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## The World of Orality

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If the senses give us access to the world and if the world seems to profile itself spatially, then we tend to grant primacy to visual perception and descriptions of the real. However I would also like to show that a complex and subtle web uniting the subject and the world involves all the senses and more particularly that of hearing and aural sensitivity.

Like a bird , the ethnographer descends into a landscape, listens to the music of the world and of all things, rhythms and melodies. His many travels , across forests and seas , take him to communities . There he begins to capture the music of the languages, of the many ways to be in this world - chats exchanged in daily life , laughter of children , plays on words, power of words, pleasure of words and all their magic spells . His sound experience is open, and drives him always further , even tempting him to project the beauty of a song onto the space of a white page. Little by little, and as a gift in return, he captures the meaning that the Other gives to his own world.

The object of the analysis is rather a set of shared values of representations of a human society, the *doxa* of a particular culture. Language plays a primary role in this perception of the other. One must also acquire another language in all it's phonological, morphological, grammatical, semantic, rhetorical, and symbolic complexity.

Each language says the world through words, immediate constituents , logical and abstract orders. Each language captures the world, seizes it and reconstructs it by thought and the mediation of symbols. Then, and only then, can one hope to become the interpreter of the interpretations of the other.

For each society has an interpretative presence in the world , a particular world that empirically and intellectually the people try to make their own , in order to ensure their survival. In other words , it centers around understanding collective and cultural representations, not mental representations or mental images which psychologists try to apprehend . It focuses upon an ensemble of ideas and values specific to a society and partially and semi-consciously present in the minds of individual people.

The interplay of perception, discriminations, denominations , categorizations, taxonomies - these hierarchized structures - and other ways of ordering the data of observation and experience , all representations of thought, manifest the intellectual and spiritual attitude of the group under consideration.

In the specific space of communication we are focusing upon today the space of orality , the structures and formal principles underlying the semantic fields and narratives must be brought to light. Each has its own unique systemic organization and reveals an interpretation of life according to an aesthetics , a rhetoric and an ethic.

To go intelligently to the heart of a story, is also to go to the heart of things , exploring all the latitudes of meaning. Through the analysis of an oral / aural composition, through the relationships of the chanted story and the spatial temporal and socio-cultural framework which stimulates it, one would hope to gain access to hidden meaning , to the features of identity exalted and sung by oral poetry.

The bard sings in a living context, amidst a very present community . It is a privileged moment of performance, this complex action through which "a poetic message is simultaneously transmitted and perceived , here and

now. That instant where speakers , listeners, and circumstances are concretely face to face." (P. Zumthor, 1983).

And we were in that relationship a while ago, during the opening ceremony, while listening to the invocation sung by the singer of tale from Manipur. Then something very special brings the community in togetherness. There is no more rupture between the self and the world, empathy prevails.

And I would like to insist upon a point namely , in order to make sense in our work as the interpreter of the interpretations of the other , nothing of the poet life can be overlooked, neither him as a person , nor the society and the circumstances inviting him to sing , to perform. So this holistic approach , seems to me to be the minimal way to access to this complexity.

Let us shift to the relationship between epic and memory for I have some notions I would like to refer to and propose as an instigation to our joint effort to understand and share in the process of analyzing these long chanted narratives.

Everything begins within the singer of tale and some kind of a negative image inside his mind anticipates his "*proferatio*" in latin , according to my tradition, by the oral chanted narrative. One could say that the epic sings within the bard who hears it before he is actually uttering it.

In order to be able to convey in an intelligible way this immense mental story, the bard has several devices that he uses consciously or semi-consciously . This is the strength of his tradition within himself , within his memory , within his body , within his hearing , within his heart. For he is also emotionally involved.

We are aware of "poetic formulae" since the work of M. Parry and A. Lord and I will not enter into this subject for this is familiar to most of us. But I would like to show you what are "melodic formulae" in Palawan tradition.

## Melodic Formulae

We shall present the first transparency of the sound wave. Together with the listening of the compact disk of "*Mämiminbin*", an epic of 3 h 30' which I subtitled : "*His quest of a wife*".

This image reveals the transcription of the beginning of the epic in Palawan, with a new tool that I discovered when I donated my collection to the National Library of France, to be preserved for the future , and when it was dubbed on compact disk. The technicians showed how they work and they proceed visually. It is interesting because visually an epic was given here in India.

### illustration1

You can see on the screen of a computer an images in two dimensions. Amplitude on vertical axis. Time on horizontal axis and the voice develops with intakes of breathing and pauses where the line stretches. I shall present you a zoom of this picture in a while . But let us listen to the singing of the bard and simultaneously look at the sound wave , the next being written down below for the first.three blocks or breathing groups of phrases and sentences.

### illustration2

I would like to show you the through this projection that the sound image duplicates the transcription I made by the ear. I mean to say that it is by listening to silences and intakes of breathing that I was able to find a way to project on space - the white page - this mental story performed by the bard in 1971.

If we take the second image , the first block that was transcribed with three alineas. This makes up a block I mean to say a breathing group of words that sets the song into motion. Here there is no metric form . We are in prose, but an opening formula (Hin) and a closing formula (bä) which functions as a prosodic device , a substitute for a rime. Hence, the visualization allows a perfect "montage " indeed, but could be of great help to the transcripator. It only helped me *a posteriori* to verify the accuracy - or eventually the non -accuracy of my transcription.

I can make a zoom on each of the lines 1 and 2. You can visualize on screen the totality of an epic or progressive details of the singing in various sound waves fixed by a picture of it, a way to transform the sound into an

image of sound. When I transcribed for the first time epics among the Highlanders of Palawan, I had no model whatsoever to be influenced by, and this was a privilege. Not all epics are in verse and metric form but, breathing techniques and breathing groups of words can be the relevant rhetorical unit.

I would like now to introduce another notion, the notion that was given to me by a very knowledgeable and talented scholar, who has been my predecessor in Great Britain, Professor Arthur Hatto. I like to convey to you the notion he formulated as "Epic moments".

### **Epic moments**

Dr. Hatto has convened a seminar on Heroic and Epic Poetry between Oxford - Cambridge and London from 1969 to 1972, he is part of the seminar in Paris by spirit. Dr. J. Smith, present here has applied the notion of epic moments to Pabuji epic. I have tried to apply it to Mämiminbin epic and found that we are probably dealing here

with a very universal notion that is operative. I quote Professor Hatto: "Epic poetry is apt to condense long drawn tensions into brief scenes of dramatic power enhanced by visual magnificence, that is *epic moment*". "Epic moments are highly charged narrative ganglia and it is suggested - as one of the fruits of comparative studies - that possession of them in memory, confers power upon the mature bard to build up an episode or even a string of episodes". In other words - and thanks to the comparative method in a vast area of literature he has been dealing with, in togetherness with many other scholars, "it is suggested that epic moments, in addition to being great poetry are mnemotechnic elements of epic and an order, altogether superior to that of theme or formulae now so well discussed and that they will therefore mark, or help to mark, the structure of an epic."

I have applied to the epic you just heard, this notion and I observed a crescendo of epic moments to the climax of the story, all build up through a mirror image in the quest of a wife, namely all actions are wrong in the first half of the epic with a crescendo of negative epic moments. Then all actions turn right and positive after the cure by Master Thunder in the middle space, and the shamanic Voyage of the two heroes. Then the good behaviour in a wife quest is conveyed up to the end to a perfect alliance. Affinity links are set up in the best possible way, namely sisters' exchange which is perfectly relevant in this society, through a crescendo of positive epic moments going towards an unfolding of the plot.

I like you to remember this triangular pattern which drives to the end of an epic and their notion of crescendo of epic moments which I find absolutely operative.

Then the "narrative structure" in the way we dig it up in my tradition of France, with Professor Claude Levi Strauss's guidance.

As Georges Dumézil was looking for constants, we now look for the contrastive differences, the one that are bearing the distinctive features. This is of course under influence of structural linguistics.

Hence, I have brought to surface the relevant oppositions, in geographical spaces , flora, fauna and the various levels of contrast between characters which builds up a very constant scheme.

And I had the joy to be able to record again the same bard twenty five years later , last August 1996. When he was about to sing, an enlightenment occurred to me. Usually, I never interfere with the singing of his choice because he has such a repertoire. Not only him, many of the singers of tale are in this area and each one has various epics in his memory. But this time I said a few his note before he started “ Could you not sing *Māmiminbin* once more tonight?” He agreed to my request and in a matter of a second he shifted from one mental story to another mental story and started the song of Mamiminbin taking - leave from his pet birds the Nutmeg Pigeons and going in a quest for his wife.

At this point , I would like to say that in order to understand a myth, it is not enough to simply follow the narrative , as if this narrative was a melody. The different variants have to be taken into consideration and the version I laid down on paper is not the canonical version because it is written; it is one - but only one - among all the possible variants and versions. I wrote down the first leaflet of it, if you want. However, the different variants must be taken into account as multi-layered , as if they were in harmony and together these multiple variants will lead to the meaning.

There is a dynamics in the long string of sung narratives transmitted from generation to generation. Epics do circulate as speech circulates. As the singer of tales performs and capture his audience, there are various processes at work simultaneously, producing in a reiterative and creative way, understanding and interpreting.

These are the extense and complex array of mnemotechnic devices. However, the rigor of the narrative structur, its clarity together with the power of poetic formulae, repetitive segments fix in the people’s memory, the sequence of the episodes and related utterances basic to the plot. Still innovations are possible and do occur, giving to an oral performance of an epic this fresh, fluent movement which manifests creativity at work. I have many other things to say but I think, I shall stop at this point.

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## Discussion

- K-V. Thank you very much . I think there is another cluster of issues that have come up and some wonderful welcomed revelations in the sound wave patterns that we have seen . The floor is open now for questions or comments.
- Dr.Smith Your sound wave I did not entirely understand what they would give you that you will not get from shall we say - a form of music transcription.Just a clarification.
- N-R. The music transcription was done by Dr. Jose Maceda in the Philippines , one of the main founders of ethnomusicology in Southeast Asia as Madame Vatsyayan knows . We have a

melody for each character. This sound waves shows the accuracy of my alinea in the transcription of the narrative for it shows exactly where the bard is breathing , the inhalation and exhalation. I have various ways to transcribe the pauses of the voice and their different weights:

- . An alinea without a period is a briefier intake of breath than an alinea with a period.
- . An alinea with a period and a large blank is a longer pause making up a complete breathing group of phrases which I called a block. Hence, it showed me *a posteriori* the accuracy of my aural transcription.

Dr. Malik I like to ask a methological question, if I may. It seems to me that when we study epic and other human phenomena, we tend to treat these things as phenomena which can be analyzed . But are these categories which are used by the singers themselves in understanding what they are doing? I mean , does memory shows up as an epistemic category itself , like you have in Indian tradition *smarana* so that is were the narrative is coming from . They do not consider mnemonic devices in the narration itself. So I just like to ask you if there are similar things that you found in your research.

N.R You see I work with a tradition which is very ancient. We have archeological excavations in Palawan going up to - 50,000 B.C. and a scalp - 23,000 B.C. (cf R. Fox and the National Museum findings, Tabon Cave, 1975). But I work with a society that has remained - in spite of the presence of a script derived from Bhrami script - that has remained without a written literature and a written conceptualization of it. However, there are abstract concepts for the singer of tales to explain the source of his inspiration and his imagination , *kira-kira* and his intellectual processes. The palaplap is for the Palawan, the notion that is important. It is revelation if I understand well - in an awoken state of consciousness through the ear and the privileged place to receive this gift from a Good-Doer is the forest , the high huge primary forest of *almaciga* trees (*Agathis philippinsis*). Then you can hear the *ringär* , the whutering wind in the canopy of the trees and these sounds inspire the bard. The melodies of the epics - and the shamanic Voyage -are associated to these sound of winds in the canopy of trees . That is why the Palawan who are so sensitive to sounds and soundscape - have develop a pentatonic anhemitonic scale specially reserve to imitate the sounds of nature in contrast to a pentatonic hemitonic scale, reserved to the expression love and sentiments. It will be my brief way to answer , but we can talk about it later.

Dr. Panda I analyze my texts, for example I took one singer Ramos



Tan ?? from Malahoba ; I recorded some pieces in one week time, then ten years and then 15 years and then another singer recorded after one year , fifteen years, twenty years. In every text I tried to put down , and I found that all the texts of the same episode were entirely different. Did you notice in your own?

N.R. I noticed. When I listened to the second recorded performance of *Mämiminbin* which was actually the third, I observed many constant formulas, phrases which are not necessarily poetic formulae, but repetitive segments that comes as autonomous segments and help the bard to recall. I made a computer analysis of some "interrelating formulas" which have nothing to do with melodic formulas or poetic formulae, but are relevant to politeness, in an epic that builds up an interrelationship to each other a perfect alliance . The interaction between the bard and his audience is another dimension for he interpellates the listeners in his song. And finally comparisons which is a way to interrelate two segments around a nucleus. "As if.."  
So there are many ways to have variations and fixed formulae. I am very sensitive to variations of course ,but I have to screen the constants also.  
Is there any ritualistic performance?

N.R. Yes, you sing an epic in Palawan Highlands to welcome a newly arrived visitor, to entertain the many guests on the eve of jural discussion for marriage and you sing a story about marriage precisely, teaching something to the newly formed couple and the society , reminding them the *Adat*, the customary law. Epics songs, an encyclopaedia, and you sing an epic to thank the Master of Preys, *si Lali*, after a lucky hunt in the forest . It is an act gifted with a symbolic efficacy.

K.V. Thank you very much, Nicole. This has open up a whole field and also the specific example that you gave . Now we move on to the paper of Dr. Saraswasti on : "*Orality and its complexity.*"