin marks him as the legitimate heir of the Hebrew kings and attests to the divinely sanctioned character of his vision of salvation history (which is none other than Dante's own)[20]. Elizabeth's Latin grants her access to an otherwise forbidden world of masculine authorities, while cloaking her sometimes heterodox visions in the mantle of orthodox prophecy.

If the first of the *Paradiso*'s imaginary languages involves the pentecostal fusion of natural tongues, the second attempts both to

[20] The point is reinforced by the fact that Pentecost is the Christian reenactment of the Hebrew Midrash on Psalm 68: 11 which describes the law being dictated by God on Mount Sinai in xenolalic fashion.

implement the same procedure within Dante's own Tuscan vernacular and to take us one step beyond. Dante's primary strategy in this regard consists in vernacularizing words from Hebrew (such as «alleluiando» [2.30.15]) and from Latin (such as «miro gurge» [3.60.68], «laboro» [3.31.9] and «conflati» [3.33.89]). Part and parcel of the *Commedia*'s larger effort to construct an illustrious vernacular out of building-blocks from the «grammatical» languages, the procedure is supplemented by the coining of verbal neologisms which probe the outer grammatical and phonetic limits of human languages as a whole. Boldly inventing such verbs as *immiare* (to «inme»), *intuare* (to «inyou»), *s'inluiare* (to «inhim» oneself) and *inleiare* (to «inher»), Dante fuses the grammatical categories of subject and object and threatens to collapse every verbal sign into an undifferentiated sea of vowels. That these neologisms effect a reversal of the linguistic consequences of the fall may be inferred from Adam's statement in *Paradiso* 26 that God's original name was the single vowel *I*, but that his name later became *El*[21]. Because *I* coincides with the first-person pronoun *io* and *El* with the third-person *egli* or «he», the fall into linguistic difference entails more than a simple fall out of vowels into vowel-consonant clusters. Implicit is a simultaneous transition from a pre-gendered act of naming in which subject and object are on (*I*(o) = I + God) to an alienated and gendered relation between the namer and the named (*I*(o) = I, *El* = God, him). Collapsing the subject/object barrier and reducing consonants to mere traces, Dante's verbal neologisms thus set out to recover (or, more precisely, to invent) an Adamic tongue that would be «imaginary» in the Lacanian sense. A purely vocalic prelapsarian tongue without difference or deferral, such a full (or «pleromic») glossolalia would be permeated by a divine *logos* which is at once *Alpha* and *Omega*, *I* and *AUIEO* — a term which the *Convivio* associates with the word's power to bind[22].

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[21] Dante is here correcting own emphatic affirmation in the *De vulgari eloquentiae* 1.4.4 («non titubo») that man's first word, and hence the first name of God, was *El*. In the Bible the divine name *Elohim* does indeed have chronological precedence over the later *I* (or *Iaweh*). In *Paradiso* 26, consequently, Dante seems to knowingly go against both biblical chronology and Patristic tradition in order to exploit the greater poetic suggestiveness of the revisionist version of the story.

[22] «Questo vocabolo, cioè *autore*, sanza quella terza lettera C, può discendere da due principi: l'uno si è d'uno verbo molto lasciato da l'uso in gramatica, che

For reasons of brevity I now skip over the last of Dante's paradisiac languages — the hyperacrostic skywriting of cantos 10-27 — in order to turn to Hildegard of Bingen's secret language, the *Lingua ignota*. Whereas in Dante's *Commedia* a spectrum of imaginary languages — from infernal babble to paradisiac baby-talk — is developed along the edges of a highly elaborate theological frame, Hildegard's creation remains much more elusive: it is an artefact which stands alone and about whose purpose little is known. Indeed, consisting in a simple word-list of some one thousand or so nouns, the *Lingua ignota* may seem a singularly unpromising «text» to try to interpret. Yet it is the only systematically constructed imaginary language that has come down to us from the Middle Ages. Moreover, authored by one of the most remarkable figures of twelfth century letters, the *lingua ignota* inhabits a complex triangular zone bounded by science, mystical vision and liturgical ritual[23]. As such it offers a unique (if somewhat eccentric) vantage point both on the taxonomy of the arts and sciences within the Hildegardian corpus and on medieval taxonomical practices as a whole.

The *Lingua ignota* and the *Litterae ignotae* exist in two manuscripts from the tweltfh and thirteenth centuries, one located in Wiesbaden and on in Berlin[24]. Found in the company of

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significa tanto quanto *legare* parole, cioè *auieo*. E chi ben guarda lui, ne la sua prima voce apertamente vedrà che elli stesso lo dimostra, che solo di legame di parole è fatto, cioè di sole cinque vocali, che sono anima e legame d'ogni parole, e composto d'esse per modo volubile, a figurare l'imagine di legame» (*Convivio 4.6.3-4; cited from vol. 1.2 of Opere Minori*, eds C. Vasoli and D. Robertis [Milan/Naples, 1988]).

[23] For a comprehensive estimation of Hildegard as author and historical figure one should consult Peter Dronke's groundbreaking chapters in *Women Writers of the Middle Ages: A Critical Study of Texts from Perpetua to Marguerite Porete* (Cambridge, 1984), 144-201; and *Poetic Individuality in the Middle Ages: New Departures in Poetry 1000-1150* (2nd ed., London, 1986), 150-179; as well as A. Führkötter and M. Schrader's *Die Echtheit des Schrifttums der heiligen Hildegard von Bingen: Quellenkritische Untersuchungen* (Cologne and Graz, 1956). All references to the text of the *Lingua ignota* here are to M. L. Portmann and A. Odermatt's *Wörterbuch der unbekannten Sprache (Lingua ignota)*, (Basel, 1986). Because there are a number of problems with this edition, it is still also worth consulting F.W.E. Roth's «Glossae Hildegardis», 390-404 in *Die Althochdeutschen Glossen*, Band III, eds E. Steinmeyer and E. Sievers (Berlin, 1895), which reprints «Die Geschichtsquellen des Niederrheingaus», *Geschichtsquellen aus Nassau* 1 (1880), 457-465; and the «Wiesbadener Glossen», ed. Wilhelm Grimm, *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum* 6 (1848), 321-340.

[24] In addition to a number of references in her writing and correspondence, Hildegard's authorship of the *Lingua ignota* and *Litterae ignotae* is confirmed by her

Hildegard's other writting, neither is accompanied by an introduction, *accessus* or narrative frame. In each case, the text consists of little more that a list of up to one thousand and ten invented terms, the vast majority of which are flanked first by a Latin and then a Middle High German translation. Individual entries are neither alphabetized nor presented in random succession, but instead are divided into categories: six in the Wiesbaden codex and fifteen in the Berlin, manuscript. The categories covered are the following (in sequential order and according to my own nomenclature): first, the supernatural sphere; second, the human order; third, the church; fourth, the secular order; fifth, time measurements; sixth, the socio-economic sphere; and seventh, the natural world[25].

By its very structure, Hildegard's work discloses its close affinities with encyclopedic works such as Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies* and, above all, with medieval dictionnaries and word lists. While certain lexical categories are notably absent — cosmology and rhetoric, to name only two — the work's organisation is hierarchical and its scope universal, spanning everything from the highest to the lowest, from God and the angels to the humble grasshopper and hornet.

The universal impulse which inspires the *Lingua ignota* is all the more striking when one examines individual subsections, such as those covering the names of plants and herbs (over one hundred and thirty entries), trees (forty-eight entries) and birds (over sixty entries). The fact that over one quarter of the total invented terms refer to the natural world and that another one hundred and forty describe the human body, closely affiliates the *Lingua ignota* with Hildegard's principal scientific works: the *Physica* (concerned with the natural world) and the *Causa* et *Curae* (a medical tract). While

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biographers Gottfried and Theodoric of Echternach and by the acts of the Inquisition. The former pose the rhetorical question «quis vero non miretur, quod cantum dulcissimae melodiae mirabili protulit symphonia, et litteras non prius visas, cum lingua edidit antea inaudita?» and procede then to discuss her xenoglossic command of Latin (see *Vita* 2.1, reprinted in Migne *PL* 197, 101 b). The latter list her works as the «... librum simplicis medicinae, librum Expositiones Evangeliorum, Coelestis harmoniae cantum, linguam ignotam cum suis litteris, quae omnia octo anni perficit: quod plenius in accessu libri Vitae meritorum colligitur» (*Acata Inquisitionis*, Migne *PL* 197, 137b).

[25] For a much more detailed schema of Hildegard's *Lingua ignota* see appendix one.

these two treatises survey many of the same materials, there remain, nonetheless, some notable gaps with regards to organization: the *Lingua ignota*'s subsections are ordered differently and the sequence and distribution of its lexical entries is usually closer to works like the medieval pseudo-Dosithean *hermeneumata* and Isidore's *Etymologies* than to Hildegard's own prior works[26].

An ulterior indication of the encyclopedic ambitions which shape the *Lingua ignota* is its tendency to adopt the macorosm/microcosm structure which typifies much of the Hildegard's writting, whether visionary of scientific. This is to say, individual subcategories generally recapitulate the larger pattern of moving step by step from top to middle to bottom, from God to man to hornet. Just as the listing of supernatural terms (of which there are only nineteen) begins with God and passes down through the angels and saints to humankind, so the list of kinship terms (of which there are twenty-seven) extends downward from father to mother to family to, finally, the clan. Similarly, the one hundred and twenty-one words referring to the human body are presented in descending fashion from the top of the head to the upper torso to the midriff to the sole of the foot. Although the latter procedure is ordinary enough, the very copiousness of Hildegard's corporeal vocabulary deserves some comment inasmuch as, in the course of the Middle Ages, the human body gradually came to be both a privileged site for verbal invention and a veritable treasure house of exotic vocabulary. Whether or not one might wish to attribute this to a congenital human urge to assign private names to one's own body (and, especially, to one's *private* parts), the fact remains that this feature is common to the *lingua ignota*, to the *hermeneumata*, to certain tenth century medical poems written in the so-called «hermeneutic style», and to the Hisperic *Lorica* (which contain elaborate lists of body terms which *Lorica* (which contain elaborate lists of body terms which have been encoded via recourse to reinvented Greek and Hebrew words so as to figuratively «shield» the bearer's body)[27].

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[26] On the *hermeneumata* and their possible connections to Hildegard's work, see appendix two.

[27] The same impulse is operative in the world of Romance when shields, swords, and other regalia associated with the hero's bodily *virtus*, are given secret names. On the *hermeneumata* see volume three of the *Corpus Glossariorum Latinorum*, ed. Georg Goetz (Leipzig, 1892); but also such bilingual *glossae* as that

The above noted predominance of genealogical and hierarchical patterns in the organization of Hildegard's text is sometimes troubled, however, by a certain «turbulence» on the local level. Competing taxonomical schemes intrude here and there, as in the subsection on trees where some fifty entries are suddenly presented according to the alphabetical sequence of their Latin cognates; (a further indication that the *Lingua ignota* was probably generated via a set of word lists). Also noteworthy are some minor variations within the expected genealogical progression. As in the *hermeneumata*, the kinship ladder is, for instance, sundered at two points: the words for mother (*maiz*) and son (*scirizin*) are disjoined by the insertion of terms for step-father and step-mother (*hilzpeueriz* and *hilzmaiz*); and the word for mistress (*pleniza*) insinuates itself in-between the words for uncle (*peuors*) and aunt (*maizfia*)[28]. Yet it should be noted that such interruptions may be more apparent than real, since medieval conceptions of family were far more inclusive than those which characterize the present era.

No less striking is Hildegard's positioning of her extensive vocabulary for the human body between a list of permanent bodily afflictions and a brief vocabulary for skin diseases. While one would not wish to overstate the importance of such an anomaly, particularly since disease was regarded as an integral part of the «natural» order, it suggests that the *Lingua ignota* is structured by a subliminal tension between an upbeat descriptive naturalism and a sense that the human order is inexorably linked to corruption, disease and decay. If the book of nature is brimming with signs which bear the indelible signature of the creator, the human body and body politic seem strangely covered with the ulcerations of the fall.

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reprinted in *PL* 112, 1575-1578, and attributed by Migne to Hrabanus Maurus and Walafrid Strabo. On the Hisperic *Lorica*, see the second volume of Herren's edition of *The Hisperica Famina*; and on the «Hermeneutic style» poetry of the English tenth century, see the two glossarial poems reproduced in Lapide, 103-104.

[28] *Maiz* seems derived from the Middle German *matere* (mother) and/or *meiz* (cleavage, incision, opening). *Scirizin* is of metaphoric orgin, combining the Middle German *schîr* (pure, clear, lustrous) with the diminutive *-chen*, but following the pattern of the Middle German *kindelîn* (small child). The connection between *schîr* and the word for son (*sun* or *Sohn*) seems motivated by the fact that the latter is a virtual homonym of the word for «sun» or *sonne*; (associations with the glorified Christ second the link). *Peveriz* and *pevors* are calques on the Latin *pater*.

Such apparent zones of «turbulence» aside, it would seem fair to conclude that the defining attribute of Hildegard's *Lingua ignota* is its naturalism and even «creatural» realism. Its inclusion of terms for sweat (*suinz*) and feces (*meginz*), for the penis (*creueniz*) and vulva (*fragizlanz*), have provoked one nineteenth century philologist to speak of it as «absolut obszön»[29]. Yet this supposed «obscenity», more the symptom of a newfound Victorian delicacy than of a prudent examination of the facts, may well provide a key to understanding what motivates Hildegard's impulse to rename the world, and above all the sexual/scatological world: does it not suggest that, more than a simple naturalist enterprise, the *Lingua ignota* represents an effort to begin language anew, to do away with all the tarnished stagesetting and rediscover the aesthetic core of human language (language as beauty, ornamentation, music, objectless play); an effort to recover, that is, the purity and innocence of Adam's act of naming in the present?

If the marginal presence of physical ailments and moral infirmities in Hildegard's lexicon might cause one to lean instead in the direction of the Last Judgement, the case for an affirmative answer is made forcefully by the loving detail with which the Edenic worlds of farm, garden and convent are ducumented at the expense of any allusion to the urban world. Likewise, it is worth insisting that not only were medieval sensibilitites towards bodily states and functions far less prudish than our own, but, more importantly, that one of the defining attributes of Hildegard's thought is the audacity and freedom with which she transforms the creatural into the transcendent. Such is the case with her use of sweat metaphors; in the words of Peter Dronke: «*sudat* is a favourite word of Hildegard's, and is often used in conjunction with her favourite imagery of greenness, flowering and perfumes: for her *sudare* has the associations not of the

[29] The remark is F.W.E. Roth's and is cited (and summarized) in the Portmann/Odermatt edition of the *Lingua ignota* (p. viii). The word *suinz* seems to fuse the Middle German *sweiz* and the Latin *sudor*. The genesis of *meginz* is far less evident, although the Greek root *mega* and Middle German verb *megenen* (to make powerful, plentiful, strong) may be related. *Greueniz* is probably derived from Latin terms referring to tumescence and creation such as *crevi* (the perfect form of the verb *crescere*, meaning to be born, to grow, to thrive, to increase); while *fragizlanz* seems related to the Latin *fragilitas* (or frailness) and/or the vulgar Latin *fragium* (or hearth).

sweat of effort but of the distillation of a perfume, a heavenly quality, out of anything that is fertile or beautiful on earth.»[30]

Further testimony concerning Hildegard's dynamic conception of the humble and creatural may be found in the Wiesbaden codex, which touches upon the themes of divulgation and simplicity in its very title, *Ignota Lingua per simplicem hominem hildegardem prolata* : a phrase which may be translated as «the unknown language brought forth by agency of the simple person [or literally, *man*] Hildegard». Hildegard's characteristic self-presentation here as a simpleton must surely be read as more than a mere humility topos. The phrase «simple man» may here signal that the author's exclusion from the «complex» world of masculine letters is actually the mark of her inclusion in an even more privileged linguistic community: the community of prophets.

Whatever the case may be, the most intriguing evidence that naturalist description and mystical vision are thoroughly intertwined in the *Lingua ignota* is internal. On the grammatical level, Hildegard's language consists entirely of substantives in the nominative case. So not unlike Dante's pre-pronominal Adamic tongue, it seems to envisage a state of absolute linguistic plenitude in which names and nouns simply radiate their meanings and interconnections, without ever having to decline into the carnivalesque world of pronouns, verbs, predicates, modifiers or adjectives[31].

On the level of word-formation, moreover, Hildegard's language is both systematic and asystematic, straddling the seam between the extraterrestrial glossolalias of the *fin de siècle* and the uglossian creations of the Schleyers and the Zamenhoffs. As may already have been evident in the case of kinship terms, it makes extensive use of prefixes and suffixes as building-blocks. Employed just like their Middle German cognates, these are often generated by fusing two phonetically

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[30] *Poetic Individuality*, 157.

[31] As such, Hildegard's work inserts itself in that metaphysical tradition of probing language's origins which, beginning with Plato, founds the edifice of language on nouns and proper names, while positing a remote «private» act of naming, whose adequacy or inadequacy the philosopher is called upon to investigate. Socrates' task in the *Cratylus* is thus to locate, via the «science» of etymology, certain names and nouns which are correct, which is to say, illumined by the divine logos. As for the other parts of speech, they are deemed inferior. Relegated to the sphere not of being but of becoming, their task is to unfold the various refracted names of the logos in time and space.

similar words such as *halbe* (half, side, party) and *hëlfe* (help, aid, support), so as to yield *hilz* or «step» and hence: *hilzmaiz* (stepmother), *hilzpeueriz* (stepfather) and *hilzsciriz* (stepson)[32]. In other cases prefixes are produced by metaphorical association, as in *luz*, which recurs in the words *luzeia* (M. Ger. *ouga*; Eng. *eye*), *luzerealz* (m. Ger. *ougrinch*; Eng. *eye socket*), *luziliet* (M. Ger. *ouglith*; Eng. *eyelash*), *luziminispier* (M. Ger. *ougbrawa*; Eng. *eyelid*), *luzpomphia* (M. Ger. *ougappel*; Eng. *eyeball*) and perhaps also in *luxzia* (butterfly). Modeled after the Latin *lux* (or light) — a connection strengthened by contemporary optical theories which held that the eye was either the recipient or the source of light — the prefix *luz* permits Hildegard to spin out a series of further metaphors (wich, again, tend to shadow the syllabic structure of their Middle German equivalents). As a case in point one may take the word *luzpomphia*, in which the term *appel* has been replaced by a variant on the Latin pomun (or fruit), yielding a marvelously surrealistic redefinition of the eyeball as a sort of «light apple». Similarly, the word *luziminispier* suggests that the eyelid is a «light manager or attendant», inasmuch as *minispier* appears a distortion of the Latin word *minister.*

This somewhat erratic, but nonetheless, analytical usage of prefixes and suffixes coexists with hermetic features such as a seeming allegorization of the letters of the alphabet. To cite but the most salient case, the words for God (*aigonz*) and Angel (*aieganz*) both extend from «*A*» to «*Z*», whereas the word for Christ the Saviour (*liuionz*) pointedly begins with «L» — that is, at the mid-point of the alphabet — and ends in the omnipresent apocalyptic «Z»; each word seeming to mime its own position within salvation history. But Hildegard's primary strategy for generating words consists in adapting and recombining root-words from Latin, Hebrew, Greek and Middle High Germain with a melodic/alliterative effect in mind. The term for «devil» is, for instance, *diuueliz*, which bears the imprint of the Middle Germain *duivel* (*Teufel* in modern German). The term for «woman», *vanix*, seems instead of Latin derivation, descending from *femina*, *fano* (to dedicate or consecrate) and/or *vanus* (empty, vain). The term for «Bishop's chair», on the other hand, is *tronischia*, ultimately derived from the Greek *thrónos*. As is apparent from the

[32] But cf. *hilzial* (= wrist) and *hilziol* (= folding door) both of which involve the notion of hinging.

above examples, all natural root-words have been subjected to a procedure which is charateristic of all «expressive» imaginary languages. They have been encrypted and then rendered exotic through the redoubling of multi-vowel sequences and the addition of a plethora of *sch*'s, *x*'s and, especially, *z*'s[33]. The *Lingua ignota*, in fact, repeats a pattern typical of glossolalias: its somewhat limited phonetic «palette» — which does not, among other things, appear to include any diphthongs — undergoes a series of cyclical mutations, such that once a given syllable occurs in one or two successive invented words, the same syllable is likely to recur constantly, as if an obsessive leitmotif, in the succeeding words. This «clustering» phenomenon ceases only when a new leitmotif takes its place, at which time it vanishes or becomes dormant. For example, the consonant/vowel sequence *buz*, entirely absent in the first 750 items in Hildegard's vocabulary, suddenly figures in over *half* of the next fifty entries, never to resurface after item 800. Similarly, the syllable *zia* occurs only three times in the first one hundred items on Hildegard's list, then jumps to eight occurrences between intems 100 and 150, the redescends to three occurrences between 150 and 200, and so on an so forth[34]. The net effet ot these generative mechanisms is that they render the *Lingua ignota* a highly alliterative, rhythmically vigorous tongue which, though related to glossolalias, resembles most of all a sort of Germanic illustrious vernacular in which Latin, Hellenic and Semitic elements appear fully integrated within a strongly Teutonic phonetic and orthographic grid. The point may be of some significance because in the so-called «Berlin Fragment», Hildegard seemingly goes against the Patristic tradition by advancing the hypothesis that in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve spoke a lost Teutonic tongue and not Hebrew[35].

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[33] 95 % of the Hildegard's invented words contain an *sch*, *x* or *z*. Only 237 or so entries out of an approximate total of 1017 do not contain a *z*.

[34] Such cyclical phonetic/syllabic patterns appear so frequently in the *Lingua ignota* that it is hard not to conclude that Hildegard composed her language in linear fashion, or, in other words, according to the sequence of the existing manuscripts.

[35] The passage in question figures among a series of *sententiae* attributed to Hildegard (see H. Schipperges, «Ein unveröffentliches Hildegard-Fragment», *Sudhoffs Archiv für Geschichte der Medizin* 40 (1956); 41-77). Although the authenticity of the Berlin fragment has never been challenged, Peter Dronke has recently pointed to a number of improbabilities which it contains, and among these, the thesis

Whether Adamic or Apocalyptic (or, indeed, both), it is essential to note that, in the last instance, the *Lingua ignota*'s claims as an inspired language are founded on its connections to music. Hildegard's letter to Pope Anastasius provides important testimony in this regard, ascribing a miraculous origin to her imaginary language and writing system, while identifying them not with her mystical or scientific works, but with her liturgical *Symphonia*[36]. The preface to the *Liber divinorum operum* is equally unambiguous, speaking of how she received «the harmonies of music and of the *Lingua ignota* and *litterae*» in a single «celestial revelation»[37]. It should thus come as no surprise that the only stagesetting in which her nouminous nouns were ever permitted to descend into the ordinary world of predicates and predication was liturgical. In the context of the elaborate rituals which Hildegard staged in the privacy of her convent at Rupertsberg, her nuns were wont to sing one of the abbess's own compositions. The song in question celebrated the dedication of the church and is the earliest surviving record of Hildegard's *Geheimsprache*. It reads:

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that the Adam's language was Teutonic. See «Problemata Hildegardiana», *Mittellateinisches Jahrbuch* 16 (1981), 97-131, but esp. 108-109.

[36] The epistle to Anastasius, dating from 1153 or 1154, provides the earliest certain reference in the Hildegardian corpus to the *Lingua ignota*. In it Hildegard describes her inspiration in the following manner: «sed ille qui sine defectione magnus est, modo parvum habitaculum tetigit, ut illud miraculum videret, et ignotas litteras formaret, ac ignotam linguam promeret, atque ut multimodan sed sibi consonantem melodiam sonaret» (Migne *PL* 197, 152d). A possible prior allusion may be found in a letter from Hildegard's scribe Volmar, dated approximately 1147, which asks «ubi tunc responsa de universis casibus suis quaerentium? Ubi tunc nova interpretatio Scripturarum? Ubi tunc vox inauditae melodiae? et vox inauditae linguae?...» (reproduced in the *Analecta Sanctae Hildegardis Opera*, ed. Johannes Pitra [Montecassino, 1882], 346 in vol. 8 of his *Analecta Sacra*).

[37] «Et factum est in nono anno postquam vera visio veras visiones, in quibus per decennium insudaveram, mihi simplici homini manifestaverat, qui primus annus fuit postquam eadem visio subtilitates diversarum naturarum creaturarum ac responsa et admonitiones tam minorum quam maiorum plurimarum personarum, et symphoniam armonie celestium revelationum ignotamque linguam et litteras cum quibusdam aliis expositionibus, in quibus post predictas visiones multa infirmitate multoque labore corporis gravata per octo annos duraveram, mihi ad explanandun ostenderat, cum sexaginta annorum essem, fortem et mirabilen visionem vidi, in qua etiam per quinquennium laboravi» (Proemium, vol. 8, pp. 7-8 of J. Pitra's *Analecta Sacra*). The «litteras cum quibusdam aliis expositionibus» are presumably Hildegard's exegetical works.

O *orzchis* Ecclesia,
Armis divinis præcinta,
et hyazintho ornata,
tu es *caldemia*
stigmatum *loifolum*
et urbs scientiarum.
O, o, tu es etiam *crizanta*
in alto sono et es *chorzta* gemma.

(Oh immense Ecclesia,
girded with divine arms,
and bedecked with hyacinth,
you are the fragrance
of the wounds of peoples
and the city of wisdom.
Oh, oh, you are truly anointed
in pealing sound and are a sparkling gem.)[38]

Of the five invented words employed in this Latin hymn, only *loifolum* or «people» figures in extant manuscripts of the *Lingua ignota*[39]. Yet the adjectives *orzchis* and *chorzta*, as well as the participial adjective *crizanta* and noun *caldemia* are clearly cast in the same linguistic mold[40]. Intruding like rough ornaments into the angelic song, they help to build a ritual bridge between the mass at Rupertsberg and its heavenly prototype. Similar to the bridal gowns worn by the nuns as they draw near to the altar to partake in the mystery of the eucharist, they participate in a delicate blurring of boundaries between *nomen* and *numen*, natural and supernatural, convent and celestial church. The fusion is effected linguistically via

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[38] Liturgical song § 67 («In dedicatione ecclesiæ»), cited from Hildegard von Bingen, *Lieder*, eds P. Barth, I. Ritscher and J. Schmidt-Gürg, (Salzburg, 1969). English translation mine.

[39] *Loifolum* seems to have been produced by grafting a deformed Middle High German *liut* (Modern *Leute*) onto *volc* (Modern *Volk*) and then adding *un* to indicate a Latin neuter plural genitive.

[40] *Orzchis* and *chorzta* are rather difficult to decode, although the former may be related to the Middle High German prefix *ort* (meaning apex, peak or summit) and the latter to the Latin *corusca* (glittering or shimmering). *Caldemia*, on the other hand, seems less a calque than a metaphor founded on the Latin *calida* (warm liquid), *caldarius* (with hot water) and related terms such as the vulgar Latin *caldaria* (an Ordeal kettle or cauldron), all of which suggest warm vaporous emanations. As for *crizanta*, it is evidently derived by grafting the vulgar Latin *crisma* (or anointing) onto either *sancta* (holy, consecrated) and/or *uncta* (oiled, sumptuous). It ought to be noted in passing Hildegard's coinage for the word «church» is *crizia*, which not only echoes *crizanta*, but also appears to meld the Greek *eklesia* with Christ's name.

the relay of Latin, the language of the institutional Church, which here provides the frame into which the *Lingua ignota* inserts itself, respecting the conventions of Latin gender as well as case structure. Yet all the while the meaning of Hildegard's words remains withdrawn, their very secrecy at once affirming the impermeability of the convent's walls and the private nature of its treasures. Seen from within, the fragrances, immensities and peoples which they denote may be embraced as palpable presences; seen from without, they present themselves as little more than empty lyric shells.

*

In closing, I should like to probe the convent walls of Rupertsberg for one last moment. In their ability to create a sense of mystery and intimacy, to enclose a small community over and against the outside world, are they really so different from the cover of a book? In other words, is not the forging of uglossias simply a radicalization the procedures common to all writting and, especially, to fictional writing? Is not every text a public attempt at a privatization of language, every metaphor a game of hide and seek, every readership a community joined together by certain forms of ritual communion? While perhaps obvious, these matters are not insignificant because, despite the centrality in the contemporary canon of works such a Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*, cultural historians still tend to place the inventors of languages at several removes from the mainstream of literary and philosophical inquiry. My own approach has been to assume the contrary position: to try to show how the margin leads back to center; how imaginary languages, literary fictions, communities of belief and public institutions are confused and intertwined. Outside of the usual isolating spotlight the inventors of Volapüks and Martians, of tongues edenic and eschatological, may thus be seen in a somewhat more familiar light: that is, not as dreamers or nostalgics, but instead as furious decoders and encoders: the philologists of imaginary worlds... *nos semblables, nos frères et sœurs.*

Appendix
to «Imaginary Languages in the Middle Ages»

Part I:

AN ANALYTICAL OUTLINE OF HILDEGARD OF BINGEN'S *LINGUA IGNOTA*

Note: all numbers refer to the M.L. Portmann and A. Odermatt's *Wörterbuch der unbekannten Sprache (Lingua Ignota)*, (Basel, 1986). The nomenclature and section divisions are my own. Percentages listed along the right-hand margin refer to the proportion between the total number of lexemes and the items within each general category.

I. **The Supernatural Order** (1-18) [19 items] [1.9%]

A. God (1, 4)
B. Angels (2, 5)
   1. in heaven (2)
   2. in hell (5)
C. Saints (3, 10-14)
D. Man as spiritual being (6-9, 15-18)
   1. as God's creation (6-9)
   2. as believer, practitioner (15-18)

II. **The Human Order** (19-189) [171 items] [16,9%]

A. Kinship relations (19-45)
   1. Fathers (19-21)
   2. Mothers (22)
   3. Step-parents (23-24)
   4. Children (25-26)
   5. The five stages of human development (27-31)
   6. Siblings (32-33)
   7. Relations outside the nuclear family (34-42)
   8. The marital unit (43-44)
   9. The clan (45)
B. Permanent bodily afflictions (46-58)
   1. Impaired senses (46-51, 58)
   2. General conditions (52-57)
C. Body Parts (59-179)
   1. Head (59-112)
      a. Upper section (60-71)
      b. Hair (72-76)

c. Ears (85-87)
d. Nose (88-91)
e. Facial bones (92-94)
f. Mouth (59, 95-106)
g. Lower section (107-112)

2. Upper Body (113-134)
   a. Bones (113-116)
   b. Extremities (113-129)
   c. Larger torso structures (130-134)
3. Middle Section of Body (135-166)
   a. Lower torso (135-136, 138-143)
   b. Organs, Innards (137, 144-148, 150-154)
   c. Organic fluids (149, 155-157)
   d. Organs of excretion, excrement (158-161)
   e. Sexual organs (162-166)
4. Lower Body (167-179)

D. Skin diseases (180-189)

III. **The Church** (190-341) [152 items] [15%]

A. Hierarchy of church offices (190-219)
   1. The priesthood (190-219)
   2. Teaching, education (209-213)
   3. Monastic life (214-219)
B. The temple of worship (220-341)
   1. Types of ecclesiastical structures (220-224)
   2. Architectural feactures (225-282)
   3. Church equipment (283-341)
      a. Liturgical and sacramental objects (283-304)
      b. Literary/musical texts for the liturgy (305-323)
      c. Liturgical robes (324-341)

IV. **The Secular Hierarchy** (342-447) [106 items] [10.5%]

A. Positions of authority (342-352, 354-357)
B. Middle to lower stations in life (353, 358-365)
C. Estate managers (366-368)
D. Craftsmen, Workers (369-409)
E. Entertainers (410-416)
F. Morally deficient individuals (417-426)
G. Physically deformed individuals (427-428)
H. Members of hunting/exploring parties (429-438)
I. Positions within the household (439-447)

V. **Time** (448-482) [34 items] [3.4%]

A. The diurnal cycle (448-449)
B. The week (450-456)
C. Time and light (457-459)
D. Larger temporal units (460-462)

E. Relational terms (463-465)
F. Months (466-477)
G. Hours (478-482)

VI. **The Socio-Economic Domain** (483-751) [268 items] [26.5%]

A. Clothing (483-503)
B. Currency (504-506)
C. Household equipment (507-532)
   1. Skinning knives (507-508)
   2. Building hardware (509-532)
D. Farming (533-569)
   1. Farming implements (533-560)
   2. Farmland (561-569)
E. Writing and Illuminating (570-593)
F. Weaving and Sewing (594-628)
G. Military Equipment (629-655)
H. Craftsman's tools (656-664)
I. Winemaking and beermaking (665-703)
   1. Equipment for wine and beer production (665-687)
   2. Products (688-691, 701)
   3. Ingrédients (692-695)
   4. The vines (695-700, 702-704)
J. The home (705-751)
   1. The house (705-714)
   2. Outbuildings and agricultural supplies (715-714)
   3. The hearth (727-731)
   4. Kitchen implements (732-739)
   5. Food supplies (740-751)

VII. **The Natural World** (751-1011) [261 items] [25.8%]

A. Trees (752-800)
B. Plants (801-935)
   1. Herbs, Flowers, Spices (801-881, 905-915, 917-921)
   2. Vegetables (882-904, 916)
      a. The onion family (882-890, 894)
      b. The turnip family (892-893, 896)
      c. Miscellaneous vegetables (891, 895, 901, 903-904)
      d. Salad vegetables and herbs (871-901, 905)
C. Birds (936-999)
D. Insects (1000-1011)

Part II:

AN OUTLINE OF THE *LEIDEN HERMENEUMATA*

The following outline provides a schematic account of the vocabulary section of the so-called Leiden *hermeneumata*, one of a number of pseudo-Dositheam Greek-Latin word lists and Greek grammar manuals, dating roughly from the ninth through the thirteenth centuries, reproduced in volume three of the *Corpus Glossariorum Latinorum*, edited by Georg Goetz, (Leipzig, Teubner, 1892). It is presented here as a supplement in order to suggest the extent to which Hildegard may have relied upon the standard taxonomical scheme, typical of (though certainly not exclusive to) medieval *hermeneumata*. Loosely hierarchical and only occasionally alphabetical, this scheme is neither that of Hildegard's own *Physica* nor that of an encyclopedic work such as Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiarum*. Rather, descending from the supernatural into the secular, it provides a general survey whose primary emphasis is on the world of man: the human body, human society, the natural world and the world of work.

While the structural parallels between the *hermeneumata* and the *Lingua ignota* are not always exact, they remain strong enough to suggest that Hildegard must have had at her disposal similar word lists. These she surely mined for verbal materials (at once Latin, Greek and Hebrew), which she then subjected to various metonymic, metaphoric and phonetic transfers. Yet in altering these materials the abbess of Rupertsberg retained, nonetheless, both the overall taxonomical pattern of word lists such as the *hermeneumata* and the extant texts of the *Lingua ignota* suggests that Hildegard's assertion that her language came to her in a sudden «celestial revelation» must be taken more as a statement of mystical intent than as a factual account.

(Note: all numerical references below are to the page and line numbers printed in the Goetz edition of the *Corpus Glossariorum Latinorum*.)

I. **The Supernatural Order** (8.27-9.38)

A. Names of Gods and Deities (8.27-9.38)

II. **Time and The Heavens** (9.39-11.27)

A. The Heavens and Meteorology (9.39-51, 62-64)
B. The Seasons and Time Measurement (9.52-61, 65-68)
C. The Temple of Worship and Feasts (9.69-10.31)
D. Spectacles (10.32-11.15)
E. Winds (11.16-27; note: winds provide the transition to the body inasmuch as they are considered both external and internal phenomena)

III. **The Human Order** (11.28-18.16)

A. The Human Body (11.28-13.29)
B. Human Nature (13.30-14.17; including tempers, diseases, handicaps, types of physique, wealth and poverty, all of which are presumed to be «natural» conditions)
C. Nutrition (14.18-18.16)
   1. Food (14.18-15.8)
   2. Beverages (15.9-34)
   3. Desserts (15.35-57)
   4. Meats (15.58-16.12)
   5. Vegetables (16.13-47)
   6. Fish (16.48-17.30)
   7. Birds and Fowl (17.31-18.16)

IV. **Other Animals** (18.17-19.24)

A. Quadrupeds (18.17-19.7; including ants and scorpions, who provide the transition to serpents)
B. Serpents (19.7-24)

V. **The Socio-Economic Domain** (19.25-24.36)

A. The Home (19.25-20.15)
B. The City (20.16-33)
C. Household Materials, Objects (20.34-24.36)
   1. Furniture (20.34-21.15)
   2. Clothing (21.16-22.9)
   3. Colors and Pigments (22.10-21)
   4. Metals and Metal Objects (22.22-24.1)
      a. Gold and Gold Objects (22.22-38)
      b. Silver and Silver Objects (22.39-23.2)
      c. Copper and Copper Objects (23.3-16)
      d. Iron and Iron Objects (23.17-24.1)
   5. Ceramics (24.2-12)
   6. Skins and Furs (24.13-36)

VI. **The Secular Hierarchy, Professions** (24.37-29.62)

A. The Arts
   1. Liberal Studies and Learning (24.37-25.32)
   2. Crafts (25.33-58)
B. Trees and Agriculture (25.59-27.35)
C. The Military (27.36-28.8)
D. The Political Order (28.9-23)
E. Names and Kinship Terms (28.24-29.8; as in the *Lingua ignota*, including terms for concubine, lover, etc.)
F. Navigation and Sailing (29.9-37)
G. Medicine (29.38-62)

(At this point the author lists the signs of the zodiac, after which follows a lengthy prose excursus on proper Greek usage, as well as some final lexical entries on the Muses, the pagan pantheon, on heroes like Prometheus and Ulysses and on the Hebrew and Greek names for the months and planets.)

Jeffrey T. SCHNAPP